

# Executive Summary Backgrounder

No. 2362  
January 20, 2010



Published by The Heritage Foundation

## State Sponsors of Terrorism: Time to Add Venezuela to the List

*Ray Walser, Ph.D.*

Since 1979, the U.S. has maintained a list of nations it judges to be state sponsors of terrorism. The list is a regular reminder of the enduring threat to international peace and security posed by the secretive alliances between non-state terrorist organizations and states run by dangerous leaders who employ or support violence against their enemies. Operating outside the norms of international law and disregarding shared obligations to work for common security, these “terror list” nations ruthlessly support terrorists as proxies to advance their interests. In the 21st century, terrorism has become a regular means for waging “asymmetrical” warfare against militarily superior enemies or for backing clients in other countries. Globalization allows transnational networks to routinely link parties that are committed to terrorism, violence, and criminality, and are a major threat to U.S. security.

As of 2009, the U.S. listed four nations—Syria, Cuba, Sudan, and Iran—as state sponsors of terrorism. A fifth country, Venezuela, merits a place on this list because of its support for acts of terrorism and subversion committed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and because of its strategic alignment with the other four state sponsors of terrorism, particularly Iran.

The continuing decay of democratic governance in Venezuela, the loss of political checks and balances, and the decline of transparency coupled with the militarization of society and unparalleled concentration of power in the hands of Venezuela’s

authoritarian populist president, Hugo Chávez, is converting Caracas into more than a second Havana. Venezuela is emerging as a mecca for anti-U.S. hostility and the gateway for anti-American extremism into the Americas. Under Chávez’s leadership, Venezuela makes its chief international mission the challenging of U.S. interests in the Americas and around the globe.

Venezuela has forged closer ties with Syria and Sudan, associated with anti-Israel extremists, and endorsed Iran’s efforts to become a regional and global nuclear power. Chávez has proclaimed his readiness to work with Iran to defeat “the [American] empire and its lackeys.”

Since January 2009, the Obama Administration’s attempts to improve relations with the stridently anti-American Chávez have yielded little more than empty gestures. Although ambassadorial relations were restored in June 2009, Chávez has signaled renewed support for FARC’s narcoterrorism, begun threatening and punishing Colombia for its defense cooperation agreement with the U.S., helped desta-

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Center for Foreign Policy Studies  
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Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis  
Institute for International Studies

Published by The Heritage Foundation  
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4999  
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bilize Honduras by backing former president Manuel Zelaya's illegal referendum, pushed ahead with major Russian arms acquisitions, and sealed ever closer ties, including joint nuclear ventures, with Iran. Venezuela plays an increasingly prominent role as a primary transit country for cocaine flowing from Colombia to the U.S., Europe, and West Africa.

Before the Obama presidency began, the U.S. had already determined that Venezuela cooperates neither in combating terrorism nor in halting drug trafficking. The U.S. has ceased economic assistance and sales of military equipment to Venezuela. Relations are largely conducted at the commercial level where the U.S.–Venezuelan trade exchange is still robust. It is the broad commercial ties that merit closer examination and scrutiny if effective pressure is to be applied to Chávez and to Venezuela in order to modify its international behavior.

Washington is all too familiar with Chávez's readiness to align himself with all current state sponsors of terrorism and to fan the flames of turmoil in the Middle East and the Americas. He has risen to high stature as an international firebrand and a dedicated leader of the anti-Americanism of the 21st century. Placing Venezuela where it belongs, on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, will not resolve every challenge the U.S. faces with regard to Venezuela, but it will send a powerful signal that the American people understand that oil,

extremism, terror, and anti-Americanism make a dangerous mixture, whether in the Middle East or the Americas. The U.S. can improve its efforts to win the public diplomacy battle against Chávez and do a better job of countering Chavez-inspired disinformation and propaganda.

The U.S. must do a better job of collecting, analyzing, and distributing intelligence regarding Chávez and the active threat posed by traditional terrorism and narcoterrorism in the Americas. The U.S. should use available intelligence platforms, such as the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JITF-South) at Key West and the new observation locations in Colombia, to monitor Venezuelan support for narcoterrorism and criminal activity. Finally, the U.S. should make clear its commitment to supporting and defending friends, such as Colombia, from either overt aggression by Venezuelan military forces or indirect aggression through Venezuelan support for FARC. Beyond the recent Defense Cooperation Agreement, the U.S. should be prepared to give Colombia a guarantee of military support against a threat of unprovoked attack by Chávez and the Venezuelan military.

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# Background

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## State Sponsors of Terrorism: Time to Add Venezuela to the List

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**Abstract:** *The U.S. officially designates four countries as state sponsors of terrorism—Iran, Syria, Cuba, and Sudan. It is high time to add Venezuela to the list. Far from being merely a populist showman and bully, Hugo Chávez is a reckless leader who collaborates with Colombian narco-terrorists and Islamist terrorists, pals around with brutal Iranian dictator Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is a virulent anti-Semite, and is guided by a relentless anti-Americanism in everything he does. President Obama does not see Venezuela as a threat to U.S. national security. This view is not optimistic—it is dangerous. Heritage Foundation Latin America expert Ray Walser lays out the overwhelming—and disturbing—evidence of the increasing threat that the Chávez regime poses to U.S. security.*

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Since 1979, the U.S. has maintained a list of nations it judges to be state sponsors of terrorism. The list is a regular reminder of the enduring threat to international peace and security posed by the secretive alliances between non-state terrorist organizations and states run by dangerous leaders ready to employ violence against their enemies. Operating beyond the norms of international laws and in disregard for the shared obligations to work for common security, these “terror list” nations ruthlessly support terrorists as proxies to advance their interests. In the 21st century, terrorism has tragically become a regular means for waging “asymmetrical” warfare against militarily superior enemies or regional rivals. Globalization allows transnational networks to routinely link par-

### Talking Points

- The security of the United States is directly challenged by the strident anti-Americanism of Venezuela’s president Hugo Chávez.
- Chávez aims to curb U.S. influence in the Americas and weaken the U.S. economically and diplomatically through hostile regional and global power arrangements.
- Chávez’s readiness to ally with Iran, Cuba, Sudan, and Syria—the four U.S.-designated state sponsors of terrorism—reflects a growing propensity to construct a radical, global anti-American network.
- In Colombia, a critical U.S. friend and key anti-drug partner, Chávez continues to demonstrate support for narcoterrorism and the illusion of social revolution.
- Chávez’s radicalism, his calls for revolution, and his unwavering hostility toward the U.S. threaten regional stability and potentially open the Western Hemisphere to a spillover of Middle Eastern or other foreign strife.
- Adding Venezuela to the list of state sponsors of terrorism will confirm a reality that already exists.

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As of 2009, the U.S. listed four nations—Syria, Cuba, Sudan, and Iran—as state sponsors of terrorism. A fifth country, Venezuela, merits a place on this list because of its support for acts of terrorism and subversion committed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and because of its strategic alignment with the other four state sponsors of terrorism, particularly Iran.

The continuing decay of democratic governance in Venezuela, the loss of political checks and balances, and the decline of transparency coupled with the militarization of society and unparalleled concentration of power in the hands of Venezuela's authoritarian populist president, Hugo Chávez, is converting Caracas into more than a second Havana. Venezuela is emerging as a mecca for anti-U.S. hostility and the gateway for anti-American extremism into the Americas. Under Chávez's leadership, Venezuela makes its chief international mission the challenging of U.S. interests in the Americas and around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

Since January 2009, the Obama Administration's attempts to improve relations with the stridently anti-America Chávez have yielded little more than empty gestures. Although ambassadorial relations were restored in June 2009, Chávez has signaled renewed support for the narcoterrorism of the FARC, begun threatening and punishing Colombia

for its defense cooperation agreement with the U.S., helped destabilize Honduras by backing former president Manuel Zelaya's illegal referendum, pushed ahead with major Russian arms acquisitions, and sealed ever closer ties, including joint nuclear ventures, with Iran. Venezuela plays an increasingly prominent role as a primary transit country for cocaine flowing from Colombia to the U.S., Europe, and West Africa. Nevertheless, the Obama Administration, according to the President's National Security Council adviser on Latin America, Dan Restrepo, does not consider Venezuela to be a challenge to U.S. national security: President Obama "does not see Venezuela as a challenge to U.S. national security. There is no Cold War nor Hot War. Those things belong to the past."<sup>2</sup>

This view is not optimistic—it is dangerous. The Administration needs to, as a recent bipartisan congressional resolution urges, adopt a genuinely tough-minded approach to dealing with Chávez and Venezuela. The Administration needs to develop a public diplomacy strategy to counter *Chavista* disinformation and a diplomatic strategy in the Americas that responds to growing threats of political destabilization. It also needs to recognize that under Chávez, Venezuela has become terrorism's most prominent supporter in the Western Hemisphere. The Obama Administration can begin to correct this policy of drift and inaction by placing Venezuela on the list of state sponsors of terrorism along with Iran.<sup>3</sup>

1. "Dreams of a Different World: Venezuela's Foreign Policy," *The Economist*, September 19, 2009, at [http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=14460201](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=14460201) (December 4, 2009). On Chávez, see Douglas Schoen and Michael Rowan, *The Threat Closer to Home: Hugo Chavez and the War Against America* (New York: Free Press, 2009); Ray Walser, "What to Do About Hugo Chávez: Venezuela's Challenge to Security in the Americas," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 2243, February 19, 2009, at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/LatinAmerica/bg2243.cfm>; and "Venezuela: Accelerating the Bolivarian Revolution," International Crisis Group, *Latin America Briefing* No. 22, November 5, 2009, at [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/latin\\_america/b22\\_venezuela\\_\\_\\_accelerating\\_the\\_bolivarian\\_revolution.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/latin_america/b22_venezuela___accelerating_the_bolivarian_revolution.pdf) (December 4, 2009).
2. When asked by *Miami Herald* columnist Andres Oppenheimer if the Obama Administration considers Venezuela a threat or a nuisance for U.S. security, Mr. Restrepo answered, "The president has said no. He does not see Venezuela as a challenge to U.S. national security. There is no Cold War nor Hot War. Those things belong to the past. We have to look at the present and see how we can work constructively with those countries that are interested in working with us. It may be that not all of them want to do so, but the vast majority of the people and countries in Latin America are interested in doing so." Andres Oppenheimer, "Obama's Confidence-Building Good—to a Point," *Miami Herald*, October 3, 2009, at <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/columnists/andres-oppenheimer/story/1265635.html> (December 4, 2009).
3. U.S. House of Representatives, 111th Congress, 1st Session, House Resolution 872, October 27, 2009, at [http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111\\_cong\\_bills&docid=f:hr872ih.txt.pdf](http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:hr872ih.txt.pdf) (December 4, 2009).

## Foreign Terrorist Organizations and State Sponsors of Terrorism

The U.S. uses two major legal tools to combat international terrorism. The first is to designate violent non-state actors as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO). The second is to enforce a range of restrictions and punitive measures against state sponsors of terrorism.

The emergence of international terrorism during the Cold War and its intensification in the post-Cold War era fostered systematic U.S. legal efforts to provide law enforcement and the judiciary with the tools it needs to combat international terrorism. The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 authorized the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Treasury, to designate FTOs. This law made it a criminal offense to provide funds or material support, such as weapons or safe houses, to FTOs. Under this law, U.S. financial institutions are required to report and block all movements of both U.S. and international financial support for FTOs.<sup>4</sup>

Since the 1970s, U.S. legislation has named four countries as state sponsors of terrorism. The provisions governing the state sponsors of terrorism list are found in the Export Administration Act, the Arms Export Control Act, and the Foreign Assistance Act.<sup>5</sup> Under these three laws, state sponsors of terrorism are subject to a range of legal restrictions and sanctions that include (1) bans on arms exports and sales, (2) controls on dual-use technology items, (3) prohibitions of economic assistance, (4) imposition of financial and other restrictions that require the U.S. to oppose proposed loans by the World Bank, and (5) the removal of judicial immunity to allow suits against state sponsor countries. The measures also mandate

“denying individuals and companies tax credits for income earned in a terrorist sponsoring country,” prohibiting commercial transactions with a state sponsor country without a Treasury license, and prohibitions against letting Defense contracts to companies in which state sponsors have significant ownership.<sup>6</sup>

The U.S. has significant yet limited powers to influence runaway terror-supporting regimes in an international environment where too many nations have grown far too indifferent to terrorism and are afraid to speak out against one of the great moral evils of the day. Both legal instruments should be employed when dealing with Chávez and Venezuela.

## Terror in the Americas: FARC and Other Colombian FTOs

For decades, Colombia has been bloodied by the endless conflicts with guerrilla insurgency, paramilitary violence, common crime, and narcotics trafficking. Long after the end of civil wars in Central America and the end of military dictatorships in South America, conflict has continued there. For the U.S., a stable, more peaceful Colombia is a critical anchor for its policies in South America. Over the past decade, the U.S. has invested more than \$6 billion in supporting a sweeping security and stabilization program known as Plan Colombia.<sup>7</sup> These efforts have reduced the number of murders, kidnappings, and acts of terrorism. In 10 years, Colombia has secured an unprecedented amount of national territory against armed groups, and citizen security has improved remarkably. The U.S.-assisted Plan Colombia, along with the parallel Colombian program—the Democratic Security and Defense Policy—is also starting to yield better results regarding coca eradication, cocaine seizures,

4. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Designation of Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” October 8, 1997, at [http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/fs\\_terrorist\\_orgs.html](http://www.state.gov/www/global/terrorism/fs_terrorist_orgs.html) (December 4, 2009), and U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” July 7, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm> (December 4, 2009).
5. Export Administration Act of 1979 at <http://www.gpo.gov/bis/ear/txt/legalauthority.txt> (December 4, 2009); Arms Export Control Act at <http://www.adc.org/PDF/AECA1976.pdf> (December 4, 2009); and Foreign Assistance Act at <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/ads/faa.pdf> (December 4, 2009).
6. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, “Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism,” *Country Reports on Terrorism*, 2008, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm> (December 3, 2009).
7. Connie Veillette, “Plan Colombia: A Progress Report,” Congressional Research Service, The Library of Congress, January 11, 2006, at <http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs/permalink/meta-crs-8270:1> (December 1, 2009).

and criminals arrested and extradited to the U.S. Ending Colombia's internal conflicts and reducing coca growth and cocaine production will remain among the highest-priority objectives for U.S. foreign policy in the Americas in the years ahead.

Colombia's future hinges on its democratic government's ability to expand territorial control and eliminate threats posed by its three deadly FTOs—in order of current threat levels—FARC, National Liberation Army (ELN), and right-wing paramilitary forces known as the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).<sup>8</sup> Collectively, these three armed actors have caused the loss of tens of thousands of lives, massive population displacements, and enormous economic costs. While the ELN has conducted desultory negotiations with the Colombian government and the majority of AUC fighting forces were disbanded and disarmed in 2005 with the Justice and Peace Law, FARC remains in a state of open war against the Colombian government.<sup>9</sup>

The U.S. designated FARC and the ELN as FTOs in 1997. FARC is also considered a terrorist organization by the European Union.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the Organization of American States (OAS) has made no such determination, inexplicably allowing FARC in the eyes of many Latin American leaders to exist in a state of legal ambiguity. Given the OAS's stance on democracy and its opposition to terrorism, including an inter-American anti-terrorism convention, this position badly needs revision. The OAS's waffling over the true nature of FARC and its regular use of terrorism and its involvement in the drug trade severely weakens the credibility of the world's oldest regional body.

Formed in 1964 as the military wing of the Colombian Communist Party, FARC “is Latin

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***FARC has an inglorious reputation for acts of terrorism with mass fatalities.***

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America's oldest, largest, most capable and best-equipped insurgency of Marxist origin.”<sup>11</sup> In 2002, when President Alvaro Uribe took office, FARC numbered an estimated 17,500 fighters operating with sophisticated command and control structures and with dozens of fronts and columns spread across Colombia. Under the previous president, Andres Pastrana (1998–2002), the Colombian government and FARC engaged in a protracted “peace process” in which the government granted FARC a massive demilitarized zone nearly the size of Switzerland. Talks between the government and FARC broke down after repeated acts of bad faith by FARC that included its expanded use of the demilitarized zone for cocaine production, a hijacking of a civilian airliner, and the kidnapping of Colombia's then-presidential candidate, Ingrid Betancourt.

In Alvaro Uribe, FARC encountered an implacable opponent who helped to revitalize efforts to bring security not only to urban areas but to rural Colombia as well.<sup>12</sup> Where the Colombian army went, mayors, teachers, and health workers largely followed. Today FARC is believed to number approximately 8,000 or 9,000 fighters in addition to supporting militia and sympathizers.

FARC has an inglorious reputation for acts of terrorism with mass fatalities. The 2003 car bombing of the social club El Nogal in Bogota resulted in 36 deaths and 200 injuries, while indiscriminate violence in a battle with paramilitaries in 2002 in

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8. U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” p. 4.

9. Román D. Ortiz and Nicolás Urrutia, “A Long Road to Victory: Developing Counterinsurgency Strategy in Colombia,” in *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century*, ed. James J. F. Forest (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger Security International, 2007), pp. 310–333.

10. Council Common Position 2009/67/CFSP, Official Journal of the European Union, January 29, 2009, at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:023:0037:0042:EN:PDF> (December 4, 2009).

11. U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Terrorist Organizations,” p. 4.

12. Peter DeShazo, Joanna Mendelson Forman, and Philip McLean, “Countering Threats to Security and Stability in a Failing State: Lessons from Colombia,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2009, at [http://csis.org/files/publication/090918\\_DeShazo\\_CounteringThreats\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/090918_DeShazo_CounteringThreats_Web.pdf) (December 1, 2009).

Bojayá caused over 100 civilian deaths. For most Colombians, the El Nopal bombing and the slaughter of civilians at Bojayá are vivid reminders of FARC's callous brutality and inhumanity.

FARC routinely practices kidnapping and extortion, and currently holds an estimated 700 hostages for ransom. It is responsible for cold-blooded murders of American citizens. In March 1999, FARC members murdered three U.S. missionaries in Colombia, leading to U.S. indictments of six prominent FARC members in April 2002. In February 2003, FARC fighters murdered American Thomas Janis and kidnapped Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, and Thomas Howes.<sup>13</sup> The three U.S. contractors were held in brutal captivity for more than five years until freed by a daring Colombian military rescue in July 2008.

Despite serious setbacks in 2008, FARC commands substantial resources and conducts a wide range of military and terror operations against the Colombian government and innocent civilians. Under the leadership of Guillermo Leon Saenz Vargas (aka Alfonso Cano), FARC aims to regain its strength, develop fresh strategies that allow it to recruit new fighters and sympathizers, and build an expanded urban base. In the first half of 2009, it increased the number of attacks on the Colombian government.<sup>14</sup> It continues financing its overall operation by working what the Drug Enforcement

Administration has labeled a "cocaine empire that is the largest supplier of the U.S."<sup>15</sup> Involvement with coca production and cocaine processing nets FARC an estimated \$300 million per year.

FARC regularly perpetrates acts of terror against unarmed civilians in violation of the rules of war and fundamental human rights standards. FARC killing sprees just in 2009 have included the executions of at least eight Awa Indians as alleged "informers," revenge killings of 12 civilians by a female FARC commander for the death of her guerrilla boyfriend, and an attack on a civilian bus resulting in the deaths of six, including children.<sup>16</sup> Terrorist acts to support its cocaine business and military operation involve assassinations, extrajudicial killings, mutilations, forced recruitment of child soldiers, sexual exploitation of females, regular use of land mines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs), kidnappings, and economic sabotage.<sup>17</sup>

### Narcoterrorism

In the post-9/11 environment, the U.S. officials studying the transformation of groups such as FARC became increasingly aware of the deadly synergy existing between FTOs and traditional criminal networks. Whether motivated by ideology or greed, terrorists and criminals sought regular sources of income. Both illegal actors found it convenient to exploit weak or failing states and ungoverned

13. The three Americans were rescued in a brilliantly executed operation conducted by the Colombian Armed Forces on July 3, 2008. A major lawsuit against FARC and its leaders was filed in a Florida court on behalf of the survivors of Thomas Janis and the three American hostages held by the FARC for over five years. See Elaine Silvestrini, "Former Hostages of Colombian Paramilitary Group Suing Former Captors," *The Tampa Tribune*, November 19, 2009, at <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20091119/ARTICLE/911191053/-1/NEWSITEMAP> (November 20, 2009).
14. "Balance de Seguridad Nacional, Premier Semestre de 2009," Fundacion Seguridad y Democracia, at <http://www.seguridadydemocracia.org/docs/pdf/especiales/informeEspecial25-2.pdf> (December 4, 2009).
15. Department of Justice, "United States Charges 50 Leaders of Narco-Terrorist FARC in Colombia with Supplying More than Half the World's Cocaine," March 22, 2006, at [http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2006/March/06\\_crm\\_163.html](http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2006/March/06_crm_163.html) (December 4, 2009).
16. Helen Popper and Luis Jaime Acosta, "FARC Rebels Kill Eight Colombian Indians," Reuters, February 17, 2009, at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN17345582> (December 4, 2009); Ashley Hamer, "Six Dead in FARC Bus Attack," *Colombia Reports*, November 20, 2009, at <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/6973-six-dead-in-farc-bus-attack.html> (November 23, 2009); and Adriaan Alsema, "FARC Commander Orders Revenge Killings: Authorities," *Colombia Reports*, November 17, 2009, at <http://colombiareports.com/colombia-news/news/6910-farc-commander-orders-revenge-killings-authorities.html> (November 23, 2009).
17. Chris Krául, "Colombia Rebel Groups Recruiting Indigenous Youths," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 2009, at <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/oct/07/world/fg-colombia-children7> (November 18, 2009).

spaces to capitalize on movement of illicit drugs, commodities, people, and weapons. In Colombia and Afghanistan—centers for the cocaine and heroin businesses, respectively—drug dealings offered regular revenue streams to finance domestic and international terrorism of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and FARC.

The Department of Justice further revised its laws to add narcoterrorism as a criminal offense. Justice defined “narcoterrorism” as “participation of groups or associated individuals in taxing, providing security for, or otherwise aiding or abetting drug trafficking endeavors in an effort to further or fund terrorist activities.”<sup>18</sup> By 2006, the Justice Department drafted a specific narcoterrorism statute that allows prosecution of individuals engaged in “the distribution of a controlled substance in order to provide a pecuniary value to a person or group that has engaged or is engaged in a terrorist activity.” Many FARC members have been extradited to the U.S. and tried and convicted for the crimes of narcoterrorism. Most of FARC’s senior leadership has been indicted in U.S. courts for the crime of narcoterrorism. Nonetheless, FARC is praised by Chávez as a constituent component of the Bolivarian Revolution.

### **FARC, Colombia, and Hugo Chávez**

Hugo Chávez vigorously supports FARC’s narcoterrorism for three essential reasons. First, FARC conforms to his geopolitical vision for developing a revolutionary, Bolivarian bloc within South America. Driven by an obsession with the past, particularly with the memory of Liberator Simon Bolivar’s failure to achieve political unity for South America, Chávez envisions a 21st-century rectification of historical errors. He desires to restore unity between Venezuela, Colombia, and other components of the

early 19th-century Grand Colombia.<sup>19</sup> Without Colombia’s willing participation in this project, Chávez fears his efforts to create a left-oriented South American bloc will falter. Like previous “revolutionaries” of towering ambition, Chávez advocates expansion of his revolutionary creed and political vision of the Bolivarian Revolution or “Socialism of the 21st Century” and desires the security that comes with living next to ideologically compatible neighbors.

Second, Chávez sees the present Uribe government and Colombia’s largely pro-U.S. political elites and entrepreneurial sectors as enemies. For Chávez, they are obstacles to his class-based, populist social revolution in which control of politics and the instruments of economic power is transferred from bourgeois elites to progressive elements of a people’s participatory democracy. Routinely, he insults and denigrates Colombia’s elected president, denouncing Uribe as a “gangster,” “mafia,” and client of the U.S.

Chávez encourages Colombian political forces to move toward his socialist–communist model. This, Chávez believes, will lead to a distancing of Colombia from the U.S. that will quickly be reflected in reduced counter-drug cooperation, revocation of the recently signed Defense Cooperation Agreement between the U.S. and Colombia, an end to free trade, and Colombia’s realignment with an anti-American bloc of South American states.<sup>20</sup> Chávez is currently applying punitive economic pressure against Colombia, aimed at disrupting as much as \$7 billion in largely agricultural sales by Colombia to Venezuela, freezing out Colombian producers and sellers in Venezuela. Chávez is sending a punitive message to ordinary Colombians regarding the price they will pay for siding with the U.S.

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18. Emma Bjornehed, “Narco-Terrorism: The Merger of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror,” *Global Crime*, Vol. 6, No. 3 and 4 (August–November 2004), p. 306, at [http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2005/Emma\\_Narcoterror.pdf](http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/publications/2005/Emma_Narcoterror.pdf) (December 4, 2009).
19. Ray Walser, “Hugo Chávez Eyes Colombia,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 1784, January 28, 2008, at [http://www.heritage.org/research/latinamerica/upload/wm\\_1784.pdf](http://www.heritage.org/research/latinamerica/upload/wm_1784.pdf) (December 4, 2009).
20. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, “Fact Sheet: U.S.–Colombia Defense Agreement,” October 30, 2009, at <http://bogota.usembassy.gov/root/pdfs/uscolombiadcafactsheet102009eng2.pdf> (December 1, 2009). Chávez has made the agreement a subject for repeated nationalistic outbursts and charged the agreement will eventually lead to war between the U.S. and Venezuela.



Chávez wants to “rehabilitate” the genuinely unpopular FARC, minimize its narcoterrorist roots and criminal nature, and encourage negotiations and power-sharing that will grant armed narcoterrorists a substantial voice in shaping Colombia’s future. His Colombia strategy also aims to derail the Colombian government’s successful Democratic Security program, return the Colombian military to its barracks, and weaken the state that has begun to stand as a bulwark against lawlessness and terrorism. Changing Colombia from a strategic U.S. partner into an anti-American adversary will vindicate Chávez’s strategy and help immensely in his project to arrange an anti-American world. The idea that Colombia might again descend into anarchic disorder and unchecked internal violence scarcely troubles Chávez.

### A Record of Support for FARC

Since 1999, Chávez has provided political and logistical support to FARC. He has permitted senior officials, such as Rodrigo Granda, Marin Arango (aka Iván Marquez), and Rodrigo London Echeverry (aka Timochenko or Timoleon Jiminez) to move freely in Venezuela.<sup>21</sup> Arango/Markquez currently plays an important role as an intermediary in developing international connections and support for FARC.<sup>22</sup>

In 2007, Chávez tried to play a prominent role in brokering the release of high-level Colombian hostages held by FARC in order to project an image as a regional leader capable of delivering a “humanitarian exchange” and improving public acceptance of FARC. He has campaigned for FARC’s recognition as a belligerent rather than terrorist organization. In January 2008, Chávez defended the FARC, along

with the ELN, claiming they were not terrorist organizations but “genuine armies occupying territory and fighting for the Bolivarian cause.”<sup>23</sup>

A Colombian military strike against a FARC camp on Ecuador’s side of the shared border on March 1, 2008, resulted in the death of FARC’s chief of staff, Luis Édgar Devia Silva (aka Raúl Reyes) and 24 FARC members and sympathizers, as well as the recovery of computers belonging to the FARC commander. On learning of the death of Reyes, a criminal responsible for more than 50 homicides in Colombia, Chávez praised the late guerrilla as a “good revolutionary.” While the March 1 incident triggered a border crisis during which Chávez threatened war against Colombia, the recovered laptops yielded an intelligence bonanza for Colombia.<sup>24</sup>

Locked in Reyes’s computers was evidence that Chávez and his lieutenants were in frequent contact with FARC leaders and regularly discussing ways to assist it with money, arms, logistical support, and strategic advice.<sup>25</sup> Particularly worrisome was the readiness of Chávez’s agents to propose up to \$300 million in aid to FARC and to act as facilitators for FARC to acquire sophisticated weaponry, particularly surface-to-air missiles or man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS).<sup>26</sup>

In September 2008, after a review of the intelligence collected from the Reyes laptops, the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Asset Controls (OFAC) identified two senior Venezuelan officials—General Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios, director of Venezuela’s military intelligence (DGIM); and Henry de Jesús Rangel Silva, head of the Directorate of Intelligence and Prevention Service (DISIP), Venezuela’s FBI; as well as former Justice

21. Department of the Treasury, Office of Financial Asset Control, “Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons,” December 3, 2009, at <http://www.treas.gov/offices/enforcement/ofac/sdn/t11sdn.pdf> (December 4, 2009).

22. Jose de Cordoba, “Chávez Lets Colombia Rebels Wield Power Inside Venezuela,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122721414603545331.html> (November 23, 2009).

23. Walser, “Hugo Chávez Eyes Colombia,” p. 10.

24. Gabriel Marcella, “War without Borders: The Colombia-Ecuador Crisis of 2008,” Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, December 16, 2008, at <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/Pubs/Display.Cfm?pubID=891> (December 4, 2009).

25. 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>.

26. Doug Farah, “What the FARC Papers Show Us About Latin American Terrorism,” NEFA Foundation, April 1, 2008, at <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefafarc0408.pdf> (December 1, 2009).

and Interior Minister Ramón Rodríguez Chacín—as materially assisting FARC narcotics trafficking under the Kingpin Act.<sup>27</sup> Carvajal, in particular, has long figured as a primary intermediary between the FARC and the Chávez government.<sup>28</sup>

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**Hugo Chávez has provided political and logistical support to FARC since 1999.**

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In July 2009, Colombian officials disclosed that their army had recovered three anti-tank weapons from FARC. These weapons, AT-4 anti-tank rockets, were swiftly traced back to their Swedish manufacturer, which reported the weapons were sold to the Venezuelan army in the 1980s.<sup>29</sup> Chávez at first called the entire report false. Later he reversed this position, claiming the weapons were stolen in 1995 during a FARC raid into Venezuela. Chávez could not explain why communications exchanges between FARC leaders in early 2007 that are documented in the Reyes laptops spoke of a recent transfer of “85mm antitank rockets” from Venezuela to FARC, precisely the weapons recovered by the Colombians.<sup>30</sup>

In the same month, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) detailed the precipi-

tous decline in U.S.–Venezuelan counter-drug cooperation while documenting the steady rise in the quantity of cocaine transiting Venezuela. It is estimated that the amount of cocaine transiting Venezuela rose from 50 metric tons (MT) in 2003 to 250 MT in 2008.<sup>31</sup> Overall, nearly one-third of all the cocaine produced in the Andean region passes through Venezuela.<sup>32</sup> As recently as November 18, 2009, a senior State Department official reaffirmed his concern about “increasing incidences” of cocaine flights passing through or over Venezuela.

This non-cooperation with the U.S. and tepid cooperation with other recognized law enforcement authorities presents a serious challenge to international counter-narcotics enforcement. Fresh routes for cocaine trafficking pass from Colombia through Venezuela to the Caribbean, especially to the Dominican Republic and weak Haiti, while other routes run toward West Africa and then into Europe.<sup>33</sup> The growing cross-Atlantic trade is also a lucrative target for radical Islamist groups.<sup>34</sup> Given the increasing levels of corruption in Venezuela and the disappearance of transparency and accountability, profits from the drug trade can also more easily find their way to the pockets of Venezuelan officials or be diverted to criminal or terrorist groups.<sup>35</sup>

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27. U.S. Treasury Department, Office of Financial Asset Control, “Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Supporting the FARC,” September 12, 2008, at <http://treas.gov/press/releases/hp1132.htm> (November 23, 2009).

28. Pedro M. Burelli, “Chavez’s Own Montesinos,” *Petroleum World News*, February 5, 2008, at <http://www.petroleumworld.com/issues08020501.htm> (December 4, 2009).

29. Editorial, “Rockets for Terrorists,” *The Washington Post*, July 31, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/30/AR2009073003329.html> (November 18, 2009).

30. Juan Forero, “Venezuela Offered Aid to Colombian Rebels,” *The Washington Post*, May 15, 2008, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/14/AR2008051403785.html> (November 23, 2009). The AT-4 is listed as an 84-mm anti-tank rocket.

31. U.S. Government Accountability Office, “Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined,” GAO Report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, July 20, 2009, at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09806.pdf> (November 20, 2009).

32. “United Nations World Drug Report 2009,” United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2009, at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR\\_2009/WDR2009\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2009/WDR2009_eng_web.pdf) (November 20, 2009).

33. Tom Brown, “U.S. Says Venezuela Drug Flights Pose ‘Challenge,’” *Reuters India*, November 19, 2009, at <http://in.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-44069020091118?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0> (December 4, 2009).

34. Claude Salhani, “Islamic Militants Boosting Role in Drug Trade,” *The Washington Times*, November 17, 2009, at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/nov/17/islamic-militants-boosting-role-in-drug-trade/> (November 20, 2009).

35. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2009*, Transparency International, 2009, at [http://www.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table) (November 18, 2009), and Brown, “U.S. Says Venezuela Drug Flights Pose ‘Challenge,’” p. 14.

In recent months, Chávez has launched yet another effort to rehabilitate FARC and other revolutionary heroes. Speaking before the United Nations on September 24, 2009, Chávez classified the conflict in Colombia as “a civil war” without a military solution. Such a characterization implies granting FARC a degree of political legitimacy as a credible negotiator. When Libya’s reigning tyrant Muammar Qadhafi visited Venezuela in September for a South American–Africa Summit, he joined with Chávez to demand a redefinition of terrorism that excludes all groups like FARC that are “engaged in the struggle of the people for liberations and self-determination.”<sup>36</sup> In short, reaffirming the sad truism that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter. Chávez’s penchant for endorsing terrorism in its multiple forms was again on display on November 20, 2009, when he praised convicted terrorist Illich Ramirez Sanchez, a Venezuelan citizen known as “Carlos the Jackal,” as a “revolutionary fighter.”<sup>37</sup> “I defend him. I don’t care what they say in Europe tomorrow,” added Chávez. These comments recall his March 2008 eulogy of narcoterrorist FARC leader Reyes as a “good revolutionary.”

By November 2009, Chávez had again engineered a fresh situation of crisis and conflict with Colombia. Claiming disorder along the border and in reaction to the October 30 signing of a U.S.–Colombia Defense Agreement, Chávez called for his countrymen to prepare for war and ordered 15,000 troops and National Guard members to militarize the Colombian border. The opposition governor of the state of Tachira, Oscar Perez, charged that the Venezuelan government conducts a dual policy in dealing with armed Colombians pursuing any Colombian paramilitary groups that venture across the border while remaining complacent with regard to FARC activity.<sup>38</sup> On November 19, Venezuelan troops blew up two pedestrian bridges over the

Tachira River, further inflaming already short tempers. Chávez has thus far rejected outside mediation, claiming he will address the crisis in the defense council of the United States of South America (UNASUR), a body that has generally been congenial to Chávez’s views.

While a full-fledged attack on Colombia appears unlikely, the chances for hotheaded miscalculations and bloodshed have increased. How Chávez manipulates border tensions to serve as a smokescreen for aid to FARC is an open-ended question. Chávez will most likely continue to apply steady pressure on the Uribe government in an effort to weaken its authority and punish it for cooperation with the U.S. before the May 2010 presidential elections in Colombia.

### Accelerating Ties with State Sponsors of Terrorism

Venezuela continues to deepen ties to all current state sponsors of terrorism. Chávez shares increasingly common worldviews and extremist agendas, and apparently personalized relations, with unsavory leaders like Syria’s Bashar al-Asad, Sudan’s Omar al-Bashir, Cuba’s Castro brothers, and Iran’s Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. When seeking to predict Chávez’s international behavior, U.S. policymakers can with considerable reliability assume that the more a nation or its leadership runs afoul of the U.S., the greater will be the chances of that party receiving Chávez’s unqualified backing.

**Syria.** The U.S. designated Syria a state sponsor of terrorism in December 29, 1979. Under the authoritarian rule of al-Asad and the Ba’ath Party, Syria has a long and sinister history of aiding terrorism and assassination in Lebanon, and waging direct and proxy war against its southern neighbor, Israel.<sup>39</sup> Syria has adopted a supportive stance toward Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad, allow-

36. “Gadhafi, Chávez Meet, Sign Anti-terrorism Declaration,” *USA Today*, September 28, 2009, at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-09-28-gadhafi-Chávez\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2009-09-28-gadhafi-Chávez_N.htm) (November 18, 2009), and Benedict Mander, “Chávez and Gaddafi Urge Redefining of ‘Terrorism,’” *The Financial Times*, September 29, 2009, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5a429ac8-ad0e-11de-9caf-00144feabdc0.html> (November 18, 2009).

37. Simon Romero, “Chávez Offers Public Defense for Carlos the Jackal,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2009, at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/22/world/americas/22venezweb.html?\\_r=1&ref=world](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/22/world/americas/22venezweb.html?_r=1&ref=world) (December 4, 2009).

38. “Chávez Foe Accuses Him of Allowing Leftist Colombia Rebels,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/12/world/americas/12venez.html> (November 20, 2009).

ing these FTOs to maintain headquarters in Damascus and conduct terrorist-related activities. Syria defends its actions by claiming the FTOs “represent legitimate resistance activity,” similar to the justifications Chávez applies to FARC. After Iran, Syria is the world’s most active state sponsor of terrorism.

Fundamentally troubling has been Syria’s readiness to support foreign fighters, harbor renegades from Saddam Hussein’s regime, and continue facilitation of Ba’athist terrorism in Iraq.<sup>40</sup> Syria’s refusal to cooperate in the fight against terrorism forced the al-Maliki government in Iraq to withdraw its ambassador from Damascus.<sup>41</sup>

During his September 2009 visit to Damascus, Chávez lavished praise on al-Asad and promised closer economic ties, including an offer to build a petroleum refinery. He endorsed the extreme anti-Israel ideology of his hosts, claiming Israel’s self-defense against Hamas in Gaza actually aimed at the “extermination of Palestinian people” and constituted “genocide.”<sup>42</sup> These views fortify the increasingly anti-Israel, anti-Semitic direction of Chávez’s public pronouncements back home.<sup>43</sup> Venezuela and Syria also signed cooperation agreements in October 2009 and promised unspecified “technological cooperation.”

**Cuba.** The Caribbean Communist state has occupied a place on the state sponsor’s list since March 1982, when it actively exported Marxist–

Leninist revolution to Central America.<sup>44</sup> For decades, Cuba was the military outpost for Soviet Communism in the Western Hemisphere and Moscow’s loyal partner in a host of Cold War confrontations and wars. While the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s ended Havana’s privileged global position and reduced its capacity to project military power abroad, it did little to modify Cuba’s commitment to the preservation of its inefficient and repressive Communist regime or moderate its deep-rooted anti-American ideology.

The political friendship between Chávez and the Castro brothers dates back to the early 1990s. In the aftermath of Chávez’s failed military coup against President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992, Fidel Castro offered the coup plotter a hero’s welcome in Havana in December 1994 after he was pardoned by President Rafael Caldera. Ties between the Castro brothers and Chávez have grown steadily stronger over the decade since Chávez was elected president. Viewed from the standpoint of U.S. regional political and security interests, the relationship between Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez represents a pivotal occurrence that has reinvigorated anti-U.S. radicalism in the Western Hemisphere in the post–Cold War era. It has also kindled populist turmoil and political polarization in Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Nicaragua.

United by shared rejection of liberal democratic values and market economies, and hostility to U.S.

39. Holly Fletcher, “Syria: State Sponsor of Terrorism,” Council on Foreign Relations, February 2008, at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9368/> (December 4, 2009).

40. Matthew Levitt, “Foreign Fighters and their Economic Impact: A Case Study of Syria and Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI),” July 14, 2009, at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/opedsPDFs/4a69e2c244ed4.pdf> (December 4, 2009).

41. Michael Rubin, “Syria’s Path to Islamist Terror,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2010, at <http://www.meforum.org/2513/syria-islamist-terrorism> (December 1, 2009).

42. “Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez Slams Israel During Damascus Visit,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 4, 2009, at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/babylonbeyond/2009/09/syria-Chavez-assad-slam-israel.html> (December 1, 2009).

43. Abraham H. Foxman, “Chavez’s Anti-Semitism,” *The Washington Post*, February 5, 2008, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/04/AR2008020402428.html> (December 1, 2009); Travis Pantin, “Hugo Chávez’s Jewish Problem,” *Commentary*, July/August 2008, at <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/hugo-ch-vez-s-jewish-problem-11455> (December 4, 2009); and Eliot Engel, “Statement Condemning President Hugo Chavez’s Recent Attacks on Israel,” Web site of U.S. Representative Eliot L. Engel, September 9, 2009, at <http://engel.house.gov/index.cfm?sectionid=24&sectiontree=6,24&itemid=1823> (January 7, 2010). Eliot Engel, Chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has long expressed concern about the link between Chávez, terrorism, and anti-Semitism.

44. Mark P. Sullivan, “Cuba and the State Sponsors of Terrorism List,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, May 13, 2005, at <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/RL32251.pdf> (December 1, 2009).

views on liberty, freedom, and individual rights, Chávez and Castro have developed an alliance that taps Cuban human resources and skills as a provider of medical personnel, teachers, and sports trainers in exchange for oil shipments and financial payments. While much is made of the work of Cuban doctors in Venezuela's slums, very little is

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***In 2002, Venezuela and Cuba established the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas—with a broad anti-American agenda.***

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known about security and intelligence cooperation between the two. Skilled in the black arts of censorship, political control, surveillance, and repression, Cuban security personnel actively assist in curtailing individual freedoms in Venezuela, expanding the state's repressive capacity, and promoting the expansion of the Bolivarian Revolution.<sup>45</sup>

In 2002, Cuba and Venezuela jointly established the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA). It now numbers nine members. An economic integration vehicle, it has also become a forum of coordinated political actions with a broad anti-American agenda. Coordination on military and security matters may eventually be included as a regular part of ALBA activities.

Cuba's hostility to the U.S. has remained constant during the change in official Cuban leadership from Fidel to Raúl Castro.<sup>46</sup> Cuban espionage services routinely target the U.S., and intelligence facilities in the Cuban city of Berjucal and at the old Soviet-listening station in the Cuban town of Lourdes are apparently upgrading their capacity for electronic snooping and cyber warfare with help from China and the Russians. Cuba is refurbishing its

military ties with Russia. Iran, too, is welcome in Havana. In November 2009, Iran extended a \$600 million line of credit to Cuba. Modest efforts by the Obama Administration to engage Cuba's Communist leadership on matters such as travel of Cuban-Americans and migration talks have yielded little change in the fiercely anti-American mindset that governs decision making in Havana.

**Sudan.** Sudan entered the list of state sponsors of terrorism in August 1993 after it became a haven for al-Qaeda's founder, Osama bin Laden, and allowed its territory to be used to target Egypt, including an assassination attempt against President Hosni Mubarak. Under President Omar al-Bashir, who has commanded the upper hand in the National Congress Party since 1989, Sudan waged a prolonged war against southern Sudan that resulted in millions of deaths before the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2005, and since 2003 has directed the Sudanese Army and *Janjaweed* militia against rebel groups and civilian populations in Darfur, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths. The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an international arrest warrant for al-Bashir in March 2009.<sup>47</sup> U.S. sanctions against Khartoum were toughened in April 2007 in response to genocidal behavior of the Sudanese regime in the Darfur region.<sup>48</sup>

Disregarding the arrest warrant and credible charges of supporting genocide, Chávez has made numerous overtures to Sudan and al-Bashir, and has pressed for stronger diplomatic ties. In 2005, he dispatched an ambassador to Khartoum, a move reciprocated by the Sudanese in 2009. During a September visit to Tripoli for a meeting, Chávez renewed his invitation for Sudan's President al-Bashir to make a friendship visit to Venezuela. The invitation was extended in defiance of the outstand-

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45. Casto Ocando, "Cubanos manejan los hilos del poder en Venezuela," *El Nuevo Herald*, November 16, 2009, at [http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/america\\_latina/venezuela/story/589387.html](http://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/america_latina/venezuela/story/589387.html) (January 7, 2010).

46. Hans de Salas-Valle, "Raúl Castro's Cuba: Ally of Rogue Regimes and Safe Haven for Terrorists," Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami, *Focus on Cuba* Issue 107 (April 28, 2009), at [http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/FOCUS\\_Web/Issue107.htm](http://ctp.iccas.miami.edu/FOCUS_Web/Issue107.htm) (January 7, 2010).

47. Press release, "ICC Issues a Warrant of Arrest for Omar Al Bashir, President of Sudan," International Criminal Court, March 4, 2009, at <http://www.icc-cpi.int/NR/exeres/0EF62173-05ED-403A-80C8-F15EE1D25BB3.htm> (December 1, 2009).

48. Patrick M. Cronin ed., *Global Strategic Assessment 2009: America's Security Role in a Changing World: Africa*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, pp. 306–333, at [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docUploaded/19-GSA2009\\_Chpt%2014.pdf](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/docUploaded/19-GSA2009_Chpt%2014.pdf) (January 7, 2010).

ing arrest warrant issued by the ICC. Chávez claimed the ICC's case against al-Bashir was "ridiculous" and a "farce" and called it a result of racism.<sup>49</sup> Ironically, Venezuela is a signatory of the Rome Statute that established the ICC, which Chávez cheerfully ignores. With Darfur and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Accord hanging in the balance and the U.S. seeking to build pressure for peace, Chávez recklessly supports the same Sudanese leadership responsible for the violence and terrorism in southern Sudan and in Darfur.

**Iran.** Recently the U.S. has looked back with a sense of humiliation at the 30th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution, the seizure of the U.S. embassy, and the prolonged hostage ordeal suffered during the Carter Administration. The seizure of the U.S. embassy is a powerful reminder of the anti-American dynamic that still drives Iranian politics and foreign policy, and holds a people in subjection to the theocratic rule of the Ayatollahs and terrorized by the repression of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and secret police. Iran's record for supporting terrorism is unsurpassed. The State Department's 2008 report on terrorism speaks clearly on the matter:

Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism. Iran's involvement in the planning and financial support of terrorist attacks throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia had a direct impact on international efforts to promote peace, threatened economic stability in the Gulf, and undermined the growth of democracy.

The Qods Force, an elite branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is the regime's primary mechanism for culti-

vating and supporting terrorists abroad. The Qods Force provided aid in the form of weapons, training, and funding to Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups, Lebanese Hezbollah, Iraq-based militants, and Taliban fighters in Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup>

As the U.S. and the world have become increasingly wary of Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, its support for terrorism, and its repression of its own people, Chávez has worked overtime to make Tehran his closest international partner.

Enhanced relations were launched with the signing of bilateral agreements on economic exchanges in 2004. Since then, Iran and Venezuela claimed to have signed as many as 300 commercial and technical cooperation agreements. Iran, according to Venezuelan reports, is building automobiles, tractors, bicycles; producing cement; exploring for oil; opening joint banks; and dispatching mining engineers to prospect in Venezuela. While the parties claim their objective is mutual economic development, many question the economic rationale for Venezuela's sudden infatuation with things Iranian.<sup>51</sup>

A lack of transparency in the exchanges opens a wide door of doubt regarding the true objectives of many of these joint ventures.<sup>52</sup> Very little is known, for example, about the April 2008 Memorandum of Understanding pledging mutual military support and cooperation. The spectrum of concerns regarding the intensified relations between Iran and Venezuela are a subject of close congressional scrutiny as Iranian inroads in the Americas, and particularly Venezuela, increase.<sup>53</sup>

Iran and Venezuela, for example, operate regular flights connecting Caracas with Tehran via Dam-

49. "Indict Bush, Not Bashir, Says Chavez at Arab Summit," Reuters, March 31, 2009, at <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJOE52U0NI20090331> (December 1, 2009).

50. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Chapter 3: State Sponsors of Terrorism."

51. Many Venezuelans see few tangible outcomes from these cooperative agreements. Recently, leading opposition figure Theodore Petkoff stated that "the Iran-Venezuela relationship is but a fantasy of lavish projects, and in effect, just noise." Simon Romero, "In Welcoming Iranian President, Chavez Blasts Israel," *The New York Times*, November 25, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/world/americas/26venez.html> (November 26, 2009).

52. "A Friend to Iran," *The Washington Post*, September 10, 2009, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/09/AR2009090902607.html> (December 4, 2009).

53. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, "Iran in the Western Hemisphere," October 27, 2009, at [http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing\\_notice.asp?id=1127](http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing_notice.asp?id=1127) (December 1, 2009).

ascus. These flights are restricted to state-authorized travelers and reportedly lack commercial viability. The U.S. State Department and independent observers reports that “passengers on these flights were reportedly subject to only cursory immigration and customs controls at Simon Bolivar International Airport in Caracas.”<sup>54</sup> Counter-terrorist experts also fear that Venezuela’s cavalier laxity with regard to citizenship, identity, and travel documents and the high levels of corruption found within the Venezuelan bureaucracy make it easy for the wrong-intentioned to assume false Venezuelan identities. With or without government complicity, Venezuela has a potential to serve as a receptive way station for Middle Eastern terrorists looking for operational space within the Western Hemisphere. The expanded penetration of Hezbollah and Hamas into the Western Hemisphere is being closely scrutinized by a body of concerned international observers.<sup>55</sup>

Following Iran’s June 2009 elections and the massive repression against opposition protesters, Chávez completed his eighth visit to Tehran. Despite the electoral turmoil, the cruel repression of protesting Iranians, and show-trials of dissidents, Chávez was undeterred, predictably blaming the unrest on U.S. intervention.<sup>56</sup> During his September visit, he again offered unqualified support for the Iranian regime. Following a private meeting with Chávez, Grand Ayatollah Khameni predicted

the approaching demise of U.S. power and influence. President Ahmadinejad informed the press that he and Chávez judged “expansion of Tehran–Caracas relations...necessary given their common interests, friends and foes.”<sup>57</sup> Chávez called Iran his “strategic ally.” Ahmadinejad visited Caracas on November 25, 2009. Chávez praised Ahmadinejad as “a gladiator of anti-imperialist struggles.” For the Iranian president’s benefit, he denounced Israel as the “murderous arm of the Yankee Empire.”<sup>58</sup>

In September, Chávez broke fresh ground by promising to deliver 20,000 barrels of gasoline per day to Iran, a transaction estimated to represent \$800 million. He also committed to \$780 million in investment swaps in various energy undertakings.<sup>59</sup> If Venezuela proceeds with this gasoline supply relationship, it will likely stand in violation of the intention and spirit of a proposed set of new U.S. sanctions targeting foreign investments in Iran’s energy development and the sale of refined petroleum products.

The Iran Petroleum Sanctions Act of 2009, if passed by the U.S. Congress, will apply pressure on Iran to comply with international inspections and abandon nuclear weapon development by tightening restrictions on Iran’s access to refined petroleum and preventing individuals, and presumably corporate entities and countries, from offering “goods, services, or technology that would allow Iran to

54. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism: Western Hemisphere*, April 30, 2009, at <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2008/122435.htm> (December 1, 2009).

55. Douglas Farah, “Iran in the Western Hemisphere,” testimony before the Subcommittees on the Western Hemisphere, the Middle East and South Asia, and Terrorism, Nonproliferation and Trade, Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, October 27, 2009, at [http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.217/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.217/pub_detail.asp) (December 1, 2009).

56. The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry on June 16, 2009, issued the following communiqué: “The Bolivarian government of Venezuela expresses its firm rejection of the ferocious and unfounded campaign to discredit, from abroad, that has been unleashed against Iran, with the objective of muddying the political climate of this brother country. We demand the immediate end to maneuvers to intimidate and destabilize the Islamic Revolution.” Issued by the Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Exteriores, “Comunicado 16/06/2009,” at [http://www.mre.gov.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2262:comunicado-16062009&catid=3:comunicados&Itemid=108](http://www.mre.gov.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2262:comunicado-16062009&catid=3:comunicados&Itemid=108) (January 12, 2010). Also see Tyler Bridges, “Ahmadinejad’s New Best Friend: Hugo Chávez?” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 2009, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/0618/p06s10-woam.html> (December 1, 2009).

57. “Leader: Repeated U.S. Failures Show New World Order,” Iran Press TV, September 6, 2009, at <http://www.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=105467&sectionid=351020101> (December 1, 2009).

58. Romero, “In Welcoming Iranian President, Chávez Blasts Israel,” p. 22.

59. “Venezuela to Export Gasoline to Iran,” CNN, September 7, 2009, at <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/09/07/iran.venezuela.gasoline/index.html> (December 4, 2009).

maintain or expand its domestic production of refined petroleum resources; or engaged in any activity that could contribute to the enhancement of Iran's ability to import refined petroleum."<sup>60</sup> Given the pessimism regarding the ability of the U.S. and Iran to reach a nuclear agreement, additional sanctions appear nearly inevitable, thus triggering an additional friction point with Venezuela.

In 2005 and 2006, Venezuela, as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency, refused to support a resolution referring the case of Iran's violations of nuclear safeguards to the U.N. Security Council. Chávez has consistently defended Iran's right to develop its nuclear program and deceptively argued, "There is not a single proof Iran is building a nuclear bomb," reinforcing Iranian defiance.<sup>61</sup>

The U.S. is rightfully worried about increasing nuclear cooperation between Chávez and Ahmadinejad, and the nature of the cooperation is shrouded in deep secrecy.<sup>62</sup> On September 24, 2009, for example, Venezuela's Minister of Industries and Mines Rodolfo Sanz confirmed that Iran was assisting Venezuela's efforts to map and analyze potential uranium deposits.<sup>63</sup> Within hours, Caracas denied the statement. Chávez turned defensive, joked about working with Iran to develop "an atomic bicycle,"

and claimed Venezuela has no intention of seeking the acquisition of a nuclear weapon.<sup>64</sup>

Venezuela has initiated the first stages of a nuclear program and signed a nuclear cooperation agreement with Russia, and has presumably begun cooperating with Iran on nuclear matters. Chávez claims oil-rich Venezuela needs a peaceful nuclear program but harbors no intention of pursuing a nuclear weapons program. While there is general agreement that a weak scientific base and resource limits imposed by the Venezuelan economy will slow Venezuela's nuclear program and that a full-fledged nuclear weapons program is still many years away, few doubt that the nuclear ambitions Chávez entertains are linked with his desire to project power well beyond Venezuela's frontiers and his readiness to support Iran even at the risk of clashes with the U.S.<sup>65</sup>

Venezuela's essential utility for Iran is its ability to serve as a front for the Iranian Ministry of Defense and its Armed Forces Logistics and for any other state companies working to advance Iran's weapons programs, both nuclear and non-nuclear. The expansion of Iranian financial institutions into Venezuela and surrounding countries offers a case in point. The U.S. has already identified Iran's Export

60. "H.R 2194: To amend the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996 to enhance United States diplomatic efforts with respect to Iran by expanding economic sanctions against Iran," at <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d111:HR02194:@@D&summ2=m&> (January 11, 2010).

61. "Chávez Backs Iran's Nuclear Program," Aljazeera, September 5, 2009, at <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/09/200995144738919572.html> (December 4, 2009).

62. See Robert Morgenthau, "The Emerging Axis of Iran and Venezuela," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 2009, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203440104574400792835972018.html> (December 1, 2009); Roger E Noriega, "Hugo Chávez's Criminal Nuclear Network: A Grave and Growing Threat," *Latin American Outlook*, No. 3 (October 2009), at <http://www.aei.org/docLib/No.3-LAOg.pdf> (December 1, 2009); and also see Warren Kozak, "The Missiles of October: The Next Hemispheric Crisis Could Involve Iran and Venezuela," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 2009 at [http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703363704574503432517397934.html?mod=WSJ\\_hpp\\_MIDDLETopStories](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703363704574503432517397934.html?mod=WSJ_hpp_MIDDLETopStories) (December 4, 2009).

63. Simon Romero, "Venezuela Says Iran is Helping It Search for Uranium," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/26/world/americas/26venez.html> (December 4, 2009).

64. Mordchai Shualy, "The Future Nuclear Powers You Should Be Worried About," *Foreign Policy Online*, October 20, 2009, at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/10/20/the\\_future\\_nuclear\\_powers\\_you\\_should\\_be\\_worried\\_about?page=0,3](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/10/20/the_future_nuclear_powers_you_should_be_worried_about?page=0,3) (December 4, 2009), and Nina Gerami and Sharon Squassoni, "Venezuela: A Nuclear Profile," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 18, 2008, at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=22568#> (December 4, 2009). For a good summary, see also Tim Padgett, "Chávez to Iran: How About Some Uranium?" *Time*, October 8, 2009, at <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1929256,00.html> (December 4, 2009).

65. Sarah J. Diehl, "Venezuela's Search for Nuclear Power—or Nuclear Prestige," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, May 7, 2009, at [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/e3\\_venezuela\\_nuclear\\_power\\_prestige.html](http://www.nti.org/e_research/e3_venezuela_nuclear_power_prestige.html) (November 20, 2009).



Development Bank and its affiliate in Caracas as a tool of the Iranian regime.<sup>66</sup> The project for a joint-development bank remains part of the bilateral program of cooperation. Venezuela was also detected assisting Iran to re-export Iranian-made arms in 2007 when it facilitated a shipment of Iranian weapons to Uruguay, disguising the weapons' origin.<sup>67</sup> Agents of Iran operating in the less constrictive environment of the Western Hemisphere can also use fictitious companies to acquire aircraft parts and dual-use technology, and generally evade U.S. export-licensing restrictions and munitions control.

"The mullahs are now part of a global anti-American alliance," concludes Michael Ledeen of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, "that includes Syria, Russia, Eritrea, China, Cuba, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Bolivia, along with terrorist organizations from Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad to the Colombian FARC."<sup>68</sup> Counter-terrorism

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***Chávez wants to guide new generations of anti-Americans in regular confrontation with the "Yankee Empire."***

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specialist and investigative reporter Douglas Farah sees Venezuela as a critical juncture point for a broad underground pipeline of criminal connectivity that allows anti-American leaders, terrorists, and criminal organizations to move peoples, arms, drugs, and even WMDs with dangerous agility and secretiveness.<sup>69</sup> "The Iranians," concludes Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau, "with the help of Venezuela, are prepared to violate any proposed sanctions regime."<sup>70</sup>

If an Iranian–U.S. military showdown occurs, Venezuela has the potential to rally as a strategic partner with Iran. Terrorist attacks, oil price spikes or production interruptions, and political unrest are options on Chávez's menu of choice if he elects to turn verbal commitments to Iran into actions in order to distract his archenemy, the U.S., from its mission in stopping Iran's nuclear weapons program.

### **Terrorism Is a State of Mind**

Ten years in office have permitted Chávez to accumulate an impressive array of largely unchecked power, greater than any other leader's in the Western Hemisphere. No Congress, court system, independent body, or free media exists to question the actions of Venezuela's strongman (*caudillo*). Chávez has successfully converted Venezuela into an increasingly undemocratic, authoritarian state guided by a single decision maker: Hugo Chávez. Disentangling Chávez's personal policies and obsessions from Venezuela's enduring national and international interests appears next to impossible.

Through the distorting lens of Chávez's anti-Americanism, the U.S. becomes the root cause of the world's troubles. Following in the well-trod footsteps of anti-American leaders as diverse as Fidel Castro, Ayatollah Khomeini, and Osama bin Laden, Chávez wants to guide new generations of anti-Americans in regular confrontation with the "Yankee Empire." Under Chávez, ideological preconditions conducive to political violence and acts of terrorism are increasingly set in motion. A steady output of anger, rancor, hate, and vilification of domestic and foreign enemies has become a regular feature of Chávez's aggressive, hyperactive leader-

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66. "Iran, Venezuela Launch Joint Development Bank," Agence France-Presse, April 3, 2009, at [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iskmQ6xtdC4Ebzc799pWYG\\_RSMXg](http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iskmQ6xtdC4Ebzc799pWYG_RSMXg) (December 4, 2009).

67. "Uruguay Caught Buying Iran Arms," *The Washington Times*, October 12, 2007, at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2007/oct/12/uruguay-caught-buying-iran-arms/> (January 7, 2010).

68. Michael Ledeen, "We Have Met the Enemy," *The Weekly Standard*, October 26, 2009, at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/017/095rmzre.asp?pg=1> (December 4, 2009).

69. Douglas Farah, "Transnational Drug Enterprises: Threats to Global Stability and U.S. National Security from Southwest Asia, Latin America and West Africa," testimony before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, October 1, 2009, at [http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.215/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.strategycenter.net/research/pubID.215/pub_detail.asp) (December 4, 2009). Farah's impressive investigations and work can be found at <http://www.douglasfarah.com/>.

70. Morgenthau, "The Emerging Axis of Iran and Venezuela."

ship style. For such a leader the boundaries between peaceful behavior, protest, and incitement to violence and war increasingly begin to blur.

Spanish conservative thinker Gustavo de Ariestegui worries about the growing philosophical connections between the radicalism of a Chávez and radical extremism of jihadists in the Middle East. He believes common ground can be found in a frustrated and misguided utopianism common to both and by an obsession with lost glory. *Chavistas* and terrorists, he argues, see themselves as “legitimate soldiers in an heroic battle within the context of an asymmetrical war of liberation. It is a theory that justifies any kind of violence, including terrorism, if it is used against the most powerful countries, the repressive forces of the West.”<sup>71</sup>

Either in Tehran or Caracas, radicalization leads to the dehumanization and demonization of one’s opponents, turning those who disagree or dissent into permanent enemies. The objective is replacing natural feelings of human solidarity, sympathy, and tolerance with anger, hate, and rage.<sup>72</sup> Political opponents in the *Chavista* rhetoric become enemies, traitors, fascists, criminals, the mafia, ultimately inferior or sub-human life forms.<sup>73</sup> Also creeping into the *Chavista* repertoire is a thoroughly chilling readiness to adopt extremist anti-Israel, anti-Semitic stances.<sup>74</sup>

The primary objective of Chávez’s foreign policy of invectives is to wage the fight against “hegemonic Yankee imperialism”<sup>75</sup> Chávez sees the September 11 attacks on the U.S. by al-Qaeda as a tragic incident that quickly became a pretext for the belligerent Bush Administration to launch acts of aggression against Afghanistan and Iraq. Before Moscow University students in September 2009, Chávez proclaimed the U.S. to be the “greatest terrorist nation.”<sup>76</sup>

Since January 2009, Chávez claims he has offered friendship to President Obama, but fears the President is nothing more than a prisoner of the Pentagon—“a State within a State”—and is unable to deliver pacific gestures, such as blocking the defense cooperation agreement with Colombia or restoring Manuel Zelaya to the presidency in Honduras.<sup>77</sup> For Chávez, the White House is powerless against deep and powerful reactionary forces that govern the U.S. Chávez told the press in New York that he sincerely hoped President Obama would not suffer the same fate as President John F. Kennedy.<sup>78</sup>

Another precondition for the propagation of terrorism is the decay or absence of democracy. As states become less democratic, they become less transparent and less accountable to their citizens. In the cases of Syria, Sudan, Cuba, and Iran none classifies as a democracy. Elections occur, but power

71. “Populism, Islamism, and ‘Indigenismo’ Versus Democracy,” The Hudson Institute, June 30, 2009, at [http://www.hudson.org/files/documents/PopulismIndigenismo\\_Transcript.pdf](http://www.hudson.org/files/documents/PopulismIndigenismo_Transcript.pdf) (December 1, 2009).

72. Dominique Moisi, *The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation, and Hope are Reshaping the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

73. The language Chávez uses to demean and dehumanize the opposition includes such terms as traitors (*vendepatrias*) and little imitation Americans (*pitiyanqui*). They are also in the fashion of Cuban dictator Castro’s demeaning terms, such as vermin, parasites, and worms.

74. “Iran Increases Its Political and Economic Presence in Latin America,” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center (IICC), April 19, 2009, at [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam\\_multimedia/English/eng\\_n/pdf/iran\\_e006.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/iran_e006.pdf) (September 29, 2009).

75. Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias, “Presidente Chávez considera que la union de los pueblos es la repuesta ante la arremetida imperial,” September 6, 2009.

76. “Hugo Chavez Gives Emotional Speech in Moscow,” *Russia Today*, September 9, 2009, at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nDvyAeydM&eurl=http%3A%2F%2Fnews%2Egoogle%2Ecom%2Fnews%2Fmore%3Fpz%3D1%26ned%3Dus%26cf%3Dall%26ncl%3DdOzTJQ%2DXNW5ORM%5FZRaMdaZU9oiZM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nDvyAeydM&eurl=http%3A%2F%2Fnews%2Egoogle%2Ecom%2Fnews%2Fmore%3Fpz%3D1%26ned%3Dus%26cf%3Dall%26ncl%3DdOzTJQ%2DXNW5ORM%5FZRaMdaZU9oiZM&feature=player_embedded) (December 4, 2009).

77. “Press Conference of President Hugo Rafael Chávez Frias of Venezuela,” United Nations, September 24, 2009, at [http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090924\\_Venezuela.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/News/briefings/docs/2009/090924_Venezuela.doc.htm) (December 4, 2009).

78. *Ibid.* “God save Obama from the bullets that killed Kennedy.”

never changes hands. Rule of law decays as the state becomes an increasingly closed society that is the instrument of a single leader or *caudillo*. Key government institutions, especially military, intelligence, and security agencies, are accountable only to Chávez. In Venezuela, Chávez exercises tight control over rewarding and punishing, shifting forces in order to keep a tight rein on the personal levers of power. This process is fully under way in Venezuela with the concentration and perpetuation of power in the hands of Chávez.

Like other petro-states, Venezuela commands vast oil resources that provide an economic advantage over other anti-Americans and greater independence of action. The state-owned petroleum giant, PDVSA, has become a vanguard political institution and a tool for financing Venezuela's relentless foreign activism. The expansive powers granted Chávez to direct resources to domestic ends, weapons acquisition, buying foreign influence, and political destabilization give him a massive advantage over genuinely democratic regimes. The strategic use of state-controlled investment opportunities also serves as a gambit for cementing ties with anti-American partners, notably Iran and Russia.

Ideology, authoritarianism, and access to abundant resources become stepping stones for the creation of a radicalized, anti-U.S. state enamored with tools of power and fired by revolutionary ambition and zeal.

### Drift Is Not a Strategy

At his press conference following the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago in April, President Obama spoke of his brief encounter with Chávez and spoke in a hopeful tone about improved relations, dismissing the potential security threat posed by Venezuela:

Venezuela is a country whose defense budget is probably 1/600th of the United States'. They own Citgo. It's unlikely that as a consequence of me shaking hands or having a polite conversation with Mr. Chavez that we are endangering the strategic interests of the

United States. I don't think anybody can find any evidence that that would do so. Even within this imaginative crowd, I think you would be hard-pressed to paint a scenario in which U.S. interests would be damaged as a consequence of us having a more constructive relationship with Venezuela.<sup>79</sup>

Since those remarks in April, it is difficult to uncover a single positive piece of evidence regarding a more "constructive relationship" with Venezuela. The course of U.S.–Venezuelan relations has been scarred by Chávez's efforts to bring Cuba back into the OAS, without a commitment to democracy, and his encouraging Manuel Zelaya's populist power bid in Honduras, coupled with reports of Iran–Venezuelan nuclear cooperation and the current crisis between Colombia and Venezuela.

Washington has done nothing to address continued U.S. strategic reliance on oil imports, particularly from Venezuela. A significant body of political and business expertise urges the Obama Administration not to rock the boat, even if Chávez clearly intends to follow a strategy that eventually diverts Venezuelan oil to Iranian, Chinese, and Russian oil companies. U.S. policymakers refuse to address the long-term implications of Chávez's anti-U.S. oil strategy and argue that a shutting off sales to the U.S. will do more harm to Venezuela than to the U.S. This position counts on the logic of markets and cost-benefit analysis acting as restraints upon a fiery, anti-American decision maker whose disdain for such "bourgeois" approaches is manifest on a daily basis. Such a hopeful policy makes U.S. security contingent on Chávez, putting the U.S. into a defensive and passive position.

Chávez's continuing ties to the FARC, partnerships with the four state sponsors of terrorism, and strident global anti-Americanism beg a firmer U.S. response. After a year in office, the Obama Administration has yet to demonstrate it commands an effective strategy for responding, let alone countering, either Chávez's growing domestic illiberalism and repression, or expansive anti-Americanism in Latin America and around the world.

79. "Press Conference After the Summit of the Americas," The White House, April 19, 2009, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/video/Press-Conference-After-the-Summit-of-the-Americas/> (December 4, 2009).

## What the U.S. Should Do

- **Add Venezuela to the State Sponsors of Terrorism List.** Congress should pass a resolution calling for placing Venezuela on the state sponsors of terrorism list and the Obama Administration should promptly proceed with adding Venezuela to the list. While largely symbolic because of existing restrictions on arms sales and technology transfers, it would give the U.S. greater authority to monitor U.S. financial transactions with Venezuela. The U.S. should make sure that the full rigor of the law is applied to Venezuela's commerce and trade in order to prevent Venezuela from acting as a front for Iran or other terrorism-friendly regimes.
- **Launch a Real Public Diplomacy Effort Against Chávez.** The U.S. is losing the battle against massive disinformation spawned by Chavez. If the Obama Administration wishes to preserve the security of the hemisphere, it must move to more proactive rebuttals with skilled public affairs efforts. Take the U.S. embassy's Web site in Caracas, <http://caracas.usembassy.gov>, which fails to post any information that challenges the outlandish assertions made by Chávez regarding U.S. policy in places like Colombia. In brief, the Obama Administration needs to develop an informational campaign to counter *Chavista* disinformation.
- **Enhance U.S. Capacity Building to Counter Terrorism and Drug Trafficking in the Americas.** The threat posed by Chávez and his allies is far from overt. It lies in the asymmetrical contest that pits the lesser accumulation of threats, such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and money laundering, to erode U.S. power and influence. The U.S. must do a better job of collecting, analyzing, and distributing intelligence regarding Chávez and the active threat posed by traditional terrorism and narcoterrorism in the Americas. It should use available intelligence platforms, such as the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JITF-South) at Key West and the new observation locations in Colombia, to monitor Venezuelan support for narcoterrorism and criminal activity.
- **Improve Security for Friends.** The Administration should make clear its commitment to sup-

porting and defending friends, such as Colombia, from either overt aggression and intimidation by Venezuelan military forces or indirect aggression through Venezuelan support for the FARC. Beyond the recent Defense Cooperation Agreement, the U.S. should be prepared to give Colombia a guarantee of political and, if necessary, military support against a threat of unprovoked attack by Chávez and the Venezuelan military. This will help moderate Colombian anxieties and silence those who are beginning to question U.S. readiness to help Colombia resist Chávez's bullying. Congress should cement the relationship with Colombia by passing long-delayed Free Trade Agreements with Colombia and Panama.

## Conclusion

Before the Obama Presidency began, the U.S. had already determined that Venezuela cooperates neither in combating terrorism nor in halting drug trafficking. The U.S. has ceased economic assistance and sales of military equipment to Venezuela. Relations are largely conducted at the commercial level where the U.S.–Venezuelan trade exchange is still robust. It is broad commercial ties that merit closer examination and scrutiny if effective pressure is to be applied to Chávez and to Venezuela in order to modify its international behavior.

Washington is all too familiar with Chávez's readiness to align himself with all current state sponsors of terrorism and to fan the flames of turmoil in the Middle East and the Americas. He has risen to high stature as an international firebrand and dedicated leader of the anti-Americanism of the 21st century. Placing Venezuela where it belongs, on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, will not resolve every challenge the U.S. faces with regard to Venezuela, but it will send a powerful signal that the American people understand that oil, extremism, terror, and anti-Americanism make a dangerous mixture whether in the Middle East or the Americas.

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