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Time Is Ripe for U.S. Policy to Address Anti-Americanism in Latin America

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While the murder of American diplomats and violent anti-American riots across the Islamic world dominate the news cycle, it is easy to overlook the slow burn of anti-Americanism closer to home. In the Western Hemisphere, Hugo Chávez's Venezuela, the Castro brothers' Cuba, and the other members of the Bolivarian ALBA movement continue to advance a hostile, if less violent, anti-American agenda.

Washington urgently requires a policy that stands against manifestations of anti-Americanism in the Americas by denying trade benefits and loan concessions, withholding ambassadors, and standing firmly with friends of liberty and democracy against those who wish the U.S. ill.

Hugo Chávez and the Axis of Anti-Americanism. Anti-Americanism is not a new phenomenon in the Western Hemisphere.

Because of U.S. military interventions in the past century, anti-Americanism got a head start in the region.

In the post-Cold War era, anti-Americanism has staged a substantial comeback owing to persistent tyranny in Cuba and the emergence of Chávez and the Bolivarian movement in Venezuela and elsewhere. The narcissistic Chávez, a cashiered lieutenant colonel and failed coup plotter, burst onto the international scene in 1999. As president of Venezuela, he inherited a corrupt, oil-rich democracy with yawning disparities in wealth. Since April 2002, when Chávez was nearly toppled by internal opposition, he has blamed the U.S. for nearly all of his nation's ills. Like the Iranians, Chávez has likened a U.S. President (George W. Bush) to Satan and called the U.S. "the greatest terrorist nation."

But Venezuela proved too small a country to contain Chávez's ambitions. He launched a Latin American unity campaign in emulation of his hero, the great liberator Simon Bolivar, recasting the historic Bolivar as primarily an anti-U.S. nationalist. Chávez fashioned an alliance with his other great hero, Fidel Castro, importing Cuban doctors and teachers in exchange for billions in financial aid. He worked with Cuba

to launch the ALBA alliance in 2002 to contest U.S. "hegemony" in Latin America. Chávez threatened neighboring Colombia, the U.S.'s closest ally in the region, and offered aid and safe haven to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, a ruthless terrorist group that derives much of its funding from drug trafficking, extortion, and kidnapping.

Using discounted oil as an enticement and rallying like-minded leftists to his cause, Chávez enlisted Nicaragua, Bolivia, Ecuador, and several Caribbean islands under ALBA's banner. In turn, ALBA has become the fulcrum for anti-Americanism in the Americas. It defended the regime of Libya's Muammar Qadhafi until his death. While the Venezuelan foreign ministry regretted the recent deaths of U.S. diplomats murdered in Libya and denounced the terrorist attack, it was quick to blame the attack on "colonialist aggression" by NATO and demanded an "end to interventionism and campaigns of hatred against Arab and Muslim peoples." In advance of the October 7 presidential elections in Venezuela, Chávez has sought to portray his rival as a puppet of U.S. imperialism.

Chávez and his Bolivarian partners continue to offer diplomatic and economic support for the murderous,

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Iranian-backed Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria. ALBA members hosted Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad this year and promised to forge closer political, economic, and security ties with Iran. Reports of secretive financial deals with Iran and other sanctions-busting actions appear regularly. And just last month, Ecuador's Rafael Correa offered diplomatic asylum to the notorious Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, who is now holed up in Ecuador's embassy in London.

Domestic assaults on private property, rule of law, and individual rights continue unabated among the Bolivarian states. There is an aggressive campaign against media freedom in the region, from virtually absolute control in totalitarian Cuba to increasing curbs on free speech and the imposition of gag rules on those who investigate and criticize government malfeasance in Venezuela. Similarly, the Bolivarian states have increasingly blocked outside assistance to pro-democracy civil society, replicating democracy backlash tactics from Cairo to Moscow.

The Trouble with Ambassadors. Chávez expelled the U.S. ambassador in 2008, took him back after almost a year, and then refused to accept his successor—even after agreeing to do so. The U.S. and Venezuela have been without high-level representation since the summer of 2010. Evo Morales in Bolivia also declared the American ambassador *persona non grata* in 2008 and sent the Peace Corps and the Drug Enforcement Agency packing as well. Based on a single WikiLeaks

cable, Correa expelled the American ambassador to Ecuador, Heather Hodges, in 2011.

The Obama Administration has responded weakly to these insults and expulsions. When Ecuador tossed out the U.S. ambassador, the Obama Administration waited days to retaliate in kind. Then, a year later, it dispatched another ambassador to Quito, quickly putting aside Ecuador's previous misdeeds. While Bolivian officials frequently made plain their disdain for the U.S., the Administration negotiated and signed a "mutually respectful" framework agreement. "For the first time since the foundation of Bolivia, the U.S. will respect Bolivian laws and its Constitution," crowed Morales. Yet almost a year after the signing, there is no U.S. ambassador in La Paz.

While Chávez buys sophisticated Russian military equipment, backs narco-terrorists, and aligns with Iran, the Obama Administration has consistently downplayed security concerns. When asked about Chávez, President Obama declared in July 2012 that "overall my sense is that what Mr. Chávez has done over the last several years has not had a serious national security impact on us."

In Nicaragua, President Daniel Ortega has fixed elections, abused the constitution, and denounced the "gringos" as the signal representative of imperialism and savage capitalism. Failure to resolve the issue of confiscation of American-owned property in Nicaragua has made it, according to U.S. law, ineligible for grants and concessionary loans from international lending

institutions. Nonetheless, the Obama Administration has elected to waive this restriction.¹

What the U.S. Should Do. No sensible person advocates a return to gunboat diplomacy or trading verbal barbs and insults with Chávez and the Castros. The U.S. therefore should do the following:

- Cancel or suspend all beneficial commercial arrangements with ALBA countries. These would include, among others, waivers of the type granted to Nicaragua and all trade preferences in whatever form.
- Oppose grants and concessionary loans to ALBA countries from the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.
- Fund, where possible, nonpartisan pro-democracy groups in ALBA countries.
- Push back with public diplomacy in response to particularly egregious statements from ALBA presidents to point out the many failings, inane statements, and erratic behavior of these very leaders.
- End diplomatic appeasement by ceasing to court ALBA governments at a senior level. The U.S. should make no attempt to send ambassadors to those countries that have rejected or expelled U.S. envoys in the recent past and should not negotiate cooperative or framework agreements with ALBA countries.

1. Ambassador Robert Callahan and Ray Walser, "No New Property Waiver for Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega," Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3664, July 12, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/07/nicaragua-s-daniel-ortega-no-new-property-waiver>.

Standing Against Anti-Americanism in the Americas.

Until the U.S. begins to send a clear message that there will be genuine consequences for undemocratic, anti-American actions, the Bolivarian anti-American alliance will continue to run roughshod over its own people and fan the flames of anti-Americanism in the Western Hemisphere.

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