

Executive Summary Backgrounder

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Terrorism, Insurgency, and Drugs Still Threaten America's Southern Flank

Ray Walser, Ph.D.

On March 1, 2008, the Colombian military attacked a jungle encampment of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), located less than two miles inside Ecuadorian territory. It was an important operating hub for the FARC, which the United States has designated as a foreign terrorist organization. Luis Edgar Devia (aka Raul Reyes), the FARC's second in command and top international strategist, was killed in the raid along with 24 other guerrillas and supporters. Perhaps more important, the Colombian military captured three laptop computers and additional memory devices belonging to Reyes.

The files on these computers and devices chronicle the thoughts and actions of the FARC and raise serious questions about the effectiveness of U.S. regional policies against the interconnected challenges of terrorism, insurgency, and drug violence in the Western Hemisphere. The FARC files are essentially a smoking gun that proves that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is supporting the FARC.

The revelations from the FARC files have prompted several Members of Congress to call for the U.S. to place Venezuela on its list of state sponsors of terrorism. However, doing so could jeopardize economic and commercial ties with the fifth-largest supplier of crude oil to the U.S. and an important U.S. trading partner. It would also likely spark a nationalist backlash in Venezuela and more anti-Americanism throughout Latin America. A more prudent policy would be a course of targeted

sanctions against individuals who are illegally supporting the FARC.

In addition, Chávez's growing ties with Iran appear to open a door for Islamist terrorism and raise the question of whether the U.S. has done enough since 9/11 to protect against backdoor terrorist threats originating in the Western Hemisphere. The U.S. needs to explore ways to strengthen vigilance and to prevent Iran from exploiting this potential conduit to the homeland.

FARC and drug-related terrorism still threatens progress made in Colombia, the essential U.S. partner in the Andes. The U.S. should work to bolster Colombia's capacity and will to defeat FARC terrorism by continuing to fund Plan Colombia and by ratifying the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Exports of Colombian cocaine, long a staple of FARC funding, are financing the mounting assault of Mexican drug cartels on Mexican law enforcement and the very fabric of democratic governance. The U.S. Congress should act promptly, without

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imposing excessive conditions, to provide much-needed aid to the Mexican government to fight the drug trade and curb drug violence. For the moment, drugs, crime, terrorism, and Chávez have heightened U.S. awareness of security threats along America's southern flank.

What the U.S. Should Do. While the Bush Administration has a solid record of working to secure the U.S. from a range of threats originating in Latin America and the Caribbean, more can and should be done to protect the U.S. homeland from foreign terrorist attack. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Keep a spotlight on Hugo Chávez's misdeeds.**
- **Apply targeted sanctions** against individuals who are identified and prosecuted by the Colombian government for supporting FARC terrorism.
- **Use diplomacy to contain Chávez.**
- **Cement the U.S. partnership with a democratic Colombia** by continuing to support Plan Colombia and the Democratic Security Program and by swiftly ratifying the Colombian Free Trade Agreement.
- **Implement the Mérida Initiative to combat Mexican drug cartels.**
- **Press the OAS to fulfill its commitments on terrorism.**
- **Give priority to funding for Latin America security.**
- **Guard the homeland with intelligence and naval assets.**

Conclusion. Latin America cannot afford to be seen as half terrorist-friendly and half terrorist-hostile. In the long run, radical populist regimes will likely run out of steam as they are consumed by non-competitiveness, corruption, and inefficiency,

spawning the sorts of popular backlash that ended previous efforts to construct populist paradises. U.S. success in Iraq and Afghanistan against Islamist terrorism will curb or contain its expansionary ways. Even in Iran, shifts in leadership among the mullahs could easily undo Iran's inroads into the Western Hemisphere.

Ultimately, the U.S. and the strengthening democracies of the region can prevail. An era of good feeling of the sort experienced in the 1990s may be restored as nations turn to improving Latin America's global competitiveness and development. In the near term, however, the U.S. faces real challenges in a polarized Western Hemisphere that will require committing more resources and coordinating responses against the convergent and often overlapping realities of drugs, criminality, and terrorism.

As the FARC files indicate, the enemies of democracy and freedom have deep and tenacious roots in the Western Hemisphere. In remote jungle sanctuaries, FARC leaders are constructing grand strategies for sweeping revolutionary change and are courting friends and allies in the turbulent ferment of radical populism. Their leaders and allies dream grandly of humanity in the abstract but are not afraid of resorting to violence, terrorism, hostage taking, drug dealing, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. They are ready to fight hard and dirty. They read the press, watch the media, and are quick to seize on signs of fatigue and flagging U.S. will throughout the Americas.

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Background

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The files on these computers and devices chronicle the thoughts and actions of the FARC and raise serious questions about the effectiveness of U.S. regional policies against the interconnected challenges of terrorism, insurgency, and drug violence in the Western Hemisphere. The FARC files are essentially a smoking gun that proves that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez is supporting the FARC.

The revelations from the FARC files have prompted several Members of Congress to call for the U.S. to place Venezuela on its list of state sponsors of terrorism. However, doing so could jeopardize economic and commercial ties with the fifth-largest supplier of crude oil to the U.S. and an important U.S. trading partner. It would also likely spark a nationalist backlash in Venezuela and more anti-Americanism throughout Latin America. A more prudent policy would be a course of targeted sanctions against individuals who are illegally supporting the FARC.

Talking Points

- The United States faces a continued security challenge in the Western Hemisphere from terrorism, political violence, and organized crime.
- A combination of radical populism, narcotics-related violence, and armed insurgency in Latin America also presents opportunities that Islamist terrorists could exploit.
- The relationship between Venezuelan President Chávez and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a narco-terrorist organization, poses a significant threat to Colombia, a critical U.S. partner in the Andean fight against drug trafficking.
- Escalating violence in Mexico's battle against the drug cartels has led to a new initiative to help the Mexicans win the drug fight and develop a longer-term security partnership.
- Establishing effective security in the Western Hemisphere and keeping allies committed to the fight against terrorism and crime will require the U.S. to exercise continued vigilance, improve interagency cooperation, and commit a steady stream of resources.

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In addition, Chávez's growing ties with Iran appear to open a door for Islamist terrorism and raise the question of whether the U.S. has done enough since 9/11 to protect against backdoor terrorist threats originating in the Western Hemisphere. The U.S. needs to explore ways to strengthen vigilance and to prevent Iran from exploiting this potential conduit to the homeland.

FARC and drug-related terrorism still threatens progress made in Colombia, the essential U.S. partner in the Andes. The U.S. should work to bolster Colombia's capacity and will to defeat FARC terrorism by continuing to fund Plan Colombia and by ratifying the Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

Exports of Colombian cocaine, long a staple of FARC funding, are financing the mounting assault of Mexican drug cartels on Mexican law enforcement and the very fabric of democratic governance. The U.S. Congress should act promptly, without imposing excessive conditions, to provide much-needed aid to the Mexican government to fight the drug trade and curb drug violence. For the moment, drugs, crime, terrorism, and Chávez have heightened U.S. awareness of security threats along America's southern flank.

The Crisis Behind the Crisis

Colombia's March 1 raid into Ecuador caused a crisis in relations among Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela and threatened to escalate into a war when President Chávez dispatched Venezuelan troops and armor to the Venezuela-Colombia border. Although the immediate threat of war swiftly subsided after Colombian President Alvaro Uribe

promised to end cross-border attacks, the repercussions of the raid still reverberate throughout the region.

The numerous letters, e-mails, and communiqués in the recovered files are a windfall of evidence on FARC scheming and offer an unparalleled picture of the FARC's search for legitimacy, arms, finances, and security. The files also demonstrate, albeit from the perspective of the FARC's senior leadership, a strengthening relationship with President Chávez, culminating in intensified conversations with senior Venezuelan officials. Apparently with Chávez's approval, these officials promised FARC leaders financial assistance, support in weapons acquisition, continued political support, and safe havens.³

Like a disturbed nest of wasps, the FARC files have unleashed an angry swarm of questions. From the Washington perspective, the files raise concerns about four adverse and converging developments that are influencing U.S. efforts to secure the Western Hemisphere against varied threats of terrorist violence:

1. Radical populist Hugo Chávez and his network of allies—Bolivia, Cuba (a state sponsor of terrorism), Ecuador, and Nicaragua—are deeply engaged in a campaign to bolster the FARC's legitimacy and survivability at the expense of Colombia and to perpetuate the conflict indefinitely or to achieve a political and military victory.⁴
2. In their anti-American zeal, Chávez and company are demonstrating a tendency to make

1. U.S. Department of State, "Foreign Terrorist Organizations," April 8, 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/fs/08/103392.htm> (June 10, 2008). Launched as a rural insurgency in the 1960s, the FARC straddles the boundaries between revolutionary cabal, an army of killer bandits, a terrorist organization, and transnational criminal mafia.
2. Ray Walser, "The Crisis in the Andes: Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela," Heritage Foundation *Lecture* No. 1080, May 2, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/hl1080.cfm>.
3. The Colombian government used precision-guided missiles to target Reyes, leaving much of his camp intact. Reyes's computers were stored in hard cases and survived the blasts. They were seized by Colombian troops and flown immediately to Bogota for analysis. On March 3, the Colombians contacted Interpol to request a full forensic analysis. The Interpol report authenticated that the Colombian government had not tampered with the computers or the files after March 1. See Interpol, *Forensic Report on FARC Computers and Hardware Seized by Colombia*, May 2008, at <http://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/PressReleases/PR2008/pdfPR200817/ipPublicReportNoCoverEN.pdf> (June 10, 2008).
4. The Bolivarian Alternative for America (ALBA) is a formal alliance involving Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Dominica. Ecuador is closely associated with the Chávez line but is not a member of ALBA.

common strategic cause with Iran, potentially opening the Western Hemisphere to exploitation and infiltration by Islamist terrorists.

3. The FARC is closely linked to cocaine production and deadly drug-related violence throughout the Americas, especially in Mexico.
4. While not linked to the FARC and Colombian cocaine, criminal organizations and gangs in places as diverse as Brazil, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala thrive on lawlessness, seriously threaten the capacity of law enforcement and judicial systems, weaken confidence in democratic governance, and open the door for new mutations and convergences of crime, violence, and terrorism.

The daily terrorist acts conducted by indigenous organizations such as the FARC, the Zetas (professional assassins of the Mexican drug cartels), the notorious *Maras* (gangs) of Central America, and *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (a deadly Brazilian prison gang), undermine security in the Western Hemisphere.⁵ Internal conflict, political violence, and terrorist attacks are much greater threats to hemispheric security than are conflicts between states. With the help of a \$300 billion trade in illicit drugs, terrorism is alive and well in the Americas and operating in different guises. Ungoverned spaces, porous borders, weak institutions, uncooperative regimes, and widespread corruption compound the problem.

As Latin America strives to integrate into the global economy and obtain a fairer share of global opportunity and growth, hemispheric leaders and their electorates need to confront endemic and persistent insecurities. Neighbors harboring and supporting terrorists that seek to topple elected governments, fifth-column protest movements, soaring

crime rates, and fading cooperation in the fight against the drug trade are warning signs to future investors, risk analysts, and policymakers. Violence in its numerous forms, including terrorism, applies a heavy brake to economic growth in Latin America.

Radical Populism, Political Violence, and Terrorism

Electoral victories of left-populist movements in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua reflected public disenchantment with centrist, pro-market politics of the 1990s and signaled Latin America's partial return to combative styles of radical populism formerly associated with nationalist leaders like Argentina's Juan Perón and Brazil's Getúlio Vargas. The resurgent populist left vows to make a clean sweep of corrupt elites and failed political parties in order to install top-down presidential leadership adept at manipulating state institutions, removing customary checks and balances, seizing control of critical economic decision making, and governing in the name of the people.

While radical populism claims to respond to economic and social demands of the excluded and impoverished, it draws substantial guidance from 20th century models of social revolution and violent political change. In addition to revering the memory of Simón Bolívar, South America's great Liberator, radical populists often seek guidance from the ideas and deeds of Lenin, Mao, Fidel Castro, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara.⁶

Fascination with the struggles of the armed left runs deep in the fabric of radical populism and exerts a powerful influence over the minds of intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and would-be revolutionaries.⁷ It is reflected in continued glorification of arch-guerrilla icon Guevara, dedication to the

5. Mark Sullivan, "Latin America: Terrorism Issues," Congressional Research Service *Report for Congress*, updated January 8, 2008, at <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/99479.pdf> (June 10, 2008). See also Moises Naim, "Five Wars of Globalization," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2003, pp. 29–36, and *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005). For an important new contribution to the study of global criminal networks, see Misha Glenny, *McMafia* (New York: Knopf, 2008).
6. James Roberts, "If the Real Simón Bolívar Met Hugo Chávez, He'd See Red," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2062, August 20, 2007, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg2062.cfm>.
7. For a good discussion of this topic, see Carlos Rangel, *From Good Savage to Good Revolutionary* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980).

armed path to power, and infatuation with the FARC's terrorist bravado.⁸ While radical populism wins legitimacy by mobilizing dissatisfaction at the ballot box, it also fosters an aggressive, conspiratorial, nationalistic worldview.

Central to radical populism is strident anti-Americanism. While it is fashionable to attribute this attitude to the past sins of American interventionism, dependency, U.S. hegemony, or even the missteps of the Bush Administration in Iraq, radical populists long ago learned from Juan Perón and Fidel Castro that demonizing the U.S. and embracing anti-Americanism is a powerful demagogic tool for winning the public's attention and mobilizing popular support.

The chief danger of anti-Americanism is not the harm that it does to the American psyche, but the distrust that it creates between the U.S. and its practitioners. Extreme anti-Americanism leads entire nations to opt out of cooperative international arrangements and programs to combat terrorism and trafficking in drugs and arms. In the Andes, it seriously threatens to dismantle progress achieved in counterdrug cooperation. Not surprisingly, the amount of cocaine transiting Venezuela has risen from an estimated 57 metric tons in 2004 to 250 metric tons in 2007, while drug seizures have fallen by half.⁹

Chávez's "Bolivarian revolution" and "socialism of the 21st century" recall the expansionary, internationalist mission of Fidel Castro. Financing from surging Venezuelan oil revenues and resource nationalism rather than the Soviet Union has given new energy to leftist parties, ranging from the Communist Party in Cuba to the Sandinista National Liberation Front in Nicaragua, the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador, and the Peronist Party in Argentina. Chávez gives the Cuban

Communist Party a subsidy of about \$1 billion per year and is providing the other parties with cheap oil, credits, and/or even bags of cash.¹⁰ Other darlings of Chávez and the radical populists are marginalized, underclass protest movements such as the *piqueteros* in Argentina, the Landless Movement in Brazil, and other organized pressure groups that employ violent and destabilizing tactics against unpopular, market-oriented (i.e., anti-Chávez) governments or help to provide cover for radical populist regimes.

The *Casas de Alba* (Bolivarian Alternative for America, or ALBA) coordinate political intervention along the Chávez model. These centers not only offer assistance to the poor and community activists, but also serve as focal points for propagating pro-left, pro-Chávez organizational work. *Casas de Alba* have provided political support for populist candidates determined to rewrite the rules of the political game. Peru, where Alan Garcia defeated pro-Chávez populist Ollanta Humala in 2006, reportedly has 200 *Casas de Alba*. The Garcia government and Peruvian Congress are deeply concerned that the *Casas de Alba* are serving primarily as fronts for pro-Chávez political forces and as recruiting stations for anti-government militants organizing to destabilize the government. Peru is also concerned that Chávez's objectives in Peru include reviving the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MTRA), a terrorist guerrilla group that was decimated in the 1990s.¹¹

The *Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana* (CCB), while seemingly linked to Chávez and his Bolivarian movement, is in fact a FARC front organization. According to the captured FARC files, it is closely linked to the FARC's leadership.¹² The CCB held its most recent congress on February 24–27, 2008, in Quito, less than 200 miles from Reyes's camp in

8. Alvaro Vargas Llosa, *The Che Guevara Myth and the Future of Liberty* (Oakland, Calif.: Independent Institute, 2006).

9. The White House, Office of National Drug Control Policy, *National Drug Control Strategy*, February 2008, at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/policy/ndcs08/index.html> (June 10, 2008).

10. Tim Rogers, "Chávez Plays Oil Card in Nicaragua," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 5, 2006, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0505/p01s04-woam.html> (June 10, 2008), and Monte Reel, "Stakes High for U.S. and Argentina in Cash Scandal," *The Washington Post*, December 23, 2007, p. A1, at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/22/AR2007122202079_pf.html (June 10, 2008).

11. Andres Oppenheimer, "Peru Keeps a Watchful Eye on Chávez," *Miami Herald*, March 16, 2008.

Ecuador. Among those killed or wounded at the camp on March 1 were Mexican students who managed to slip away from the congress to visit Reyes.¹³ There are indications that their visit involved military training for possible terrorist operations in Mexico and provision of support services to the FARC.

Loosely networked and filled with a variety of left sympathizers, the Chávez left draws from a collection of old-line Communists, radicals, indigenous leaders, and anti-Americans who travel freely from Havana to Caracas to La Paz and other locations. Assisted by Venezuelan financial aid, it hides its dangerous tendencies behind a smokescreen of unabashed apologetics. The groups that make up this movement aspire to become catalysts for the destabilization of democratic, free-market, pro-U.S. governments and do not play by normal rules of the political game.

Islamist Terrorism in the Americas

Islamist terrorists struck first in the Americas in Argentina—before even the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. In 1992, Islamist terrorists bombed the Israeli embassy in Buenos Aires, killing 30 people. Two years later, they bombed the Argentine–Israeli Mutual Association (AMIA) in Buenos Aires, killing 85. In November 2006, an Argentine judge issued arrest warrants in the AMIA case for a Lebanese member of Hezbollah and eight Iranian officials, including former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani.¹⁴

The Tri-Border Area (TBA), the area where Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay meet, has a large Muslim population with links to the Middle East. For decades, the TBA has earned a reputation as a zone of contact for smugglers, money launderers,

arms and drug traffickers, and dealers in pirated and contraband goods.

Although U.S. officials believe Lebanon-based Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas have collected money in the TBA, they have presented no public evidence of an operational Islamist terrorist presence there. The U.S. has had mixed results working with the governments of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay to pursue cases of money laundering and possible fundraising for Hezbollah.¹⁵ Fernando Lugo, the new president of Paraguay, has earned Chávez's praise for his populist utterances, and his future political direction is uncertain.

Radical populists appear to be opening the door to an association with Iran, which could become an entry point for Islamist terrorism. Despite extremely different political cultures and geopolitical views, Iran seeks to break out from its confined position in the Middle East. It has found convenient friends in Chávez and others in the Bolivarian camp.¹⁶

Ample evidence in the press indicates that Venezuela, Bolivia, and Nicaragua are deepening their diplomatic and economic ties with Iran. All three have signed economic and investment cooperation agreements for agricultural and commercial ventures. Iran and Venezuela recently announced formation of a joint investment bank, to be capitalized at \$1.5 billion. Venezuela claims that it has signed agreements worth a total of more than \$20 billion since 2001. Chávez and Iranian President Ahmadinejad have visited each other seven times since 2005, and Iran and Venezuela act together as price hawks within OPEC, pressing for higher charges and limited output.

Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, who visited Tehran in June 2008, is the beneficiary of agricul-

12. The CCB Web site is filled with pro-FARC information, including prominent appeals for the release of Simon Trinidad, a senior FARC leader imprisoned in the U.S. See Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana, Web site, at <http://www.conbolivar.org> (June 17, 2008).

13. "El Misterio de Lucia," *Semana*, April 19, 2008, at http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=111118 (June 10, 2008).

14. Sullivan, "Latin America: Terrorism Issues."

15. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2007*, April 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2007/index.htm> (June 10, 2008).

16. Angel Rabasa, Peter Chalk, Kim Cragin, Sara A. Daly, Heather S. Gregg, Theodore W. Karasik, Kevin A. O'Brien, and William Rosenau, *Beyond al-Qaeda, Part 2: The Outer Rings of the Terrorist Universe*, RAND Corporation, RAND Project Air Force, 2006, at http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG430.pdf (June 10, 2008).

tural and industrial deals with Iran. In his address to the United Nations in September 2007, Ortega questioned the authority of the U.N., NATO, or any other international actor to prevent any nation—namely, Iran—from exercising its “right” to nuclear weapons.

In September 2005, Venezuela joined with Cuba and Syria to oppose the International Atomic Energy Agency’s resolution declaring Iran to be in violation of nuclear safeguard obligations. The most recent national intelligence statement presented to Congress notes that Venezuela and Iran have also discussed cooperation on nuclear energy but states that there is no evidence of significant developments aside from these talks.¹⁷ The U.S. Department of State noted that in March 2007, “Iran and Venezuela began weekly Iran Airline flights connecting Tehran and Damascus with Caracas. Passengers on these flights are not subject to immigration and customs controls at Simón Bolívar International Airport.”¹⁸

One disturbing detail in the FARC files is a cryptic reference to sending members to the Middle East to learn how to use rockets.¹⁹ Perhaps it was a casual suggestion, or it may be a harbinger of ties to come, reminiscent of the ties between Central American revolutionaries and the Palestine Liberation Organization in the 1980s. This is a warning that Chávez and his military thinkers might begin to view the FARC as a weapon in a prolonged, asymmetrical conflict with the U.S., just as Iran has employed Hezbollah to attack Israel and to project power and influence in Lebanon and elsewhere.²⁰

Chávez, the FARC, and Terrorism

For decades, the U.S. and Venezuela maintained productive, friendly relations. In the 1980s, they worked to resolve the Central American crises, joined forces against common enemies such as drug traffickers, and pressed for freedom in Cuba. Under the tutelage of Chávez, Venezuela executed a 180-degree turn in foreign policy, although the attitudes of its people have not changed so dramatically.

The deterioration became more marked after a brief coup unseated Chávez for four days in April 2002. In 2005, Chávez announced that he was ceasing cooperation with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, claiming that the agency was spying on Venezuela. U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield commented that “the only one who wins is the drug traffickers.”²¹ As noted, cocaine now transits Venezuela in alarming quantities.

By 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice determined that Venezuela was no longer cooperating fully with U.S. anti-terrorism efforts. As of October 31, 2006, the U.S. ended military sales to Venezuela, imposing its first set of sanctions on the country. Venezuela’s lack of cooperation has included providing support to the FARC, failure to improve security of travel and identity documents, lack of intelligence cooperation, and even asserting at a major Organization of American States (OAS) counterterrorism meeting that the U.S. is “the biggest security threat in the region.”²²

As relations with the U.S. declined, Chávez’s links with the FARC intensified. The presence of FARC leaders and fighters in Venezuela has long

17. U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community*, February 27, 2008, at http://www.dni.gov/testimonies/20080227_testimony.pdf (June 11, 2008).

18. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2007*.

19. Jose de Cordoba and Jay Solomon, “Chávez Aided Colombian Rebels, Captured Computer Files Show,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 9, 2008.

20. Douglas Farah, “What Does Iran Want from Latin America,” April 9, 2008, at <http://www.douglasfarah.com/article/333/what-does-iran-want-from-latin-america#comment> (June 10, 2008).

21. BBC News, “Chávez Says U.S. Drug Agents Spying,” August 7, 2005, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4130354.stm> (June 20, 2008).

22. Frank C. Urbancic, Principal Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism, U.S. Department of State, “Venezuela: Terrorism Hub of South America?” statement before the Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation, Committee on International Relations, U.S. House of Representatives, July 13, 2006, at <http://www.state.gov/sct/rls/rm/2006/68968.htm> (June 10, 2008).

been an irritant for Colombia. In late 2004, the detention of Rodrigo Granda, the FARC's international representative and a fugitive from Colombian justice, on Venezuelan soil and his forced return to Colombia touched off the first of several troubling incidents between Chávez and Colombia. (Venezuela maintained that Granda was kidnapped.) Only a high-level meeting between Chávez and President Uribe resolved the matter.

By contrast, according to the FARC files, when a FARC unit murdered five uniformed Venezuelan national guardsmen and an engineer from the state petroleum company PdVSA in September 2004, Chávez minimized the incident and quickly shunted blame to the Colombian paramilitaries.²³

By 2007, Chávez was actively defending the FARC, seeking to convince the Europeans and the public at large that the FARC is not a terrorist organization, but instead a belligerent force fighting what he considers a just war. Because the FARC wore uniforms, controlled territory, and had a command structure, this was sufficient to make it a legitimate contender for political power. In his thinking, Chávez, the soldier turned coup maker and revolutionary leader, shares much in common with the veteran fighters of the FARC.

In public, Chávez worked hard to undercut Colombia's elected president, especially after November 2007 when President Uribe directed him to cease mediating talks to free hostages of the FARC. Chávez attacked Uribe's legitimacy, calling him a criminal and client of the United States. The Colombian people clearly disagree: They have elected President Uribe twice by impressive majorities and overwhelmingly regard the FARC as a criminal and terrorist organization. In his annual report to the Venezuelan legislature, Chávez expressed sweeping support for the FARC and for Colombia's incorporation into a single, reconstituted Bolivarian state in the Andes.²⁴

The FARC files peel back further layers, revealing a deeper, far more dangerous relationship between Chávez and the FARC. Although the Colombians have not released all of the files, those already made public show that Chávez used senior representatives, notably Chief of Military Intelligence Hugo Carvajal and Minister of Interior Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, to meet with FARC leader Iván Márquez. Márquez operated from a base camp in Venezuela and freely shuttled back and forth to Caracas. Ostensibly, the meetings were attempts to hammer out a "humanitarian accord" to free hostages, including former Colombian presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three Americans. They culminated in a public meeting between Márquez and Chávez in the Miraflores Palace in November 2007.

According to the FARC documents, behind the scenes of the hostage talks, the Venezuelans and the FARC sought to hammer out a secretive alliance. With Reyes and the FARC leadership eagerly following via e-mail, Márquez reported that Chávez had offered approximately \$300 million in assistance, either as a loan or as an outright gift, and help to procure weapons. When pressed by the FARC on the terms of assistance, a Venezuelan official responded, "Don't think of it as a loan, think of it as solidarity."²⁵ The weapons would be purchased with the help of Australian arms dealers and could be shipped through Maracaibo or concealed in containers from Russia bound for the Venezuelan military. Other ideas included using FARC veterans to train Venezuelans in irregular and asymmetric warfare.²⁶ Fulfillment of these promises would seriously prolong and elevate the conflict in Colombia.

The FARC files offer a snapshot of a dangerous relationship. It became clear that two sets of rules were to be observed. In Venezuela, Chávez would rule without check, while Colombia's future would be decided by Chávez, the FARC, and perhaps the people of Colombia.²⁷ In March 2008, following

23. "Massacre en el computador," *Semana*, May 10, 2008, at http://www.semana.com/wf_InfoArticulo.aspx?IdArt=111741 (June 10, 2008).

24. Ray Walser, "Chávez Eyes Colombia," Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1784, January 28, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/wm1784.cfm>.

25. De Cordoba and Solomon, "Chávez Aided Colombian Rebels."

26. *Ibid.*

the death of Raul Reyes, Chávez stated that his goal is to drive the U.S. out of Colombia.

Are Sanctions in Order for Venezuela?

These connections between Chávez and the FARC raise the question of what the U.S. should do. Several prominent Members of Congress have called for placing Venezuela on the list of state sponsors of terrorism.²⁸ From the U.S. perspective, this would assign Venezuela to the status of virtual pariah state along with Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria. It would also open the potential to apply commercial sanctions, which could seriously constrict trade and financial transactions with Venezuela.

Such an action would clearly signal the readiness of the United States to stand against Chávez and demonstrate its disapproval of Venezuela's involvement in the internal struggles of Colombia to the point of an open break with Chávez. Depending on how the legislation is drafted, it could apply powerful economic and political pressure on Venezuela, which sells the bulk of its crude oil to the U.S., owns the CITGO refinery and distribution network, and purchases extensively in the U.S.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Venezuela is the U.S.'s 23rd most important trading partner. In 2007, the U.S. imported approximately \$40 billion in oil and other products from Venezuela and exported approximately \$10 billion in goods and services. Trade has been increasing at the rate of about 10 percent per year. Venezuela is the fourth leading supplier of crude oil and refined petroleum products to the U.S.

A major disruption of the trade relationship would cause significant hardship in Venezuela and

perhaps prompt a backlash against Chávez's adventurism. On the other hand, it would also give Chávez a chance to play the nationalist card on a grand scale and to crack down on domestic opposition and dissent. It could also attract considerable sympathy and support from many Latin American and global players who would view such a decision as an act of U.S. unilateralism.

If Chávez elected to withhold or suspend oil sales to the U.S. in retaliation, the sudden disruption in petroleum supply from Venezuela would immediately affect the world oil market, sending prices climbing. The effects would ripple through the U.S. economy, reducing export income and destroying jobs. Past studies of such a scenario indicate that Venezuela would bear the brunt of the shock but that the U.S. would experience serious repercussions.²⁹

Because of its previous unwillingness to work with the U.S. to combat human trafficking, the narcotics trade, and terrorism, Venezuela is already ineligible for most forms of foreign assistance, military sales, transfers of dual-use technology, and financing by the Export-Import Bank and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. The U.S. Office of Foreign Asset Control has frozen the assets of and prohibited transactions by some Venezuelan individuals and companies. A few exceptions permit continued support for Venezuela's democratic opposition and civil society.

Declaring Venezuela a state sponsor of terrorism might also harm the growing political opposition to Chávez in Venezuela. Since his reelection in 2006, Chávez's approval ratings have dropped significantly. He now faces growing domestic problems and opposition as a result of rising inflation, food

27. Skepticism and criticism abound on the validity and interpretation of the FARC files. They range from the Venezuelan government's statement that they "are false, and an attempt to discredit the Venezuelan government" to more moderate concerns that the Colombian government has engaged in cherry-picking, is holding back the bulk of the documents from full public scrutiny, and has yet to present an unequivocal "smoking gun" relating to Chávez and the Venezuelans. This author accepts the validity of the documents but also accepts that proofs that would hold up in U.S. courts are difficult to find.
28. Report, *Playing with Fire: Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela*, S. Prt. 110-45, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, 110th Cong., 2nd Sess., April 28, 2008, at <http://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/Playing%20with%20Fire.pdf> (June 17, 2008).
29. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Energy Security: Issues Related to Potential Reductions in Venezuelan Oil Production*, GAO-06-668, June 2006, at http://lugar.senate.gov/energy/venezuela/pdf/GAO_Report_Venezuela.pdf (June 11, 2008).

shortages, escalating crime, and attempts to restrict individual freedoms.

An important segment of society led by the student movement is questioning growing restraints on liberty and Chávez's strategies of political polarization. Disenchanted voters turned back Chávez's bid for an unlimited stay in office in December 2007, and Chávez faces considerable opposition in the upcoming November state and municipal elections in which his party could lose 10 or more governorships.³⁰ Chávez must stand for re-election in 2013, and giving him an excuse to play the nationalist, anti-American card could seriously backfire.

If the U.S. declared Venezuela a state sponsor of terrorism, relations between Venezuela and Colombia would also suffer badly. Colombia is an important supplier of food to Venezuela, and trade between the two countries exceeds \$5 billion per year. Weakening the Venezuelan economy or forcing Chávez to rush to the international market would have a negative impact on Colombia and would likely weaken the hand of the Colombian government along the Colombian–Venezuelan border, a critical zone in the struggle against the FARC. It might cost the Colombians 100,000 jobs.³¹

The intricate and complicated nature of ties between Colombia and Venezuela has forced President Uribe to respond in the past to Chávez's challenges with prudence and pragmatism. Despite numerous provocations, Uribe has worked to conciliate Chávez and to avoid a permanent rupture between the two states.

In the current crisis, senior Colombian officials have stated that they prefer that the U.S. let them take the lead in fashioning diplomatic responses to the new evidence from the captured FARC files. Colombia continues to examine options, which could involve taking its case to the U.N. Security Council. Colombian officials have also suggested that segments of the files that have not been made public are being used to remind other nations of

their obligations not to support a terrorist organization. The government is engaged in judicial investigations of individuals whose activities in relation to the FARC may have overstepped legal bounds and may merit criminal sanctions.

Finally, on June 8, 2008, in an about-face from previous statements, Chávez urged Alfonso Cano, the FARC's new commander, to free the hundreds of hostages and to enter into peace talks with the Colombian government. Reflecting on the trends in Latin America, Chávez observed that "at this moment in Latin America, an armed guerrilla movement is out of place."³² Whether this is a smoke-screen or represents a real desire to distance himself from the FARC, Chávez may also be altering course for fear of Venezuela's being placed on the list of state sponsors of terrorism.

Colombia: A Linchpin in the Fight Against Terrorism

With the exception of the Central American states in the 1980s, no country in the Western Hemisphere has suffered greater loss of life and treasure from internal violence than Colombia. In the 1980s and 1990s, Colombia degenerated into lawlessness, terrorism, and violence because of cocaine and insurgency. The disintegration of the Medellín Cartel opened the door for the FARC to expand into the drug trade and led to the formation of right-wing paramilitaries to oppose the FARC and capitalize on the drug trade.

A decade ago, Washington policymakers feared that Colombia hovered on the brink of becoming the world's first failed narco-state. Ten years later, Colombia remains at the crossroads of U.S. anti-drug and anti-terrorism policy in the Western Hemisphere, but its record of progress has given its leaders and people new confidence about the future.

Colombia's Democratic Security Plan and Plan Colombia, a U.S.-supported assistance program, have evolved and built solidly on counterinsurgency, counterdrug, and reconstruction and stability oper-

30. Official results of the December referendum have not been released.

31. Report, *Playing with Fire*.

32. Ray Walser, "Hugo Chávez, Colombia, and the FARC: A Change of Heart?" Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1956, June 16, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/wm1956.cfm>.

ations. Since 2002, under President Uribe's leadership, Colombia has developed a strong response to the threats of the violent right and terrorist left. It has significantly reduced homicides, kidnappings, and acts of terrorism.³³ Colombia has also demobilized approximately 30,000 paramilitaries and restored control over much of the nation's territory.

The FARC has been reduced to approximately 10,000–11,000 combatants, and "Bogota now holds the strategic advantage because of the military's sustained combat operations in the FARC's rural heartland and the permanent stationing of security forces in regions previously dominated by insurgents."³⁴ Colombians argue that the success against the FARC has driven it to seek outside support and sanctuary and to relocate coca cultivation and laboratories outside of Colombian territory.

In recent months, the FARC has suffered serious losses in its leadership, including the death of its historic leader Manuel Marulanda (aka Tirofijo) on March 27, the recent death of Iván Ríos, and the surrender of leader Karina. Many believe that the FARC will have trouble maintaining unity under its new leader, Alfonso Cano.

The greatest enemy of terrorism is a strong, functioning democracy that enjoys a high level of legitimacy and deploys the instruments of state power and influence to control national territory. The Colombian government still struggles to deliver improvements in the lives of ordinary Colombians, especially those displaced by the conflict or living in areas under FARC control.

The government must also better safeguard the lives of all citizens, from the wealthy to the poorest union worker. This means a robust presence in zones recovered from the guerrillas, not just by the military and police, but also in the education, health, and other sectors. Succeeding against the terrorism of the FARC and drug traffickers will also

require creating economic opportunities to counter the economic incentives for coca cultivation and criminal activity.

Fighting terrorism in Colombia and elsewhere requires that the U.S. take a holistic view. It needs to help to build the state while seeking to starve the FARC and other extremists by isolating them, cutting them off from outside support, and turning them from rebels into citizens. Passage of the Colombia Free Trade Agreement, sidetracked by a bitter partisan debate in the U.S. Congress, would provide a sound economic base for developing a stronger Colombia and send a powerful signal of long-term U.S. support for and commitment to Colombia in its battle against terrorism.³⁵

The Colombian government faces the challenge of fighting the FARC while developing an alternative peace track that can move insurgents and terrorists from war to reintegration into society. Learning from the bitter experiences of 1999–2002, when granting a liberated zone only emboldened the FARC to entrench, expand its power, and traffic in drugs, President Uribe has thus far resisted the FARC's fundamental demand for an autonomous zone of guerrilla control, especially in a central area of the country. Furthermore, granting the FARC status as a belligerent force appears to be well beyond the realm of the negotiable. Colombians are also highly skeptical about the FARC's ability, with its leadership problems and general isolation from the modern world, to table a genuine negotiating agenda. Nonetheless, because of the hostage situation, outside pressures on the government to negotiate a political and humanitarian agreement with the FARC will persist.

Colombians should not reject the idea of a new peace strategy out of hand. They can look at providing new incentives for combatants to leave the FARC, demobilize, and reintegrate into Colombian

33. Peter Deshazo, Tanya Primiani, and Philip McLean, *Back from the Brink: Evaluating Progress in Colombia, 1999–2007*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2007, at <http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071112-backfromthebrink-web.pdf> (June 11, 2008).

34. U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community*, p. 36.

35. James M. Roberts, "The U.S.–Colombia Free Trade Agreement: Strengthening a Good Friend in a Rough Neighborhood," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2129, April 30, 2008, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/TradeandForeignAid/bg2129.cfm>.

society. In its battle to break the FARC's drug and terrorism machine, Colombia will continue to look to the U.S. for help if Chávez provides the proposed assistance to the FARC or if the FARC suddenly starts to use new weapons such as advanced surface-to-air missiles.

Drug Terrorist Threat to Democracy

Waves of illegality, violence, and terrorism launched from FARC-controlled areas and elsewhere in the Andes are striking Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. Friends and important trade partners are besieged by drug cartels and criminal gangs.³⁶

Mexican President Felipe Calderón inherited from President Vicente Fox a crisis of public insecurity. Violent drug cartels were working as a conduit for Andean cocaine and were deeply involved in the production and distribution of methamphetamines, marijuana, and heroin in U.S. markets. After assuming office, Calderón called in the Mexican military to fight the cartels in several Mexican states. While largely a stopgap measure, the move demonstrated Calderón's commitment to restoring public security.

Calderón has also stepped up cooperation with the United States. In 2007, Mexican authorities extradited 80 criminal suspects to the U.S., including 65 Mexicans. For the longer term, Calderón's administration has developed a seven-point strategy that includes creating a professional and corruption-free national federal police, developing community policing, overhauling the judicial process, and adding new crime-fighting technologies and training facilities.

By mid-2008, the drug violence in Mexico had reached unparalleled heights. Police officials at all levels, including the head of the Mexico City police, have been assassinated. While much of the killing occurs between rival gangs in turf fights and revenge killings, drug violence has frightened Mex-

icans and caused them to question President Calderón's tough line. The drug terrorism poses a serious concern for U.S. border officials as corruption and violence spill over into the U.S.³⁷

An estimated 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. comes from Mexico, and the drug trade is worth an estimated \$23 billion. Guns, bulk cash, and precursor chemicals move freely from the U.S. to Mexico. Many of the weapons, included automatic weapons, are purchased in gun shows in the U.S. by straw men and smuggled south to agents of the cartels. Recently, the Mexican authorities seized over 5,000 illegal firearms, and about 90 percent of these weapons were traced back to the U.S.³⁸

In March 2007, following a meeting between President George W. Bush and Calderón, the Bush Administration, in consultation with Mexican officials, developed a package of counternarcotics assistance. The Mérida Initiative calls for spending \$1.5 billion over three years to help Mexico acquire aircraft, modern scanners, polygraphs, training in information technology, and comprehensive training assistance for its law enforcement agencies. While the initiative does not call for deploying American troops on the ground, it does promise greatly enhanced cross-border cooperation and the sharing of key anti-drug, anti-crime intelligence. Because of the Mérida Initiative and improved cooperation between U.S. and Mexican officials, U.S. law enforcement agencies are taking a closer look at the southward flows of arms and dollars from the U.S. that sustain the drug cartels' reign of terror in Mexico.³⁹

The Mérida Initiative also calls for approximately \$50 million in assistance to help the Central Americans and the Caribbean nations combat the phenomenon of criminal gangs, such as *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13), which have proliferated in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. The anti-gang funding in Central America concentrates on promoting

36. Ray Walser, "A War We Cannot Lose: Mexico, the Drug Cartels, and the Mérida Initiative," Heritage Foundation *Background*, forthcoming.

37. George W. Grayson, "Mexico and the Drug Cartels," Foreign Policy Research Institute, August 2007, at <http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200708.grayson.mexicodrugcartels.html> (June 11, 2008).

38. Sam Logan, "Guns: The Bloody U.S.–Mexico Market," International Relations and Security Network *Security Watch*, October 31, 2007, at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=18300> (June 10, 2008).

regional cooperation and should also help to meet transnational threats from drug mafias and terrorists.

OAS Slow to Act Against the FARC

On and after 9/11, the Organization of American States performed important conceptual work aimed at establishing the right to democracy with the Inter-American Democratic Charter, constructing a stronger regional commitment to fight against terrorism in the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism and breaking new ground by formulating a broader blueprint for security with the Inter-American Security Charter of October 2004. Within the framework of legal instruments, the OAS has updated guiding concepts to respond to the transnational challenges of the 21st century.

The OAS also created the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (CITCE), a committee parallel to its Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission, to provide a legal framework for advancing counterterrorism cooperation and capacity-building. The OAS also overcame a general reluctance to become involved in security matters and created the Secretariat for Multidimensional

Security. The CITCE and the secretariat have done serious work to advance technical proficiency, promote professionalism and standardization, and share best practices in the fight against terrorism.

Certainly, the Western Hemisphere is better prepared to respond to the external threat from Islamist terrorism than it was before 9/11,⁴⁰ but its record on responding to indigenous threats, such as the threat from the FARC, leaves many in the U.S. worried about the OAS's effectiveness. OAS Secretary General Miguel Insulza faced tough questioning from a subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives on April 9, 2008. When asked whether there was evidence of President Chávez's support for FARC terrorism, he swiftly answered that there was not.⁴¹ Since the OAS, unlike the U.S. and the European Union, does not consider the FARC to be a terrorist organization, he was technically correct.⁴² When pressed to describe what the OAS could do to prevent incidents such as occurred on March 1 with the Colombian strike, Insulza observed that "the OAS is no more than its member countries want it to be."⁴³

39. For a comprehensive documentation of the Mérida Initiative, see Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, "Meridia Initiative Portal," Web page, at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=5949&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=407349 (June 11, 2008). See also Stephen Johnson and David B. Muhlhausen, "North American Transnational Youth Gangs: Breaking the Chain of Violence," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1834, March 21, 2005, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/UrbanIssues/bg1834.cfm>.
40. The Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism states that governments "shall promote cooperation and the exchange of information to improve border and customs control measures to detect and prevent the international movement of terrorists and trafficking in arms." It mandates cooperation among law enforcement authorities and calls for the enforcement of U.N. conventions that include prohibitions against the taking of hostages, terrorist bombings, and terrorist finance. Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, Art. 7, June 3, 2002. The Declaration of Security in the Americas called on all OAS members to "prevent, punish, and eliminate terrorism" and to renew commitments to fight transnational organized crime. Declaration of Security in the Americas, October 28, 2003, at <http://www.state.gov/p/wha/rls/61292.htm> (June 17, 2008). For a good review of the challenges facing the OAS, see Luigi R. Einaudi, "Trans-American Security: What's Missing?" *Strategic Forum*, September 2007.
41. Agence France-Presse, "OAS Chief to US Congress: No Venezuela-Terrorist Link," April 10, 2008, at <http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5ipNXwHOq34tlujMqpPj9OZVXwzrw> (June 20, 2008).
42. Many OAS members consider the FARC to be an "irregular force," although some member states, such as Mexico, have taken a tougher line against the FARC since 9/11 and have closed down overt offices. Representative Connie Mack (R-FL) wrote on April 14, 2008, to OAS Secretary General Insulza that "By any common and reasonable standard the FARC is a terrorist organization." In the letter, he expressed his fear that the OAS had become a "puppet for the force of tyranny." Representative Connie Mack, letter to José Miguel Insulza, Secretary General, Organization of American States, April 14, 2008, at http://mack.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.View&ContentRecord_id=573 (June 17, 2008). See also Andres Oppenheimer, "After Report on FARC Files: Silence," *The Miami Herald*, May 22, 2008, at http://www.miamiherald.com/news/columnists/andres_oppenheimer/story/542435.html (June 10, 2008).
43. Agence France-Presse, "OAS Chief to U.S. Congress: No Venezuela-Terrorist Link."

Sadly, in the halls of the OAS, one nation's terrorist remains another nation's freedom fighter. The OAS's refusal to designate the FARC as a terrorist organization—despite hostage taking, use of land mines, attacks on civilian targets, and numerous violations of standing OAS commitments—indicates the difficult political environment within which the fight against terrorism must be conducted in the Western Hemisphere.

The challenge for the OAS is how best to deal with indigenous threats from groups like the FARC. The rising disruptive influence within the OAS of the Chávez-style radical populism makes achieving effective political consensus on key security matters difficult if not impossible.

In letters to the OAS, Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Representative Connie Mack (R-FL) urge the OAS as whole or the CITCE “to examine all information pertinent to the allegations of country assistance to the FARC.”⁴⁴ The U.S. desires an effective multilateral body that is more than just a debating society. The continued response of the OAS to the revelations from the FARC files and its willingness to deal with a fuller range of transnational threats will serve as a benchmark for future U.S. support for the body.

U.S. Counterterrorism Requires Continued Vigilance and Resources

Given its hard military power and hemispheric reach, the U.S. military remains the greatest deterrent to large-scale, anti-U.S. terrorism in the Western Hemisphere. The perception that the U.S. would respond with overwhelming military force if attacked by terrorists based in the Western Hemisphere remains strong. In the post-9/11 world, the U.S. position regarding the harboring of terrorists who strike at the U.S. is clear. However, the U.S. seeks to move beyond deterrence to reducing, preventing, and possibly even eliminating terrorist threats.

Yet in 2008, the U.S. will spend a little more than \$1 billion to combat terrorism, drug traffickers, and

criminal gangs in Latin America.⁴⁵ Compared with the billions of dollars generated by the drug trade, corruption, illegal arms sales, money laundering, and other illicit activities, the U.S. government spends \$1 for police, military, and anti-terrorism assistance for every \$300 generated by illegal activities. When the conceivable costs of a successful terrorist attack on the U.S. are factored in, this level of spending seems even smaller. In terms of energy supply, trade, foreign direct investment, and migration flows, Latin America is as critical to U.S. security as the Middle East and other areas of operation in the struggle against terrorism.

Viewed strategically, Colombia is the key to defeating terrorism in the Western Hemisphere. U.S. assistance to Colombia through the various programs for counterdrug and security assistance remains essential to defeating the terrorism of the FARC and drug traffickers. The U.S. invests approximately \$500 million annually through various programs to strengthen the government of Colombia. Keeping Colombia on a steady track of progress will send a strong message to enemies of the U.S.

Outside of Colombia, the U.S. provides modest assistance of approximately \$10 million through the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program, which is administered by the Department of State. These funds have been used to improve capabilities in airport security management, hostage negotiations, bomb detection and deactivation, and countering the movement of money and arms that support terrorism.

The U.S. has made travel to and from the region more secure by requiring full documentation of all travelers, including Americans, under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative. The U.S. has also worked to include the states of the Americas under broader global initiatives ranging from the Container Security Initiative to the Proliferation Security Initiative. These measures have brought partners to recognize the need for vigilance and broad anti-terrorism cooperation.

44. Mack, letter to Miguel Insulza, April 14, 2008, and Senator Richard Lugar, letter to Miguel Insulza, May 13, 2008.

45. U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2009*, 2008, p. 649, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/101444.pdf> (June 17, 2008). Luigi Einaudi estimates that revenue from the drug trade alone totals \$300 billion. Einaudi, “Trans-American Security.”

The U.S. recognizes that the Caribbean is its “third border” and is seeking to strengthen multilateral and regional maritime cooperation to stop terrorists and other criminals who use Caribbean waters. Key to this is Operation Enduring Friendship, which builds institutional capacity and strengthens controls and protections against possible penetration by terrorists across land and sea borders.

Meeting a multifaceted terrorist threat requires the strongest interagency coordination possible among military, law enforcement, and civilian bodies. The first-tier U.S. players include the Departments of Defense, Justice, Homeland Security, State, and the Treasury. Meeting the threat will also require full engagement by the U.S. Northern Command (Mexico) and the U.S. Southern Command (the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean) and close integration among the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF), the CIA, and the Director of National Intelligence.

Under Admiral James Stavridis, U.S. Southern Command is developing a broader, more integrated security package for the Western Hemisphere. Southern Command envisions a more comprehensive and coordinated effort to link civilian and military actions in strengthening democratic institution building in the Western Hemisphere. It is working to develop closer in-country cooperation among all elements of the U.S. government and to maintain close contacts with host country officials dealing with the spectrum of crime, drugs, and terrorism as well as with a range of humanitarian and social missions. The re-creation of the U.S. Fourth Fleet, based in Jacksonville, Florida, will provide a more permanent naval capability to meet challenges ranging from disaster assistance and humanitarian relief to combating the drug trade and protecting the U.S. homeland from potential terrorist threats.

What the U.S. Should Do

While the Bush Administration has a solid record of working to secure the U.S. from a range of threats originating in Latin America and the Caribbean, more can and should be done to protect the U.S. homeland from foreign terrorist attack. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Keep a spotlight on Hugo Chávez’s misdeeds.** Working with Colombia, the U.S. should develop a public diplomacy strategy aimed at exposing the nature of the FARC and its foreign backers. A “name and shame” approach could help to link terrorism and its enablers in Venezuela and elsewhere in the public mind.
- **Apply targeted sanctions.** The U.S. should apply targeted sanctions (e.g., visa revocation and asset freezes or seizures) against individuals who are identified and prosecuted by the Colombian government for supporting FARC terrorism. Similar groups that support the FARC, its front the Coordinador Bolivariana Continental, and potentially pro-Chávez groups should also be investigated by the FBI to ensure that they are not providing material support to the FARC.
- **Use diplomacy to contain Chávez.** The U.S. should engage in high-level diplomatic conversations with the governments of Brazil, Chile, Peru, and other countries to underscore the critical need for cooperation in ending FARC terrorism, combating Islamist terrorism, and responding to other transnational threats. The U.S. should also quietly try to dissuade China, Russia, and other countries from directly or indirectly providing arms to the FARC.
- **Cement the U.S. partnership with a democratic Colombia.** The Bush Administration and Congress should seize the opportunity to cement the U.S. strategic partnership with Colombia and should continue to support Plan Colombia and the Democratic Security Program with adequate military and financial assistance as Colombia assumes greater responsibility for its self-defense. Congress should also act swiftly to approve the Colombian Free Trade Agreement, which would create more jobs for American workers and strengthen the Colombian economy, creating jobs, opportunity, and hope in Colombia.
- **Implement the Mérida Initiative to combat Mexican drug cartels.** The U.S. should, through law enforcement and intelligence bodies, should work to assist the government of President Calderón in its current crisis. The Mérida Initiative offers a new paradigm for enhanced and

continuous cooperation. Congress should act quickly, without imposing excessive conditions, to strengthen the Mexican and Central American governments in their battles against drug cartels and criminal gangs. The U.S. goal should be to render tangible U.S. assistance in 2008. The U.S. should redouble its efforts to deploy the necessary manpower and to use tools such as eTrace, which allows Mexican police to access U.S. arms data, to disrupt the flow of weapons and bulk cash to Mexico and further south.

- **Press the OAS to fulfill its commitments on terrorism.** The U.S. should continue to press the OAS and member states to conduct a formal review of the evidence in the FARC files. It should make clear that inaction weakens U.S. support for the OAS and sets a negative precedent for multilateral security in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Give priority to funding for Latin America security.** Congress should increase funding for anti-terrorist, anti-drug, and security efforts in the Western Hemisphere. It should look for ways to develop synergies with and to strengthen law enforcement in order to build the police and judicial institutions needed to combat a spectrum of threats to democratic states. The U.S. should continue to expand participation in important programs such as the Container Security Initiative and the Proliferation Security Initiative. Congress should also increase funding for training in anti-terrorism assistance, improve the security of travel documents, and facilitate the exchange of information and watch lists.
- **Guard the homeland with intelligence and naval assets.** U.S. intelligence should work with its Western Hemispheric counterparts to gather, analyze, and exchange intelligence on terrorist and criminal activities in the Western Hemisphere and links with international terrorist groups. The anti-drug mandate of the Joint Interagency Task Force South should be expanded to include anti-terrorism and anti-crime missions. The U.S. should develop a visible, multipurpose maritime presence in the Caribbean and Latin America by providing adequate ships and personnel for the Fourth Fleet. It should also extend

cooperation and capacity building, including ship rider agreements, with the Central Americans and others.

Conclusion

Latin America cannot afford to be seen as half terrorist-friendly and half terrorist-hostile. In the long run, radical populist regimes will likely run out of steam as they are consumed by non-competitiveness, corruption, and inefficiency, spawning the sorts of popular backlashes that ended previous efforts to construct populist paradises.

U.S. success in Iraq and Afghanistan against Islamist terrorism will curb or contain its expansionary ways. Even in Iran, shifts in leadership among the mullahs could easily undo Iran's inroads into the Western Hemisphere. In the long run, the U.S. and the strengthening democracies of the region can prevail. An era of good feeling of the sort experienced in the 1990s may be restored as nations turn to improving Latin America's global competitiveness and development.

Nonetheless, in the near term, the U.S. faces real challenges in a polarized Western Hemisphere that will require committing more resources and coordinating responses against the convergent and often overlapping realities of drugs, criminality, and terrorism.

As the FARC files indicate, the enemies of democracy and freedom have deep and tenacious roots in the Western Hemisphere. In remote jungle sanctuaries, FARC leaders are constructing grand strategies for sweeping revolutionary change and are courting friends and allies in the turbulent ferment of radical populism. Their leaders and allies dream grandly of humanity in the abstract but are not afraid to resort to violence, terrorism, hostage taking, drug dealing, and forced recruitment of child soldiers. They are ready to fight hard and dirty. They read the press, watch the media, and are quick to seize on signs of fatigue and flagging U.S. will throughout the Americas.

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