

# VENEZUELA AND THE QUESTION OF TERRORISM

Venezuela's record clearly shows that it is a country that neither tolerates nor supports terrorism. However, since 2006, the U.S. State Department has certified Venezuela as "not cooperating fully" with anti-terror efforts. Annual reports have re-certified the country as such, but a lack of evidence to support that designation would indicate that it reflects nothing more than the political aims of the current U.S. administration.

Additionally, in important ways, Venezuela's own efforts to combat terrorism have faced obstacles due to U.S. policy. Two examples are an embargo on sales of U.S. military equipment needed for policing and border patrol, and the failure of the U.S. to comply with extradition treaties that would allow Venezuela to prosecute known terrorists.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE CURRENT CLAIMS

Venezuela shares a 1,500-mile long border with Colombia, a country that has for several decades been the site of an armed conflict that has greatly impacted the Western Hemisphere. Since the late 1990s, the U.S. has played a role by providing training and funding to the Colombian armed forces in their increasingly militarized struggle against guerrilla groups. Venezuela has maintained strong relations with Colombia, and in 2007 was asked by government officials to negotiate a humanitarian hostage-for-prisoner swap.

Months later, Colombia's President Uribe abruptly curtailed that humanitarian process accused Venezuela of aiding the guerrillas. Laptops allegedly showing evidence of monetary contributions to the guerrillas was produced by the Colombian military. Officials say the laptops were acquired in a controversial attack on a FARC camp in Ecuador, a deadly invasion on March 1, 2008 that killed two dozen, including the rebel hostage negotiator. Many experts and observers have since questioned the veracity and origin of their contents.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, in an open letter to the U.S. media,<sup>2</sup> two dozen specialists on Latin American cited "significant problems of inconsistency" between the documents and the statements of Colombian officials, and concluded that the Colombian government "has substantially exaggerated their contents, perhaps for political purposes."<sup>3</sup> For its part, the Venezuelan government has reviewed and rejected the alleged evidence. President Chávez called the allegations "ridiculous," lamenting that "the government of Colombia is capable of provoking a war with Venezuela to justify a US intervention in Venezuela."<sup>4</sup>

However, in the U.S., the contents of the laptops have been strategically released to the press to build a case against Venezuela. INTERPOL'S forensic examination of the laptops (released May 15th) found no evidence that they had been altered after March 1st, but was

unable to determine their accuracy or source.<sup>5</sup> Media accounts have nonetheless taken the Colombian officials at their word, while assigning guilt to Venezuela despite a lack of proof.

#### A COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE POLICY FOR THE U.S.

Based on the allegations by Colombia, Republican representatives in the U.S. Congress have proposed legislation hostile toward Venezuela, including a “state sponsor of terrorism” designation. House Resolution 1049 was put forth by Connie Mack (R-FL) and the right-wing Cuban-American Congressional Members of Florida on March 13, 2008.

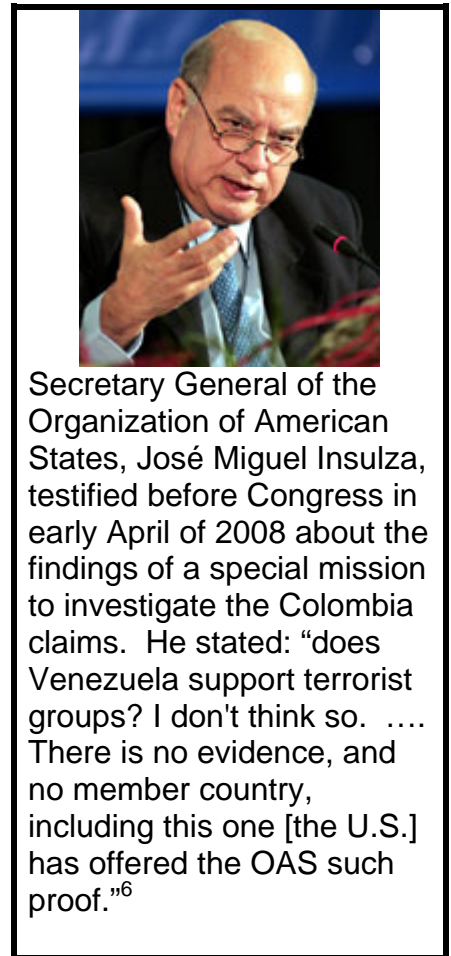
Despite their campaign to push the State Department to add Venezuela to its list of state sponsors of terrorism, the resolution has failed to win favor among lawmakers. A report by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee calls it “counterproductive,” and “strongly cautions that policymakers must be wary of the implications of poorly thought-out sanctions which might isolate the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, analysts and experts on Latin America have pointed out the negative political consequences that the “state sponsor of terror” label would bring. Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, DC commented that sanctioning Venezuela “would be self-defeating” for the U.S. He added that “it might give Chávez a boost... and it would risk a further jump in oil prices.”<sup>8</sup> Adam Isacson of the Center for International Policy said, “There is not even consensus among the Republicans that it would be helpful. Also, having to get a special license for all Venezuelan oil sales to the U.S. would throw the fuel market in a bit of turmoil.”<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the economic repercussions that a “state sponsor of terror” designation for Venezuela would have are enormous. Venezuela is the second-largest trading partner of the U.S. in the hemisphere, and the twelfth-largest in the world. Bilateral trade between the countries has grown in recent years to exceed \$50 billion in 2007. American sales to Venezuela rose by 40 percent in 2006, and another 13 percent in 2007.<sup>10</sup> Trade between Venezuela and other Latin American countries could also be threatened by U.S. sanctions. The economies of Colombia and Venezuela are particularly intertwined; bilateral trade totaled about \$6 billion in 2007.<sup>11</sup>

The Ambassador of Venezuela to the U.S., Bernardo Alvarez, has explained: “There will be very grave economic consequences if a politically driven measure like this is taken. Just think about the \$10.2 billion lost U.S. exports to Venezuela, 230,000 manufacturing jobs tied to exports and 1.58 million barrels of oil a day from Venezuela .... Any action like this would have economic and political consequences, not only for the U.S.-Venezuela relationship as a whole, but also within the region. This would be seen as an effort to breed instability in the region.”

VENEZUELA’S WORK FOR PEACE



Secretary General of the Organization of American States, José Miguel Insulza, testified before Congress in early April of 2008 about the findings of a special mission to investigate the Colombia claims. He stated: “does Venezuela support terrorist groups? I don't think so. .... There is no evidence, and no member country, including this one [the U.S.] has offered the OAS such proof.”<sup>6</sup>

Venezuela has proven itself to be a worthy ally in the hemispheric search for true security and a strong voice for peace and international cooperation. Initiatives such as the humanitarian mediation to free hostages in Colombia have made Venezuela a voice for positive change in the region.

Not only has Venezuela stood up for peace and prosperity, it has also maintained a well-defined policy of opposing terrorism in all its forms. This fact should not surprise the international community, for Venezuela has signed ten multilateral agreements and conventions guarding against terrorism – eight under the United Nations framework, and two under the Organization of American States. One of them is the Inter-American Convention Against Terrorism, which the U.S. has hesitated to sign.<sup>12</sup>

The government of Venezuela has a no tolerance policy on terrorism, which it has demonstrated under the administration of President Hugo Chávez by detaining and prosecuting or extraditing offenders according to law. Meanwhile, the U.S. has presented obstacles to the country's counter-terror efforts by refusing sales of military equipment and failing to respect extradition requests. A case in point is that of Luis Posada Carriles, who is wanted in Venezuela for numerous acts of terrorism including the deadly bombing of an airliner that killed all 73 people aboard.<sup>13</sup> Three years have passed since Venezuela first requested the extradition of Posada Carriles, but U.S. officials remain unresponsive, instead allowing the man to live freely in the state of Florida.<sup>14</sup> This flagrant violation of international extradition treaties would appear to be contradictory with the goals of the U.S. war on terror.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Briefing: Doubt cast on Colombia's seizure," by Kelly Hearn, *Washington Times*, April 29, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/04-29-08wt.html](http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/04-29-08wt.html)H

<sup>2</sup> "Letter to the Media: Laptop does not prove Venezuela ties." [Hhttp://www.mediaaccuracy.org/node/56](http://www.mediaaccuracy.org/node/56)H

<sup>3</sup> "Briefing: Doubt cast on Colombia's seizure," Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Chavez says Colombia seeks war with Venezuela," AFP, May 12, 2008.

[Hhttp://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jiv8gWZRSsEUeXPIKiAvdC9pB\\_wH](http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jiv8gWZRSsEUeXPIKiAvdC9pB_wH)

<sup>5</sup> Interpol media release, May 15, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/PressReleases/PR2008/PR200817.asp](http://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/PressReleases/PR2008/PR200817.asp)H

<sup>6</sup> "OAS Chief to US Congress: No Venezuela-Terrorist Link," AFP, April 10, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/04-10-08afp.html](http://www.rethinkvenezuela.com/news/04-10-08afp.html)H

<sup>7</sup> "Don't sanction Venezuela, panel urges," by Pablo Bachelet, *Miami Herald*, April 29, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/story/513277.html](http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/story/513277.html)H

<sup>8</sup> "Documents indicate that Chavez helped Colombia rebels," by Frank Bajak, Associated Press, May 11, 2008.

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<sup>9</sup> "Colombia shows new rebel documents," by Frank Bajak, Associated Press, April 9, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/09/AR2008050902543.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/09/AR2008050902543.html)H

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Commercial Service. [Hhttp://www.buyusa.gov/venezuela/en/csnews.html](http://www.buyusa.gov/venezuela/en/csnews.html)H

<sup>11</sup> "Analysis: War Not Likely in S. America Crisis," by Chris Hawley, *USA Today*, Marcy 3, 2008.

[Hhttp://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-03-04-colombia-analysis\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-03-04-colombia-analysis_N.htm)H

<sup>12</sup> "Venezuela Ratifies Inter-American Convention on Terrorism," by Martin Sanchez, *Venezuelanalysis*, January 30, 2004. [Hhttp://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/337](http://www.venezuelanalysis.com/news/337)H

<sup>13</sup> "The terrorist we tolerate," by Rosa Brooks, *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 2007.

[Hhttp://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-brooks11may11\\_0,5521510.column](http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-brooks11may11_0,5521510.column)H

<sup>14</sup> "Posada Carriles, a terror suspect abroad, enjoys a 'coming out' in Miami," by Carol Williams, *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 2008. [Hhttp://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-posada7-2008may07\\_0,1699509.story](http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-posada7-2008may07_0,1699509.story)H

<sup>15</sup> "A Terrorist Goes Free," by Bernardo Alvarez Herrera, *New York Times*, April 21, 2007.

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