



Former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez (*left*) and former Cuban President Fidel Castro speak to the press 23 August 2005 at José Martí International Airport in Havana. (Photo by Jorge Rey, Media Punch/Alamy Stock Photo)

# The Cubazuela Problem

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For years, a form of irregular war has been underway in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>1</sup> The war's initiators refer to their method as a "combination of all means of struggle," a long-in-the-tooth expression of Marxist-Leninist provenance.<sup>2</sup> In the case of this war, "all means" includes violent applications of power by regular, guerrilla, paramilitary, clandestine,

and surrogate forces orchestrated over an extended period of time and geographic expanse. The struggle's lead strategists also inspire and sustain sophisticated jurisprudential, diplomatic, informational, and economic operations. We would be inaccurate to suppose these latter, nonviolent enterprises support the former, or vice versa. The two categories of effort, violent

and nonviolent, form a fluid whole intended to take, increase, and concentrate power in the proponents' organizations. The identity of those organizations is not a mystery. They are armed political parties that, among other features, loudly announce themselves as anti-United States in tone and message, and behave accordingly.<sup>3</sup> Prominent in the mix are the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* (Communist Party of Cuba, or PCC) and the *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela* (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, or PSUV). These Marxism-inspired parties and their allies self-style as "Bolivarian." The PCC/PSUV couple has dispossessed so many persons who call themselves Venezuelans that Venezuela itself retains little meaning as a collective political identity. It is nevertheless a unique place with immense potential wealth from natural resource exploitation, a long if interrupted tradition of democracy, and an educated population with a tenaciously hopeful attitude.

Venezuelans can justifiably claim a tight cultural weave with both South and North America. Misery in their country did not just happen; identifiable persons caused it, imposed it, and will continue to do so as long as they can maintain their impunity and ability to grant impunity to their followers and agents. All this considered, Venezuelans opposed to domination by the Bolivarians can retake their country and turn things around, but not without outside help.

In this article, we look briefly at what the Bolivarians have done and consider how action or inaction against the Bolivarians matters. The single environmental condition most conducive to the preservation and expansion of Bolivarian impunity is the near-total absence of any effective physical pursuit. So long as there is no physical threat to Bolivarian leaders, there is no reasonable likelihood that their dominance and abuse of power will ameliorate. Therefore, any action proposed to restore Venezuela as a liberal republic will necessarily include some amount of physical coercion. Venezuela, however, is not the geographic locus of the strategic mens rea of the region's aggressive Marxism—Cuba is. Venezuelan territory is but one of the venues and prizes in the war, the future of the entire region perhaps inextricably connected to its fate. Colombian territory, however, may be the geographic fulcrum. (See figure 1, page 4; the principle actors and primary lines of communication in the irregular war unfolding in the Circum-Caribbean are located within this extent.)<sup>4</sup> Political power in Colombia

is on the precipice of sliding toward Bolivarian domination, and avoiding that domination may be the key to many Venezuelans' material salvation.<sup>5</sup>

## Cubazuela

Generalized societal failure continues to deepen in Venezuela such that any detailing of worrisome events would be unimpressive by the time this article is read.<sup>6</sup> By the end of September 2017, however, a political stasis was reached, as all potential for electoral or legislative change or opposition to the government had been effectively suppressed.<sup>7</sup>

Notably, Venezuela's collapse is not of recent origin; things have been on a steep, steady slide for years, and for some time now, the country has excelled in several dubious categories. Its government runs the least efficient oil company in the world.<sup>8</sup> That same government is a major illegal narcotics trafficker.<sup>9</sup> "Since 2005, the U.S. government has determined annually that Venezuela's Bolivarian government has 'failed demonstrably' to adhere to its obligations under international counternarcotics agreements and to take certain counternarcotics measures."<sup>10</sup> It has had a miserable record of human rights, including transnational trafficking in humans. "The government of Venezuela does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so."<sup>11</sup> It has been a direct supporter of the Colombian *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, or ELN) and the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC), both of which are on the U.S. State Department list of terrorist organizations.<sup>12</sup> It became the worst economic performer in the hemisphere years ago and now vies for worst in the world.<sup>13</sup> "A country that was once the richest in Latin America is now a basket case, and the Bolivarians are to blame."<sup>14</sup>

On the 2016  
Corruption Perception

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Index, it rated 166th of 176 countries and worst in the hemisphere.<sup>15</sup> At some point, being worst in so many ways has to be viewed as some kind of accomplishment. It is unmistakably a Bolivarian accomplishment, and the mens rea of that accomplishment is as much Cuban as it is Venezuelan.<sup>16</sup>

R. Evan Ellis, a scholar at the U.S. Army War College, asserted that the situation can be understood as “the capture and systematic looting of a state, achieved by first capturing its institutions through mass mobilization and bureaucratic machinations, then increasing the control of the state through military force.”<sup>17</sup> Whatever the particular sequence of efforts, the capturing and looting of a central government apparatus for the purpose of increasing the power of a party faction is not a unique or unprecedented formula in the region. Rather, it is a well-understood rubric that has been and is being tried in numerous countries, and has succeeded in several.<sup>18</sup> The overtaking of Cuban central government functions by Marxist revolutionaries, who in 1965 would form the PCC, is the region’s exemplar. Venezuelan revolutionary Douglas Bravo was an admirer of the Cuban Marxist method and a central figure in failed Venezuelan guerrilla attempts in the 1960s and 1970s. He was also an early, influential mentor of then Lt. Hugo Chávez. “The trick, Bravo and others believed, was to gain power by force, then take on a populist disguise to present your uprising as the will of the masses.”<sup>19</sup>

The PCC, however, not only served up the takeover model, but it also has been serving up takeovers. In his 2008 *The Cuba Wars*, author Daniel Erikson

relates an observation made to him by Teodoro Petkoff, a well-known Venezuelan politician, journalist, and former communist guerrilla. “Hugo Chávez adores Fidel Castro,” Petkoff said. “And for Fidel



(Map courtesy of One Stop Map, <https://www.onestopmap.com>)

### Figure 1. The Circum-Caribbean

Castro, who truly cares for nobody, he saw Chávez as naïve, and he threw a lasso around him and roped him in. ... I believe that this whole path that the Venezuelan state is traveling—of being authoritarian, autocratic, and militaristic—comes from Fidel.”<sup>20</sup>

In a recent editorial, Mary Anastasia O’Grady reminded her readers of the complete takeover by Cuban intelligence of the Venezuelan national identity papers and passports office in 2005.<sup>21</sup> That takeover was a significant milestone in structural influence by the Cuban Communist Party, an influence that Fidel Castro had sought for decades. Perhaps Castro had not captured the loyalties of the earlier generation of Venezuelan Marxists like Douglas Bravo.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, as early as the late 1980s, Cuban communist operatives were laying organizational foundations that led to the creation and



empowerment of the notorious motorcycle *colectivos* that today serve (if loosely) as one column of coercive control for both the Cuban and Venezuelan parties.<sup>23</sup>

Today, the firmament of pro-socialist political parties in Venezuela presents some organizational and ideological differentiation. In a way, however, it is differentiation without difference. Party leaders who would call themselves “Chavists” are likely also to consider themselves “Castroists,” that is, adherents to the principles and guidance of the Cuban Revolution, which Cuban and Venezuelan party leaders adaptively recode as the Bolivarian Revolution. Most of those who tag themselves Bolivarians (Castroists, Chavists, and Marxists) follow with evident discipline the policies and messaging of the PCC and of its Venezuelan partner, the PSUV.

It would be imprudent to allow our hopes to exaggerate the potential consequence of disagreements within the Castroist-Chavist-Marxist revolutionary movement, including resistance to Nicolás Maduro’s presidency.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, disagreements within what briefly surfaced as an opposition electoral coalition called the *Mesa de la Unidad Democrática* (Democratic Unity Table, or MUD) *did* prove consequential.<sup>25</sup>

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (left) listens to then Cuban President Raúl Castro 14 December 2017 during the thirteenth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas in Havana. (Photo by Desmond Boylan, Associated Press)

Disillusionment and lost resolve reflected ideological heterogeneity within that coalition. Leaders of Chavist socialist parties in the MUD showed their willingness to negotiate with and ultimately to submit to the continuing dictate of the PSUV and PCC.<sup>26</sup> In any case, the PCC is the locus of *mens rea* for a lion’s share of the organized violence in the region over the past few decades. It is not a lone hierarchal peak nor is it able to discipline all components of the region’s Marxism-inspired revolutionary movement, but it is and has been the author, motivator, and guide for much of the “struggle” and especially that part of the struggle causing widespread Venezuelan woe. While being careful to identify the PCC and PSUV as principal organizational culprits, we should be careful to avoid wishful thinking as to the role of the regular armed forces in Venezuela. Emblematically, they are the “Bolivarian” National





Armed Forces, not the “Venezuelan” Armed Forces. From the widow of Marxist writer Régis Debray, What I see is that they [the Venezuelan armed forces] are a copy of the Cuban institutions. For example, ceding to the officers the most important Venezuelan economic portfolio, which is the mining sector, is exactly what they have done in Cuba. That is to say, what little economy exists in Cuba, tourism, that is in the hands of the armed forces. Cuba is a military dictatorship and a militarized society.<sup>27</sup>

Positive geopolitical change in Venezuela does not hinge on decisions of the armed forces there. What the formal military in Venezuela does or does not do is not the crux of the matter. From what we can see, the armed forces hierarchy is in solidarity with the PCC and PSUV. Together they have cemented a common resolve; they are Bolivarian Marxists. That is not to say that morale within the Bolivarian military rank-and-file is sound, or that even mid-ranking officers are all decidedly loyal to the high command or to party leaders. Numerous reports indicate the opposite.<sup>28</sup> Those reports of disaffection might provide reason for some to entertain various kinds of operations that, in the right context,

Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino speaks 1 August 2017 during a news conference in Caracas, Venezuela. The senior Venezuelan military leadership is now so thoroughly coopted by a combination of Cuban domination, profit taking from protection of international criminal cartels involved in the illicit drug trade, and croncy corruption that has converted the military into a syndicate to exploit Venezuelan oil production that a military coup against the regime is extremely unlikely. (Photo by Marco Bello, Reuters)

might weaken the Bolivarian Armed Forces. Troop level disaffection may lead to acts of indiscipline. Frustration regarding economic mismanagement and its consequences may even lead to clashes among official armed institutions. Nevertheless, the country’s fate is unlikely to be determined because of a military mutiny.

Available public evidence provides little justification to hope for an anti-Bolivarian uprising within the military that would steer Venezuelan society away from the single-party totalitarian path it is on.<sup>29</sup> For one thing, there are several distinct armed organizations that protect the Bolivarian hierarchy and serve to counterbalance each other. These include the Bolivarian National Guard, Bolivarian National Police, Bolivarian National Armed Forces, Cuban advisory units (Ministry of Intelligence),

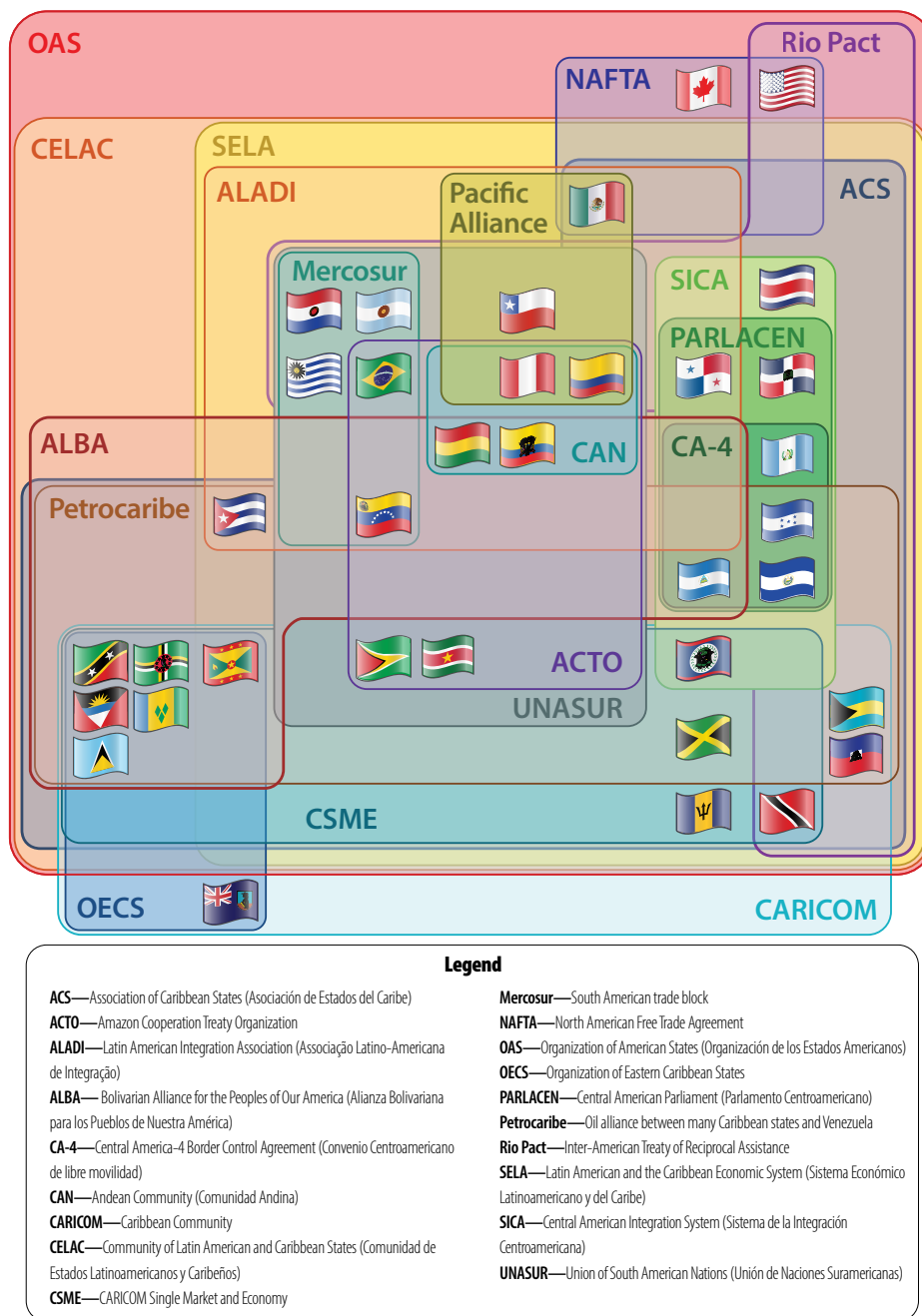
the *Colectivos* (described elsewhere herein), the Colombian FARC, the Colombian ELN, and armed civilian militias.<sup>30</sup> Still, many Venezuelans became aware of and displeased with Cuban presence and political domination years ago.<sup>31</sup>

## International Organizations and Parties

Beyond party structures inside Venezuela, international alliances made by the PCC and PSUV are in good measure reflected in the list of political parties that are members of the FSP.<sup>32</sup> (Understandably, the São Paulo Forum [FSP] enthusiastically supported dialog between the Maduro administration and the MUD.)<sup>33</sup> Fidel Castro and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva founded the FSP in the early 1990s to address the survival of the hemisphere's revolutionary parties in the wake of the Soviet demise. Some FSP parties, including those to later comprise the PSUV, took control of central government apparatuses. As in Venezuela, several of the region's FSP parties achieved government takeovers, in part by democratic electoral competition.

While we tend to describe the meetings of international organizations (IOs) according to country participations (as Cuba, Venezuela, Ecuador, Argentina, etc.) the more revealing participatory categorization would be by political party nuclei. In 2004, Castro and Chávez launched the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, or ALBA), a

regional organization with an ostensible economic purpose of countering the U.S.-inspired Free Trade Area of America. ALBA centers on the five parties most closely aligned ideologically.<sup>34</sup> Beside the PCC and PSUV, they include the Sandinista National Liberation Front (Nicaragua), Movement to Socialism (Bolivia), and the Country Alliance (Ecuador).<sup>35</sup> After the creation of



(Figure by SiBr4, courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Membership in the depicted organizations is represented by national flags, but more consequential is the weight of political party membership behind those flags. Note that the status of Cuba within the Organization of American States is complicated.)












**Figure 2. Supranational American Bodies**

## Table. Parties of the Forum of São Paulo (FSP) by Country

Country	Country flag	Parties in the Forum of São Paulo (FSP)	FSP presence in government
1. Antigua and Barbuda		?	?
2. Argentina		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broad Front</li> <li>2. Transversal National and Popular Front</li> <li>3. Evita Movement</li> <li>4. Southern Free Peoples Movement</li> <li>5. Communist Party</li> <li>6. Communist Party—Extraordinary Congress</li> <li>7. Humanist Party</li> <li>8. Intransigent Party</li> <li>9. Posadist Revolutionary Workers Party</li> <li>10. Socialist Party</li> <li>11. Party of Solidarity</li> <li>12. Union of Militants for Socialism</li> </ol>	In opposition
3. Bahamas		?	?
4. Barbados		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People's Empowerment Party</li> </ol>	No representation
5. Belize		?	?
6. Bolivia		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Movement to Socialism</li> <li>2. Free Bolivia Movement</li> <li>3. Communist Party of Bolivia</li> </ol>	Totalitarian control, President Evo Morales (Movement to Socialism)
7. Brazil		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Democratic Labor Party</li> <li>2. Communist Party of Brazil</li> <li>3. Brazilian Communist Party</li> <li>4. Free Homeland Party</li> <li>5. Popular Socialist Party</li> <li>6. Brazilian Socialist Party</li> <li>7. Workers Party</li> </ol>	In opposition, former President of Brazil Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers Party) was cofounder of the FSP
8. Canada		N/A	N/A
9. Chile		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Citizen Left</li> <li>2. Broad Social Movement</li> <li>3. Left Revolutionary Movement</li> <li>4. Communist Party</li> <li>5. Humanist Party</li> <li>6. Socialist Party</li> <li>7. Allendist Socialist Party</li> <li>8. Democratic Revolution</li> </ol>	Lead government, President Sebastián Piñera is of the National Renovation Party, part of the Let's Go Chile coalition

(Table is modified from version found on Wikipedia; flags courtesy of CIA World Factbook)

**Table. Parties of the FSP by Country (continued)**

Country	Country flag	Parties in the Forum of São Paulo (FSP)	FSP presence in government
10. Costa Rica		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Broad Front Party</li> <li>2. Popular Vanguard Party Communist Party</li> </ol>	Minority party
11. Colombia		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Patriotic March</li> <li>2. Progressive Movement</li> <li>3. Green Alliance Party</li> <li>4. Colombian Communist Party</li> <li>5. Alternative Democratic Pole</li> <li>6. Present for Socialism</li> <li>7. Patriotic Union</li> </ol>	?
12. Cuba		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communist Party of Cuba</li> </ol>	Totalitarian control, Fidel Castro was cofounder of the FSP
13. Dominica		?	?
14. Dominican Republic		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Alliance for Democracy</li> <li>2. Force of the Revolution</li> <li>3. United Left Movement</li> <li>4. Country Alliance Party</li> <li>5. Homeland for All Movement</li> <li>6. Communist Workers Party</li> <li>7. Dominican Liberation Party</li> </ol>	Dominant control of government, President Danilo Medina (Dominican Liberation Party)
15. Ecuador		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pachakutik United Plurinational Movement—New Country</li> <li>2. Proud and Sovereign Fatherland Alliance Movement</li> <li>3. Popular Democratic Movement</li> <li>4. Communist Party of Ecuador</li> <li>5. Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Ecuador</li> <li>6. Socialist Party-Broad Front</li> </ol>	Dominant control of government, tending toward totalitarian
16. El Salvador		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation</li> </ol>	In power, President Salvador Sánchez Cerén
17. Granada		?	?
18. Guatemala		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convergence</li> <li>2. Winaq Political Movement</li> <li>3. Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity</li> </ol>	In opposition, minor representation
19. Guyana		?	?
20. Haiti		?	?

(Table is modified from version found on Wikipedia; flags courtesy of CIA World Factbook)



**Table. Parties of the FSP by Country (continued)**

Country	Country flag	Parties in the Forum of São Paulo (FSP)	FSP presence in government
21. Honduras		1. Liberty and Refoundation Party	In opposition
22. Jamaica		?	?
23. Mexico		1. Party of Mexican Communists 2. Communist Party of Mexico 3. Party of the Democratic Revolution 4. Labor Party	Party of the Democratic Revolution is a minority party, aligned ideologically with leading Revolutionary Institutional Party, which is not a member of the FSP
24. Nicaragua		1. Sandinista National Liberation Front	Totalitarian control
25. Panama		1. Peoples Party 2. Democratic Revolutionary Party	In opposition
26. Paraguay		1. Guasú Front 2. Paraguayan Communist Party 3. Popular Socialist Convergence 4. Popular Patriotic Movement 5. Movement to Socialism 6. Country in Solidarity 7. Citizen Participation Party 8. Tekojoja Popular Party	In opposition, several parties in opposition as Guasú Front
27. Peru		1. Citizens for Change 2. Communist Party of Peru—Red Fatherland 3. Peruvian Communist Party 4. Nationalist Party of Peru 5. Peoples Party 6. Socialist Party of Peru 7. Land and Liberty	In opposition, some in coordination as Broad Front
28. Saint Kitts and Nevis		?	?
29. Saint Lucia		?	?
30. Suriname		?	?
31. Trinidad and Tobago		1. Movement for Social Justice	No representation

(Table is modified from version found on Wikipedia; flags courtesy of CIA World Factbook)

**Table. Parties of the FSP by Country (continued)**

Country	Country flag	Parties in the Forum of São Paulo (FSP)	FSP presence in government
32. United States of America		N/A	N/A
33. Uruguay		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Uruguay Assembly</li> <li>2. Ample Front Compromise</li> <li>3. Broad Front</li> <li>4. 26th of March Movement</li> <li>5. Tupamaros National Liberation Movement</li> <li>6. Popular Participation Movement</li> <li>7. Popular Broad Front Movement</li> <li>8. Communist party of Uruguay</li> <li>9. Trotskyite–Posadist Revolutionary Worker Party</li> <li>10. Peoples' Victory Party</li> <li>11. Socialist Workers Party</li> <li>12. Socialist Party of Uruguay</li> <li>13. Artiguist Viewpoint</li> </ol>	In power, Broad Front has presidency and majority in both houses
34. Venezuela		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Socialist League</li> <li>2. Electoral Movement of the People</li> <li>3. Communist Party of Venezuela</li> <li>4. Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela</li> <li>5. Homeland for All</li> </ol>	Totalitarian control

(Table is modified from version found on Wikipedia; flags courtesy of CIA World Factbook)

Martinique, an insular region of France in the eastern Caribbean Sea, is a member of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States, although its flag does not appear in the Euler diagram in figure 2 (on page 7). The São Paulo Forum (FSP) website lists two parties from Martinique, The Communist Party for Independence and Socialism and the National Council of Popular Committees. Aruba, located off the coast of Venezuela and a constituent part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, also has a party appearing on the FSP list, the Red Democratic Party. Similarly, the FSP website lists a party from Curaçao, the Sovereign People Party. The flag of The British Virgin Islands, a British overseas territory, is shown on the Euler diagram as a member of Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. The FSP website does not list a party member from the British Virgin Islands or from the other British territories in the Caribbean. The FSP website does, however, list three parties from United States territory.

ALBA, Cuban and Venezuelan party leaders acted as midwives to a number of other regional organizations, the overlap of which is shown by the Euler diagram in figure 2 (on page 7).<sup>36</sup> The table (on pages 8–11) provides a guide to the flags, correlated to FSP parties.<sup>37</sup>

Note in figure 2 the marginalization of the United States and Canada, which was a columnar purpose of the Bolivarians' multifaceted organizational effort. Not visible is the ubiquitous membership participation of FSP party leaders. A simple review of party affiliations in the curricula of individual participants at meetings of ALBA or the *Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños* (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, or CELAC) will show that the FSP is heavily represented.

Perhaps the most ambitious regional contraption was the *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas* (Union of South American Nations, or UNASUR).<sup>38</sup> Due greatly to the pro-Bolivarian content of its membership, UNASUR has been of little weight in the face of the Venezuela matter, even with its new president (Mauricio Macri, president of Argentina), who is decidedly anti-Bolivarian.<sup>39</sup>

The FSP parties made great advances in stealing money using central government apparatuses. Party control of a country's central government is lucrative in so many ways: printing money, selling passports, building sinecures in myriad IOs, borrowing money, exchanging money, taxing commodity transport, etc. A

recent, astoundingly efficient example has a nickname, “Odebrecht.”<sup>40</sup> Odebrecht is a Brazilian construction conglomerate at the heart of what is arguably the biggest commercial corruption scheme in Latin American history. Fraudulent financial flows (created from overbidding, underperforming, overpaying, kickbacks, and so forth) apparently went preferentially to member parties of the FSP. Max Brooks, author of *World War Z*, suggested that what was going on in Venezuela might usefully be compared to what was going on in Syria. He offered an outline for a response, one that to this analyst could not have been farther from optimal. He suggested we enlist the assistance of CELAC and UNASUR. In other words, his advice is that we go to the perpetrators to implore them to please be gentle.<sup>41</sup> CELAC and UNASUR are mechanisms of the parties in the FSP. Energetic, effective anti-Bolivarian effort in the irregular war in the region cannot be planned around an expectation of positive multilateral assistance from regional IOs, and especially not these.

The Organization of American States (OAS), too, has been ineffectual as an ameliorating influence on the situation in Venezuela, in great measure because of the ALBA block of countries. In an otherwise insightful article, Gustavo Coronel makes the commonplace assertion that military action, were such to be taken against the Bolivarians, would need to be done in concert with the OAS or the United Nations.<sup>42</sup> According to Coronel, failure to do so would be counterproductive. His is a misleading warning in at least two ways. First, given the fluid political tendencies of their staffs and representatives, almost any action taken against the Bolivarians *by way of* those institutions is likely to be ineffective, if not counterproductive. Second, powerful alliances and coalitions can be built outside any of the other extant IOs.<sup>43</sup>

## Colombian Politics

What will happen in Venezuela is intimately, inseparably joined to what is going on politically in Colombia. Indeed, the near-term outcomes of party politics in Colombia may be more important to the futures of the majority of Venezuelans than what is now occurring inside Venezuela. No strategy seeking a durable improvement of things Venezuelan can be reasonably designed without attention to Colombia. For one thing, the financial health of the Bolivarian hierarchies appears

to depend on contraband gold, cocaine, emeralds, coltan, and other commodities besides hydrocarbons. The smuggling routes over which the movement of these commodities depends span across several countries, with many of the routes originating in Colombia. Control of these routes appears to be a central responsibility of select elements within the panoply of armed organizations belonging to the Bolivarian enterprise.<sup>44</sup>

In September 2016, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos declared to an audience at the United Nations that the war against the FARC was officially over.<sup>45</sup> He made another declaration to the end of the FARC war in mid-August 2017.<sup>46</sup> To some Colombians, their president’s repeated pronouncements of the end of the war are off-putting, considering that he almost simultaneously declared war against corruption, illegal mining, organized crime, and other behaviors that together fairly describe the modus operandi of the FARC and ELN.<sup>47</sup> Many Colombians, perhaps a majority, fear that Santos and his administration surrendered far too much power to the same people who are abusing power in Venezuela—if not to the self-same personalities, at least to a group of their close allies with shared heroes, money flows, sanctuaries, arguments, and ruthless behaviors.<sup>48</sup> In other words, there exists within Colombia a reasoned premonition that the country has entered a path toward the economic underperformance, foreign dependence, criminality, and abuse of liberty that the PCC imposed in Cuba and the PSUV is imposing in Venezuela. That reasoning is in part based on the observed consolidation by Bolivarian elements of control over smuggling routes.<sup>49</sup>

The process of negotiation between the FARC and the Santos administration was itself an ominous indicator that the FARC might attain more power through the negotiations than it had achieved in decades of war. That process included welcoming the PCC as host and arbiter, and the PSUV as a good-will observer (in their guises as constructive neighboring governments). The FARC, ELN, PCC, and PSUV are on the same team. Despite the Santos administration’s public fanfare of total FARC disarmament, many in Colombia see that disarmament as a dubious supposition.<sup>50</sup> The FARC leadership did not adjust its ideological azimuth or abandon its resolve to take over the whole state, or has it rejected the use of violence. It is an odd situation in which a president of a country would concede so much political power and impunity to a group which, at its zenith, represented



“The Cubans are there; the Russians are there, the Iranians, Hezbollah are there. This is something that has a risk of getting to a very, very bad place, so America needs to take this very seriously.”

perhaps a half a percent of the population. In doing so, Santos seems to have generated disapproval of his FARC policy from a hundred times that portion of his countrymen.<sup>51</sup> As it stands, prospects that the Colombians' national government will actively oppose Bolivarian power in the region seem to depend a good deal on the results of the 2018 presidential elections.

The Colombian political parties in the FSP are the Patriotic March, the Progressive Movement, the Green Alliance Party, the Communist Party of Colombia, the Alternative Democratic Pole, Present for Socialism, and the Patriotic Union. It is all but given that the new FARC political party will emerge as a member. The way things appear, Santos's Social Party of National Unity might become a member of the FSP as well. All of these parties support the continuation and expansion of FARC political power within the confines of the FARC-Santos accords, as the leaders of those parties interpret them. The leading electoral-party entity opposed to that consolidation of FARC power is called the Democratic Center, its key personality being former President Álvaro Uribe. Within the parameter of electoral prospects, however, if the FARC continues to gain power in Colombia and its leaders continue to enjoy impunity—especially as to control over smuggling routes into and out of the country—physical pursuit against Bolivarian elements and leadership throughout the region will be a much more difficult strategic option for anyone.

### Brazilian Foreign Policy

More people in South America speak Portuguese than Spanish, a consequential fact that is too easy for many strategists to misplace. It might not be true that as goes Brazil goes the success of all foreign policies regarding the situation in Venezuela. Still, for or against, the posture taken by Brazil's leadership will undoubtedly weigh on outcomes. A positive relationship with Brazil is of itself a valued object of international diplomacy, so the policies of a Brazilian administration will of course influence foreign decision-making.

It is hard to imagine a Brazilian government supporting a landing of exclusively extraregional military formations on South American soil, but planners should not presume that a Brazilian government would necessarily disapprove any kind of military action or any mix of formations.<sup>52</sup> As in the rest of Latin America, as in Venezuela, the Brazilian political party firmament is well-populated by pro-Bolivarian elements. Nevertheless, opposite positions are also present. External actors would want, in most contexts, to provide credible assurances that Brazilian strategic influence would not suffer, but rather be enhanced by the outcomes from any coercive action.

### Conclusion

Of the situation in Venezuela, Mike Pompeo, then director of the CIA, asserted, “The Cubans are there; the Russians are there, the Iranians, Hezbollah are there. This is something that has a risk of getting to a very, very bad place, so America needs to take this very seriously.”<sup>53</sup> We might want to call obliviousness toward the irregular war in Latin America “management by exception” or “economy of risks.” Rather than being oblivious to it, foreign strategy makers might simply not have sensed the severity of the danger posed. They might also have considered the parties responsible for the Venezuelan disaster benign.

In any case, with the exception of some transnational counternarcotic prosecutions, little authority of any kind has actively pursued the Bolivarians, whether for past transgressions or ongoing illegalities and violations. In the absence of any pursuit, Bolivarian impunity is made easy, if not perfected. The lines of communication on which Bolivarian strength depends appear to be increasingly secure. Those lines lead to geographic sanctuary, the overall extent of which appears to be growing. Although the Bolivarians have lost some international sympathy due to the miserable optics of their Venezuela franchise, the loss of face has been offset by the internationally popular FARC power arrangement with a Colombian administration that itself is looking more and more Bolivarian.

Unless and until there is increased, physical opposition to Bolivarian impunity—active, physical pursuit that blocks smuggling routes, closes sanctuaries, and disempowers Bolivarian leaders—foreign interests will be negatively affected in the following ways:

- Cocaine and heroin production and transnational trafficking will flourish.<sup>54</sup>
- Human rights violations, including human trafficking, will continue.
- Unregulated and undocumented migration flows will increase.
- Illegal mining will continue to expand.
- Environmental degradation will accelerate.
- Select foreign powers (Russia, China, Iran) are likely to advance significant military staging space and increase their preferential access to key strategic mineral and hydrocarbon resources.<sup>55</sup>
- Countries within the region may move away from the region's nuclear-free tradition.
- Other countries will suffer the effects of Marxist takeovers.
- The overall commercial and material health of the region will likely decline.

Venezuela has all but ceased to exist as a valid geostrategic concept. Venezuela is not an isolatable place, nor is “Venezuelan” an accurate identity to be intoned in terms of the perpetrators of widespread material privation, corruption, and abuse. Strategy makers should contemplate all of northern South

America and the Caribbean. Instead of a place name or a national government, the PCC and the PSUV would be the more meaningful bullseye organizational identities for counteraction.

Today, the impunity enjoyed by leaders of the PCC and PSUV is not being challenged on any appreciable scale in any sphere. The PCC/PSUV is the principal source of the tragedy (willfully causing the privation). For an external strategy to have success in the long run, that is, to reset the populations of northern South America and the Caribbean on an improving material, pro-liberty and pro-United States political azimuth, the PCC and PSUV will have to be confronted and their impunity ended. The FARC and ELN are of the same cloth, in the same club as the PCC and PSUV, and they, too, have been given a pass (allowed if not provided impunity for violent illegal behaviors) in recent years. These four organizations are backstopped by a broader network of organizations, including some formal multinational regional IOs. The counter to all this would ideally be an orchestration of disparate elements and forms of effort, the counterpart of the Marxist “all forms of struggle,” perhaps including military action of some kind. ■

*The observations, opinions, and assertions expressed in this article are those of the author, Geoff Demarest, alone and do not represent the official policy or position of the U.S. government or any part of the U.S. government.*

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## Notes

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