

Cubazuela:

Chronicle of the Cuban invasion

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Overall Conclusions

What are we dealing with in Venezuela?

Venezuela is a failed state controlled by a criminal group linked to drug trafficking and to transnational terrorism. That group has usurped the institutions, dismantled democracy, taken away sovereignty from the people, and established a regime of terror. It continuously commits crimes against humanity, such as torture and genocide due to the current famine and human catastrophe that plagues the population. Citizen insecurity, added to political repression, has left more than 24,000 violent deaths in 2018, – not including the thousands that have died of malnutrition and lack of medicines – comparable to the total that occurred in Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq in the same period. An exodus of three million equates those refugees coming out of Syria. A man-made regional catastrophe.

It has handed over national independence to Cuba, which has established there a model of modern colonial domination. It has also ceded territories to foreign criminal groups (FARC, ELN, Hezbollah) in which laboratories have been set up for the production of drugs. From Venezuela the ELN directs its armed struggle against the Colombian state and plans terrorist actions such as the recent attack against the police academy. The drugs produced on a large scale in those territories are then trafficked to countries, such as the United States and some members of the European Union, where each year people die due to their abuse and where the trafficking bands contribute to raising crime rates. The narco state is also responsible for the massive exodus of more than three million people that today destabilizes the region economically and socially and generates the danger of a pandemic.

The situation in Venezuela, therefore, is unprecedented. We are not dealing with an independent and sovereign state that controls its national territory, protects the welfare and security of its citizens, and lives in peace with its neighbors. The institutions of the state have been transformed into perpetrators of a criminal enterprise.

What instruments does the international community have in the face of this situation?

The case of Venezuela cannot be analyzed from the traditional perspective of the rights inherent to an independent and sovereign state.

The international standards that apply in this case are:

- those of the Palermo Convention against transnational organized crime of the United Nations,
- the resolution adopted by the World Summit of that organization in 2005: The Responsibility to Protect,

- the provisions of Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the United Nations Charter on the right of every state to individual or collective defense against armed aggression from another country.

Faced with this narco-state in the hands of a criminal gang, the armed defense, individual or collective, by the attacked states is legitimate. As established in Article 51 (Chapter VII) of the Charter of the United Nations: *No provision of this Charter shall impair the inherent right of self-defense, individual or collective, in case of an armed attack against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken the necessary measures to maintain international peace and security.* Individual and collective defense actions do not require a prior authorization by the Security Council.

In the immediate future, the international community must give priority to all operations that are aimed at stopping the access of this criminal group to new financial resources and armaments, intercepting air and/or naval cargoes, means and routes used in drug trafficking, neutralizing the presence and operations from Venezuelan territory of the narco-terrorist groups, and opening a protected humanitarian corridor to carry food and medicines to be distributed directly to the population in the manner provided by the constitutional government led by interim president Juan Guaidó.

Is there a risk of internationalizing the conflict?

The Venezuelan conflict has been internationalized for decades since this criminal group first allowed the presence not only of the aforementioned narco-terrorist irregular groups, but also that of a Cuban interfering and interventionist force. The Cuban invasion has fluctuated between 25,000 and 50,000 military advisers for intelligence and counterintelligence, protection of personalities and police repression, as well as a large group of civilians in functions of political proselytism, ideological influence and military reserve. Said civilians have sufficient military training to regroup as armed support units in case they are ordered to do so. This invading force oversees intelligence systems, brutal paramilitary groups (such as *Colectivos* and the FAES), interrogation and torture centers, electronic espionage systems, as well as institutions working on ideological influence.

Cuban military interventionism has recently been joined by a Russian military presence with the announcement that Moscow will establish a military base in Venezuela, the shipment of weapons, the visit of nuclear bombers and the deployment of some troops and high-ranking officers.

Should the use of force, or even threat of use of force, be excluded, thus limiting all efforts to working on a negotiated political solution?

To be successful in a negotiation, it is necessary for the other party to be convinced that there is no “Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement” at its disposal. The promises of amnesty and

unblocking of bank accounts are proving, so far, not as persuasive as could be the fear of losing life. The public withdrawal of the use of force from the table -even the threat thereof- only favors the reluctance to any genuine negotiation. Nor is it contributing to create incentives for having the army to reconsider their loyalty to the current criminal regime.

- a) **It is not possible to reach a negotiated agreement with the Venezuelan regime without making them feel credible fear of the consequences of their denial.** Both Caracas and Havana (the latter cannot be a part of the solution because it is an important part of the problem) believe that they still have a better alternative: resisting until external pressures get exhausted while dividing and finally crushing the opposition.
- b) **The exclusive use of economic sanctions will not result in the end of the usurpation.** Economic sanctions are so far aimed at affecting the formal economy (oil and financial transactions). However, the regime can follow the same strategy of disruption and attrition followed by Bashar al-Assad and relocate its “government” in a rich territory like the Venezuelan Guyana, where it could request the protection from some loyal military units, irregular terrorist groups as well as Cuban and Russian military assets. But the notion that Maduro could sustain a prolonged war in Venezuela and the region based on irregular forces has more to do with a mantra for propaganda than with reality. Venezuela is not Syria.

The main sources of income of the criminal economy can only be decimated efficiently if military and police operations are carried out to neutralize and eradicate their laboratories, as well as to intercept the air and naval routes of drug trafficking. Only this type of measures will be able to put an end to the permanent aggression against other countries posed to date by drug trafficking and the planning of terrorist attacks from Venezuelan territory. It is a collective regional responsibility to act in these circumstances although any country or a limited coalition is entitled to take the initiative and launch a collective self-defense to face the aggressions by the Venezuelan criminal regime. But the inescapable reality is that the region and some countries in Europe will move to action when the United States leads it.

- c) **The democratic *realpolitik* is not equal to that of criminals.** The logic of criminals is not that of politicians. In circumstances like these, there are always voices that advise political prudence and bet honestly to appease the aggressive instincts of the enemy. That is what Chamberlain tried to do, only to discover later that the Nazis were criminals, not statesmen. Venezuela is a test case in the current global geopolitical confrontation. Not only Cuba, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, but also others, are paying close attention. The possible fall of Cubazuela represents a game changer between autocratic regimes and the forces of democracy at a global scale that is only comparable to that brought about by the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The gravity of not making the right decision today is a reminder of the old adage: *Everything you do can kill you, including doing nothing.*

Cubazuela: Cuba's Model of Colonial Domination

Executive Summary

1) Venezuela's crisis is on some occasions analyzed under the following false premises and narratives:

- Considering the Maduro's regime to be merely a "dictatorial government", while in practice it is a colony of the Cuban totalitarian regime, controlled by a transnational criminal group associated with terrorist organizations such as the FARC, the ELN and Hezbollah.
- Referring to Venezuela as a sovereign state, when in fact it is a failed state whose sovereignty has been expropriated by the aforementioned criminal group. Furthermore, the current holders of Venezuela have ceded some of her territories to narco-terrorist groups and use her national wealth to enrich themselves and the power elite of Cuba.
- Presenting the Venezuelan case as a confrontation between a "popular Leftist government" and the "oligarchic Right", when in reality it is about an unprecedented challenge to regional and world governance by the first fully fledged Narco-State in the Americas.
- Minimizing the current famine and dire shortage of medical products and supplies, comparable only to other deliberate genocidal events such as the mass starvation provoked by Stalin in the Ukraine (*Holodomor*).
- Mobilizing public opinion against potential US interference and intervention in Venezuela, bypassing the practices that the Cuban regime has exercised in that country for two decades, and its present deployment of tens of thousands of military, police and civilian advisers and experts.
- Deterring the international community from considering the option of any type of use of force, alleging that it would generate a prolonged conflict with countless victims. It must be noted that only last year the current status quo caused 23,047 violent deaths (compared to 2,640 in Afghanistan during the same period) not including thousands of casualties as a result of famine and lack of medication.
- Hiding the multiple dangers Venezuela is posing to her neighbors in the region in terms of security (drug trafficking and terrorism), demographics and public health (as a result of a mass exodus of three million Venezuelans, only comparable with that of Syria).

2) The debate over the "use of force" has distorted the broad meaning of that option. Not every variant of the use of force always imply ground troops or prolonged occupations.

- The landing in Normandy, ordered by Roosevelt, is not equivalent to the capture of Osama Bin Laden decided by President Obama; just as the invasion of Iraq ordered by President George W. Bush is not equal to the operation of air attrition decided by President Clinton to stop the Serbian genocidal regime. Neither can any of these cases be equated to the use of drones for surgical air operations or the use of covert operations from the days of the OSS until today. The overthrow of Noriega – when he was on his way to consolidate a narco-state in Panama – did not involve a permanent military occupation nor did it result in a subsequent irregular civil war (despite all his bragging on the subject). The imposition of no-fly zones to protect corridors of humanitarian aid is not comparable to a declaration of war and is a form of limited action that can be justified by the letter and spirit of the resolution of the Nations United Summit in 2005, on *the Responsibility to Protect*.
- What should decide the type of action required in this case is also the international paradigm under which it will be approached. On the one hand there is an array of different modalities that have been used against criminal, dictatorial, aggressive, but still regular or even failed states. In this case there is plenty of room for creativity in choosing the tools of engagement when we realized that this time, we are dealing with a brand-new species in international affairs: the full-fledged narco state. The dream of Pablo Escobar.

3) Raúl Castro will sabotage any negotiation that does not somehow ensure the continuation of his power over Venezuela, even if it is behind another face.

From the perspective of a communist *realpolitik*, Venezuela is considered by Havana as the outer defense perimeter of the Cuban regime; hence the order to resist to the end. The fall of the Venezuelan Narco-State would be a watershed – a game changer – regionally and geopolitically comparable only to the impact that the fall of the Berlin Wall made on Eastern Europe and the USSR. But the Venezuelan military will not overcome their fear if they do not first see a decisive move by the international community to show them – in deeds – that patience with the drug-trafficking state and its Cuban allies has run out.

Make sure to address the right questions and beware of deliberate disinformation

It's an old saying that you cannot provide the right answers if you keep addressing the wrong questions. The art of Russian and Cuban disinformation is appropriating and twisting elements of our legitimate logic and semantics to distort their true meaning, plant false premises, and keep us entertained in responding false dilemmas.

After the initial bewilderment and momentary loss of initiative caused in Cuba and Venezuela by that the meteoric rise of current interim president Juan Guaidó, the power elites of both countries regrouped. The new threat demanded the urgent organization of a counter-offensive. Moving from a defensive to an offensive position, they resorted, among other things, to their most effective tool. That vital instrument is *dezinformatsia*.¹ An issue to which, the intelligence communities in Western countries, are paying increasing attention since the 2016 elections.

The instruments of disinformation – now reinforced by the advent of the Internet and the digital technologies – aims at inducing in experts and public opinion in general a logic of analysis that falls far from reality and closer to the interests of those who promote them.

Manipulating public anxieties, language, and perceptions

By way of example, below we quote a – not exhaustive – list of some of the main themes that, when superficially treated, encourages various distortions in public perceptions and narratives around the case of Venezuela.

- “It is necessary to block the possibility of a military intervention and the use of force or threat of use of force by a foreign power.”
- “Venezuela’s sovereignty is to be respected.”
- “The Venezuelan state and government function under international standards.”
- “The use of force would internationalize the Venezuelan internal crisis.”
- “The self-proclamation of Guaidó by the opposition as interim president is equivalent to an attempted coup d’état against Maduro’s elected government and its state institutions.”
- “The crisis in Venezuela reflects the plans of imperialists and the Right to crush a popular and progressive government.”

Are these the right questions and premises on which a serious analysis of the situation in Venezuela should be based? Let's see:

¹ Disinformation also seeks that certain issues be unknown or misconstrued by preventing the circulation or dissemination of facts, arguments, news or information that are favorable to those to be misinformed.

- **Foreign interference including military intervention and the use of force has existed for almost two decades in Venezuela.** They are of Cuban origin. But also, is it not Nicolás Maduro who shall be demanded to cease immediately his use of military and paramilitary force, under Cuban advisory, against the citizenry?

The debate about whether or not to use force in the case of Venezuela must start from the fact that it has already existed for two decades and it originates in Cuba. On the other hand, the question about whether or not the use of force in Venezuela should be accepted excludes the complex range of choices that exist under that term.

The use of force ranges from a large-scale invasion (Normandy, Iraq), to a lightning and surgical maneuver (Panama) to air operations without the use of ground forces (as ordered by President Clinton in Sarajevo), the creation of limited channels of humanitarian aid with protected airspace (*no-fly zones*), commando operations to capture, remove or eliminate enemies (Bin Laden), and many other actions of a police or covert nature (such as intercepting vessels dedicated to drug trafficking or using drones to eliminate key criminal elements).

Equating the use of force only to actions on a large scale, with landings and prolonged occupations can confuse the unwary and neutralize those who want some decisive action to remove from power a gang of goons who will not leave of their own accord.

- **The sovereignty of Venezuela – which lies on the people –, has been “expropriated” ever since the alliance between Chavez and Castro** and needs to be *rescued* first; otherwise we would be respecting the sovereignty of a transnational criminal group. On the other hand, since the Nuremberg trials (1945-1946), the Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the creation of the International Criminal Court (1998) and the resolution on the Responsibility to Protect adopted by the United Nations Summit (2005), it is known that every sovereignty is limited. Sovereignty no longer extends a leeway for committing crimes such as those of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis, or by Stalin’s deliberate causing of the famine in the Ukraine. Nobody can invoke the protection of Venezuela's sovereignty in order to prevent the world from reacting against the death and suffering brought about by mass starvation and lack of medicines in that country.
- **Venezuela is a failed drug-trafficking state to which the United Nations Palermo Convention could be applied.** Transforming state institutions into a criminal enterprise has had a dramatic toll. According to the Venezuelan Violence Observatory, 23,047 died violently in 2018 – a period for which the United Nations only reported 2,640 violent deaths in Afghanistan – and there is an exodus of nearly three million Venezuelan citizens.
- The famine and total absence of medical resources have become widespread while the Maduro government deliberately had ignored the crisis and even blocked in February the tons of humanitarian aid donated to the country.

What international law protects in these cases is multilateral humanitarian action -including the use of force if necessary. The *Responsibility to Protect* (R2P or RtoP) is a global political

commitment adopted by all the United Nations at its 2005 World Summit. Its four key objectives are precisely the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Venezuela's narco-state has perpetrated all of the above.

- **Repression by paramilitary groups.** The group that has controlled the Venezuelan state for two decades has been using force – and sponsoring related paramilitary groups to do like-wise – against peaceful citizens. On the other hand, the massive presence of Cuban forces, the FARC, the ELN, Hezbollah and other groups – as well as the Russian provocations with their military presence and their shipments of arms to this repressive and violent regime – *have long ago internationalized this conflict.*
- **Juan Guaidó was elected interim president by the National Assembly as prescribed by the Constitution currently in force** that was drafted and approved during the rule of Hugo Chavez. Guaidó is not a “self-proclaimed” President. Is the elected interim president according to that Constitution. The international community and the legitimate Venezuelan institutions, such as the National Assembly and the Supreme Court of Justice, warned before the last elections that a fraudulent and unconstitutional process was in the making, and that its results would not be accepted. When Nicolás Maduro insisted, under Cuban advice, on carrying it forward, he destroyed the last vestiges of democratic institutions that remained in the country. In such circumstances, what is provided under the current constitution is that the National Assembly elects an interim president to call elections as soon as the necessary conditions exist for it.
- **This is not a matter of Left versus Right.** The group that operates the institutions of the Venezuelan state is of a criminal, transnational nature; it is not of a political nature nor is it guided by an ideology (although it has an ideological discourse to justify its actions). It is a criminal group, linked to transnational drug trafficking and money laundering worldwide, an ally and financier of terrorist groups such as the FARC, the ELN and Hezbollah, with sanctuaries in its territory, from where criminal and terrorist acts are planned and carried out against neighboring nations. Besides, so far, the only force that has demonstrated with absolute clarity its imperialist and colonial actions against the Venezuelan people is the Castro regime in Havana.

Cuba's colonial model

Definition and functions of Venezuela's colonial status

When one state cedes to another the control of its military and intelligence sectors, the ideological format of its news outlets, its educational and cultural institutions, customs mechanisms and citizen registers, as well as the issuance of official identity documents, electronic systems for registration and count of electoral votes and other key processes; when it ultimately transfers at no cost tens of billions of dollars in natural resources, and must even buy oil from other producers in order to deliver its quota to that second country – despite lacking the

essential quantities to meet its own needs – we can say that we are in the presence of some type of colonial domination.

The former commander of one of the main forces of the Farabundo Martí Front of El Salvador, Joaquín Villalobos, argued in an article recently published by *El País* in Madrid why he considers Venezuela to be a Cuban colony:

“Colonialism basically consists of political, military and cultural control, a puppet government and an extractive economy. By manipulating Chavez, Fidel Castro managed to conquer Venezuela. He defined its government model; aligned the country ideologically with Socialism of the 21st century; reorganized, trained and defined the doctrine of its Armed Forces; assumed control of its intelligence and security agencies; sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers, teachers and doctors to consolidate its political dominance; and established the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of America (ALBA) for the geopolitical defense of his colony. He chose Maduro as the puppet successor to Chavez and established an extractive economy that allowed him to obtain up to 100,000 barrels of oil a day to sustain his own regime.”²

Cuba: the "*jinetero*" (pimp) state and its colony Cubazuela

Since the early 1960s, Fidel Castro found a way to receive unlimited resources from his international allies – without ever paying a dime – to stabilize his political power, albeit he was leading an economically unsustainable system. The USSR and Eastern European countries provided Cuba with resources equivalent to several Marshall plans.³

Both Castros – yesterday Fidel and Raúl today – in return yielded logistical facilities to install advanced bases with electronic listening systems. These would service aircraft and war fleets, trafficked with intelligence information gathered by their international intelligence agencies and networks (still considered among the best in the world) about not only the United States but also other countries. Havana also offered the international projection capacity of the Cuban military – officers and troops – to operate in other regions of the world (Africa, the Middle East, Asia and

² *El País*, “Cubanos go home,” Feb 22, 2019. Available at:
https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/02/20/america/1550691005_971416.html

³ After the devastation of the war, Europe was able to rebuild thanks to the 13 billion dollars that it was granted through the Marshall Plan from 1947 to 1952. However, the Cuban government led the country to its current bankruptcy after almost thirty years of subsidies that amounted to more than 4 billion dollars a year, not including the payment and trade facilities that the socialist nations granted to the island, plus all the extra aid that Cuba received from other socialist countries members of the so-called Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) and apart from, among other sources of income, the high rents for military and intelligence facilities; for example, the 200 million dollars that Russia paid every year for the rent of the Lourdes Radar Center in Pinar del Río." Available at:
<https://www.dw.com/es/qu%C3%A9-se-hizo-del-subsidio-sovi%C3%A9tico-a-cuba/a-17786647>

now with Venezuela, Latin America) as well as its potential to organize disinformation and influencing campaigns favorable to the Cuban regime's clients.

The export of sugar alone and other raw materials was never enough for the Castro regime to maintain itself in power. For that reason, the fall of the USSR and Eastern Europe was a heavy blow to its main source of economic sustenance: the Cold War. Without a conflict in which to interfere and intervene, without strategic allies in a geopolitical confrontation to have as clients of their warring services, the Castro regime, in the early Nineties, seemed doomed to an inexorable fall. And it was then that Hugo Chávez appeared.

Since 1959 Fidel Castro (and the USSR) had their eyes set on Venezuela. In the beginning, Castro wanted to reproduce his guerrilla scheme in Latin America (not only in Venezuela, but also in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, among others). In Venezuela, he began with the insertion of his best officers of the Cuban Interior Ministry, and also involving high-ranking personnel from the Cuban Armed Forces, such as Arnaldo Ochoa and Raúl Menéndez Tomasevich – in operations wherein others, such as Antonio Briones Montoto, lost their lives. But while the most spectacular were those armed incursions, less visible – and much more fruitful in the long term – was the discreet and patient work of influencing and recruiting agents trained by Cuba for decades, within the armed forces and in the cultural, academic and student milieus of Venezuela.

Before Chávez emerged, Cuba had already helped to foster Marxist ideas and anti-imperialist sentiments that would offer the pro-coup colonel fertile soil to exploit the weaknesses of the Venezuelan political and economic system to the advantage of his personal ambitions.

Chávez was not a historic accident, but his rise to power came amidst the most serious existential crisis that Castro had ever faced. Taking hold of Venezuela's destiny was not merely a luxury but a need for his power survival.

In *El Nuevo Herald*⁴, the prominent Cuban journalist Carlos Alberto Montaner evokes the intellectual emergence of “Cubazuela”:

“In December 2005, Carlos Lage said in Caracas that Cuba had two presidents: Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro. ‘Cubazuela’ had been born. At that time, Lage was Vice President of the Cuban Council of State and the Council of Ministers. He was the second man in Cuba, as appointed by Fidel. The *Comandante* had ordered him to release that gem among the Venezuelans. The idea was, as always, Fidel's, but Chávez agreed, and Lage obeyed. That meant, also, that Venezuela had two presidents: Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez.”

Cubazuela: two strategic functions of the Cuban colony

- a) *To provide subsidies to maintain the Cuban regime of totalitarian governance and its unsustainable economy.*

⁴ Available at *El Nuevo Herald*, March 24, 2019

Had Hugo Chavez not ascended to power in Venezuela, Fidel Castro would have had to face a lethal crisis or be prepared to make his totalitarian political regime more flexible and open up to very radical market reforms to attract capitals from foreign investors and from the Cuban Diaspora. Chavez threw a lifeline to Castro and by so doing he helped to extend the life of the totalitarian regime that Cubans still suffer. But that was not enough for Fidel. To secure the new source of economic support and to use Venezuela as a springboard to expand his regional influence and to establish a complex network of criminal activities, he had to transform it into a colony ruled by a corrupt military elite and a proxy government.

In his article “How Cuba conquered Venezuela”, the prominent Venezuelan thinker and author Moisés Naim describes the procedures used by Castro for his massive interference and progressive invasion of Venezuela.⁵

b) *Outsourcing dirty – and potentially dangerous – tasks to Venezuela to avoid direct national security risks for Cuba*

For the Cuban “*jinetero*” (pimp) state, the functions of its colony in South America are not limited, however, to obtaining free oil and financial resources. There are other more sinister and less visible uses.

One of them is to outsource to Venezuela an array of criminal activities which happen to coincide with the geopolitical objectives of Cuba’s most obnoxious international allies (Russia, Iran, the FARC, the ELN, Hezbollah), This can be accomplished by transferring to Caracas the connections with drug trafficking and its logistics, and the training and provisioning connections of terrorist and “rogue” groups like the afore mentioned (ETA also made use of those facilities before it disappeared).⁶

Castro was able to outsource the risks associated with those undertakings – especially after the scandal of his drug trafficking activities in 1989 – and to ward off the potential danger of US retaliation. He even managed to get Obama to reward him with a token of good behavior by removing Cuba in 2015 from the State Department’s list of countries that support terrorism. All thanks to Cubazuela, his South American colony.

The Cuban Mission in Venezuela and its tools for interference

Cuba’s colonial domination in Venezuela is masked behind consultancies, exchanges, and the provision of various services. Thus, Cuba has a varied range of instruments applied to exert influence and control which are not limited to the military. Although the latter is the most

⁵ *El País*. “¿Cómo conquistó Cuba a Venezuela?,” April 19, 2014
Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/04/19/actualidad/1397936093_048585.html

⁶ The best presentation of the various subversive, espionage, drug trafficking, terrorist and criminal activities carried out by Cuba in concert with its Venezuelan puppet can be found in the book *Chavistas en el Imperio* (2014, Editorial Factual) of the internationally recognized Venezuelan investigative journalist Casto Ocando.

important instrument at present, Cuba's interference is manifest as much in the political and military fields as in the economic, social, educational, communications and cultural areas.⁷

What Cubans call "The Mission of Cuba in Venezuela" is a conglomerate of diverse groups, whose total number has fluctuated -estimated at certain times between 25,000 and 50,000 people, deployed to carry out missions which are diverse but complementary to the common purpose of sustaining the dictatorship that in turn serves as life support for the Castro regime. It is this Cuban interference and invasion in Venezuela that maintains a government as submissive to its dictates as Marshal Pétain's was to Hitler.

Moisés Naim, in the aforementioned article in *El País* (April 19, 2014), said the following:

"Cuba pays for all this with personnel and 'services'. Venezuela receives from Cuba doctors and nurses, sports trainers, bureaucrats, security personnel, militias and paramilitary groups."

"We have more than 30,000 CDR members in Venezuela," boasted in 2007 Juan José Rabilero, at the time Coordinator of the Cuban Committees for the Defense of the Revolution (CDR)."

As stated previously, some of the main instruments for colonial interference and control in the hands of this multipurpose invading force are the consultancies, the social missions and the exchanges. Each advisor, civilian or military, has a double function: On the one hand, they mold the Cubanization of the corresponding institutions. On the other, they are a source of intelligence about their "advisees", closely monitoring their ideas, unexplained luxuries, personal tastes, way of life, friends and family in Venezuela or abroad, and other details. The social missions (such as the medical undertaking, called *Barrio Adentro* (Into the Neighborhoods) become an antenna for surveillance, proselytizing and political coercion among the citizenry, as *The New York Times* acknowledged recently.⁸

The scholarships and exchanges of bilateral delegations in any field serve to augment in Venezuela a floating Cuban population of agents for ideological influence and vigilance as well as to bring to Cuba persons of interest for the Cuban intelligence that they wish to study closely or to put in compromising situations that could be used as blackmail upon their return to Venezuela.

These instruments of colonial domination by the Cuban Mission in Venezuela can be summarized as follows:

⁷ *El tiempo*, "La intervención cubana en Venezuela comenzó con Hugo Chávez," Dec 7, 2018

See: <https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/como-iniciaron-los-intercambios-entre-cubanos-y-venezolanos-302636>

The lawyer and director of the NGO *Control Ciudadano*, Rocío San Miguel, a scholar and expert on the Venezuelan Armed Forces, has pointed out that Cuban influence is practically structural in Venezuela. "Cuba guides the destinies of our country today. The situation room where the most important strategic decisions are made, political and military, but also economic and social, is in Havana", she said in an interview with Prodivinci portal after the *Constituyente* imposed by President Maduro was installed.

A detailed presentation of the massive and disturbing Cuban interference has also been given by Venezuelan General Antonio Rivero (<https://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/venezuela/como-iniciaron-los-intercambios-entre-cubanos-y-venezolanos-302636>)

⁸ Available at *The New York Times*, March 17, 2019

- Presidential consultancies for control of the leader.
- High ranking officer/advisors for the control and domestication of military and intelligence institutions.
- Advising ministers and important officials for the control of relevant civilian institutions.
- Missions for services and civilian exchanges focused on influencing and steering the population.

As Juan Jose Rabilero⁹ plainly expressed in 2007, the tens of thousands of civilian advisors – doctors, sports instructors plus academic, journalistic and cultural exchanges – are guided and organized by the Mission of Cuba in Venezuela to simultaneously perform tasks of information gathering, electoral and ideological proselytizing and military reserve.

The Achilles Heel of the Cuban Colonial Model

The cause of the current situation is the colonial model brought to Venezuela by Cuba's interference and invasion. It contains the seeds of self-destruction the Cuban model of governance has been impregnated with. It is characterized by the same factors that made the communist regimes of Europe and even the USSR itself fail and fall. The main problem confronting Cubazuela is not the purported internal conspiracies or the hypothetical danger of an external invasion, nor the alleged imperialist interference.

The features of State-run communism – which Fidel Castro exported to Venezuela – are now imploding his South American colony in the same way that they previously caused the implosion of the USSR. Among them, the following stand out:

- A State-run and centralized national economy that destroys incentives and market productivity.
- Vertical promotion based on political loyalty and not on knowledge or professional merits.
- Criminalization of criticism and suppression of freedom of the press that prevents any system feedback for possible self-correction.
- Lack of maintenance and investments both in infrastructure and in the technological resources of the economy, leading it to its downfall.
- A collapse of the statistical and accounting system of costs and profits that impedes any efficient and realistic management.
- Disconnection of the national currency from the international financial system, triggering unbridled inflation.

⁹ Quoted by *El País*, March 19, 2014.

- Corruption that permits the transfer of the immense wealth of the nation into the hands of a privileged group embedded into transnational organized crime networks.

The sum of all these factors has resulted in the implantation in Venezuela of the same problems that afflict the people of Cuba: technological backwardness, destruction of the productive apparatus, external indebtedness, inflation, low productivity, depreciation of wages, diminishing ability to purchase imports and the mass exodus of professionals and the general population.

The implantation in Venezuela of a regime of governance similar to that which governs the totalitarian state in the Island ended up liquidating the stability of the Cuban colony in South America. This also opens the way to the resurgence of an acute crisis in its Cuban metropolis that evokes the so-called “Special Period” that occurred when the fall of the USSR.

Conclusion: Totalitarian and Democratic *Realpolitik*s

Venezuela is the perimeter of defense, external and strategic, of the Cuban regime. That is why the orders from Havana are to resist to the end.

If the Venezuelan military finally decide to challenge the orders and the vigilance imposed on them by the contingent of Cuban officers, Maduro's mafia regime could not stand on its own. The paramilitary groups “colectivos” and FAES could in that case be effectively controlled and removed by the Venezuelan armed forces themselves in a short period of time.

Totalitarian *Realpolitik*

Raúl Castro will not allow anything to be negotiated other than the continuation of his power over Venezuela, perhaps behind another face. The democratic transition in Venezuela is inadmissible from his communist *realpolitik* perspective. That is why he is eager to persuade his partners that they cannot trust any promises of amnesty. In other words: he inculcates the idea that for them there is a Better Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, that consists of resisting until the escalation of the external sanctions is contained and the internal opposition gets exhausted enough to be swept away from existence.

Raúl Castro reminds the Venezuelans that in more than one country it was the Left itself who relied on a new transnational justice to pursue and prosecute the repressors of Latin American dictatorships, which initially received impunity under the “*punto final*” laws to facilitate the democratic transitions. Perhaps he has also explained to them how no one can ultimately protect them, whatever guarantees they may receive for their asylum. He knows this very well. In 1973, his brother deployed a clandestine operation in Algerian and Spanish territory to kidnap former Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar in Guadalmina, near Marbella, Spain. The operation was canceled because Batista died the same day he was to be kidnapped. By the way, General

Ronda Marrero was commissioned *in situ* for that adventure and he is now one of the main advisors for the repression applied in Venezuela.

Democratic *Realpolitik*

Quite a few voices of democratic governments regret what happens in Venezuela and condemn the Maduro regime, but limit themselves, sometimes even with reservations, to accepting that international action cannot surpass the use of selective economic sanctions. Unfortunately, that is music to the ears of Raúl Castro and his associates in Caracas. The narco-state regime is not concerned about the welfare of the population and bets either on repression to sustain itself in power, or on persuading a part of the population that their troubles are caused by “US imperialism.”

Those who anticipate that under no circumstances would they support a solution that uses force -for fear of opening the door to a prolonged foreign military occupation- start from a false premise: They are ignoring the multiple options used historically for the use of force when it became essential. Thus, inadvertently, they are reinforcing the logic of the communist *realpolitik* of Havana and Caracas: the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement is to resist at the expense of the torment of the population. Without intent, they are contributing to the consolidation of first Narco-State in the Americas for many more decades.

What would be the immediate destabilizing consequences that such toll-free concession would bring to the region? What would be the reaction at global scale of autocracies such as Russia, North Korea, Iran and China – allies of Cuba and Venezuela – if they perceive any hesitation as weakness of democratic forces? How many young people have already died for the tons of cocaine that this mafia has introduced in the United States and Europe? How many more would have to die if this Narco State consolidates in South America?¹⁰

The only effective democratic *realpolitik* is to propitiate in an effective way the fall of the Venezuelan narco-state. It would be a watershed. That event would represent a game changer for regional and world geopolitics, comparable only to the impact that the fall of the Berlin Wall made on Eastern Europe and the USSR. As it happened to the Kremlin a couple of years after that event, it is likely that Havana would follow the same fate as the Caracas regime in a relatively short time.

If the Venezuelan military finally decide to challenge the orders and the vigilance imposed on them by the contingent of Cuban officers, Maduro's mafia regime could not stand on its own. But they will hardly overcome their fear if they do not see decisive action from the international community that shows them – in deeds – that the time of the drug-trafficking state has really ended.

¹⁰ A few months after the Bay of Pigs disaster, in which President J. F. Kennedy, with the operation already under way, decided to cancel the air support to the 2506 Brigade, Khrushchev began installing nuclear missiles in Cuba. From then on, the Kremlin's perception that there was an inexperienced and vacillating enemy in the White House made the Cold War more dangerous.

The internal conflict of the Venezuelan narco-state against its people was internationalized two decades ago with Cuba's interference and intervention. It is for the international community to decide if they are going to help the Venezuelan people to get rid of that yoke even if it is necessary to use some form of force, individually or collectively, to that end.

There is a military invasion going on in Venezuela, and it came from Cuba

Executive Summary

- 1) The only military invasion ongoing in Venezuela began some 20 years ago, and it has been perpetrated by the armed forces and the security, intelligence and counterintelligence services of Cuba as a colonial occupation force.
- 2) The gradual Cuban takeover of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) has been denounced by dissident Venezuelan military like General Antonio Rivero. Even more, Cuba also controls the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), the General Directorate of Military Intelligence (DGCIM), the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB) and other Venezuelan armed corps (FAES) as well as paramilitary groups (“colectivos”) and strategic civilian sectors like communications. Managing this process on site is the Cuban Cooperation and Liaison Group (GRUCE), integrated by high-ranking military officers from Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and Ministry of the Interior (MININT) and supervised directly from the Island.
- 3) Elite members of FAR and MININT, up to the rank of Army Corps General (Raúl Castro is the island’s only Army General) compose the GRUCE staff and top brass in Venezuela and, for that matter, undertake Cuba’s colonization of Venezuela.
- 4) The GRUCE has designed plans to be executed under its command by all Cuban envoys in Venezuela, aimed at counteracting internal and external pressures and national crises after the total liquidation of democratic institutions by the Maduro regime.
- 5) Cuban civilian aid workers are additionally used at the discretion of the Cuban military services in Venezuela, fulfilling, among others, proselytism and intelligence tasks. They also serve as a potential support militia for “exceptional situations”. Civilian aid “missions”, such as the medical ones, are also used as a cover-up for Intelligence officers – such as the one captured in Colombia at the beginning of March 2019 – who have no professional training other than their espionage skills.
- 6) During the mass protests of 2014 and 2017 in Venezuela, the Cubans coached a ruthless repression, unprecedented in Venezuela, which left hundreds of protesters dead and thousands wounded and detained. This open terror campaign included the use of

paramilitary groups mostly composed of hardened criminals, who are handled by Cuba through longtime ideological proxies like Freddy Bernal.

- 7) The intelligence gathering, penetration, undermining and “neutralization” methods used in Venezuela by Cuba’s counterintelligence against local political opponents, disgruntled military and other groups that might pose a threat to the puppet regime of Nicolás Maduro are about the same as those used on the island.
- 8) Although the Cuban forces in Venezuela have kept a low profile for years, as discontent and defections increased more recently among the Venezuelan military, they have double-downed their own visibility in the barracks, even bringing to the country FAR special forces to participate in joint exercises with the national FANB.
- 9) Venezuelan NGOs and international organizations have denounced that Cuban advisers are behind tortures inflicted on political opponents and the disgruntled military, at quarters of either the Intelligence service (SEBIN) or of the military counterintelligence, DGCIM.
- 10) The assumption that an intervention from outside could compromise Venezuela’s sovereignty is a false one, as the country’s sovereignty has been totally compromised by Cuba’s colonial rule.

“There is an intervention, there is interference, there’s an invasion, there is a permanent, flagrant violation of our security and defense systems in which a foreign military power operates to keep the sovereignty of our State under control.” This quote is from an interview granted last year to *Diario Las Americas* by exiled Venezuelan Brigadier General Antonio Rivero. His is a courageous voice, having placed himself in the line of fire to expose – with documents, photos and videos – Cuba’s stealth invasion of Venezuela. He did this openly, from inside his oppressed country.

Now the illegitimate government of Nicolás Maduro and his Cuban handlers try to divert attention by arousing the ghost of a U.S. invasion. But the invasion of Venezuela is almost two decades old and it was not masterminded in Washington, but in Havana. That silent cancer began to undermine the sovereignty and institutions of Venezuela some time before the election that brought Hugo Chávez to power in 1999. Today it reaches a calculated metastasis level so that Havana does not lose the vital energy supplies and hard currency that keep flowing like clockwork from the exhausted South American country.

Venezuelans have not seen divisions of Cuban soldiers in the streets, but they are convinced, and military defectors and dissidents have confirmed it, that the Cubans are behind the crackdown against protesters, behind the espionage of political opponents or even common citizens suspected of dissent; behind the sustentation and security detail of Nicolás Maduro, and behind the pervasive counterintelligence that terrorizes and witch-hunts a disgruntled military.

Venezuela is twice the size of California; it ranks number 41 in the world by population, with around 32 million. The number of Cuban invaders is 22,000 according to data received and reported by the OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro. Yet the 22,000 form a select, indoctrinated legion, well trained in different functions toward a twofold goal: To keep Maduro – or any other puppet chosen in Havana’s Palace of the Revolution – at all costs, thus to safeguard the regime’s colonial rule of Venezuela and at the same time continue to perpetuate its 60-year grip on the Island.

Among those tens of thousands of Cubans, between 25,000 and 50,000¹¹ at different times, (General Rivero’s estimate goes way higher, to 100,000) there is a group of between three and five thousand security, intelligence and counterintelligence specialists who have created an autonomous Cuban Ministry of the Interior inside the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. They recruit their own agents and local informants and the only Venezuelan authority they respond to is Maduro himself.

Many of them are assigned as supposed “advisors” to high-ranking civilians and military officers, but their core mission is to become their “controllers”, to ascertain their ideas,

¹¹ *El País*: “Las relaciones desmedidas”. Cristina Marcano. March 30 2014.
See: https://elpais.com/internacional/2014/03/28/actualidad/1396026665_272257.html

relationships, family attitudes and other pieces of information that could cost them their jobs should colonial officials issue a negative assessment of their political reliability.



Army Corps General Joaquín Quintas Solá oversees in January 2017 the “anti-imperialist” war games Zamora 200 at La Orchila military base. He is accompanied by the deputy chief of the Operational Strategic Command of Venezuela, Admiral Remigio Ceballos.

On the other hand there is also a relatively small, yet cold and violent group of Cubans, entrusted with training snipers, as well as the “patriot” criminals and thugs of the paramilitary groups, so that they learn the best techniques in the business of killing: aiming at the head, the neck or the chest of unarmed students, women and teenagers.

As a whole, the so-called Cuban Mission in Venezuela constitutes a colonial force focused on two main purposes: to extend from the shadows its control of the country’s key institutions and, in the name of Cuba’s best interests and by any means, to get rid of any present or potential threat to the criminal puppet group governing Venezuela.

Former Salvadorean guerrilla commander Joaquín Villalobos has explained in the Spanish newspaper *El País*¹² why Venezuela can be considered a Cuban colony:

¹² *El País*: “Cubanos go home”. Joaquín Villalobos. Feb. 22, 2019)

See: https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/02/20/america/1550691005_971416.html

“Colonialism consists basically of political, military and cultural control, a puppet government and an extractive economy. For almost a century and with barely a few thousand troops, the British dominated India, a country with a population of 300 million and a territory of more than three million square kilometers. By way of making a pawn of Chavez, Fidel Castro managed to conquer Venezuela. He defined the model of governments; aligned the country ideologically with the so-called socialism of the 21st century; reorganized and trained the Armed Forces, defining their doctrine; assumed control of intelligence and security agencies; sent hundreds of thousands of soldiers, teachers and doctors to consolidate Cuba’s political dominance; and established the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of America (ALBA) for the geopolitical defense of his colony. He chose Maduro as Chávez's puppet successor and established an extractive economy that allowed him to obtain up to 100,000 barrels of oil a day to sustain the Castro regime.”

Without that Cuban overseas province, a crucial link of its imperialistic, undemocratic project for the Hemisphere, Havana would return to the socioeconomic chaos and popular revolt of the 1990s which put Castro’s power at risk. Villalobos points out: “The Cuban regime has opted for Venezuela and Nicaragua to be destroyed in a futile containment strategy in order to avoid its own, inevitable end. Cuba has been resisting a transition for twenty years while its citizens suffer from hunger and misery.”

As a result, for almost 20 years the Island’s rulers have spared no material or human resources, sending to Venezuela, in addition to tens of thousands of professionals, its military, security and intelligence elites with one mission: to secure their plunder of the colony from millions of dissatisfied and hungry Venezuelans, or from an alleged invasion from abroad. The latter is the same argument Fidel Castro used for decades to keep Cubans in suspense. But the only real invasion to Venezuela has been the one that quietly has flowed all of these years from Cuba into Venezuelan airports, with license to skip Customs and Immigration controls.¹³

An exceptional witness: General Antonio Rivero

General Rivero calculated in 2012 that the number of Cubans devoted in Venezuela to security, intelligence, counterintelligence and defense work reached some 5,600 people, including 3,700 officers of the intelligence service (the G2), and about 500 active military spread throughout the country’s key bases. The latter perform advisory functions in strategic areas: intelligence, weapons, communications and military engineering. They are also present in the operational area and in the office of the Minister of Defense, who has a Cuban general as a permanent advisor.

¹³ *El País*: “Cable sobre cómo los servicios de inteligencia cubanos tienen acceso directo a Chávez”. Nov. 30, 2010). See: https://elpais.com/internacional/2010/11/30/actualidad/1291071636_850215.html

According to the high-ranking officer, the earliest presence of Cubans in Venezuela helping Chavismo goes back to 1997, when 29 undercover agents settled in the island of Margarita and coached Hugo Chavez's 1998 electoral campaign in matters of intelligence, security and information.

However, the first permanent group of Cuban military personnel in Venezuela did not exceed ten. They arrived around 2002 to reinforce the security of President Hugo Chávez. From the beginning they were granted more authority than their Venezuelan peers at the presidential security detail. In an interview with the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba (FHRC), General Rivero said that in the early years of Chávez in power he spent some time, while installing a communications system, at the Miraflores presidential Palace. He was already a friend of the firebrand Lt. Colonel when Chavez led the 1992 failed *coup d'état*, and he even designed for him a plan to escape from the prison where he was sent to serve his sentence. Rivero recalls that two Cuban women who were in Venezuela as part of that first group began to determine, with the approval of the President, where he could go and where he could not.



Venezuelan Brigadier General Antonio Rivero quit the military in 2010 so that he could freely denounce the Cubans' interference in the Bolivarian National Armed Force.

“Motherland, Socialism, or Death”

During Hugo Chávez's first administration, and after an excellent management of the response to the tragic floods and landslides that occurred in the state of Vargas in December 1999, Brig. General Antonio Rivero served in Venezuela for six years as a successful Director of Civil Protection. “I met and kept a professional relationship with General Ramón Pardo Guerra (Chief of Staff of Cuba's Civil Defense). As Director of Civil Protection, I traveled three times to the island, two trips were disaster-related, and one had to do with an Ibero-American Conference on the subject.”

But the successful Rivero chose to keep a distance from the socialist course of Chavismo. He refused to support with water supplies the marches and demonstrations sponsored by the party Chávez had created. He disapproved of a red cap to be part of the Civil Protection workers' uniform. Rivero's resistance became more visible after Chavez was reelected in 2006. "My conviction got stronger when, after winning reelection, he said openly that in 1998 he did not dare speak of socialism because then he would have never won." Nevertheless, according to Rivero, it was not until 2008 that secret military accords were signed between Cuba and Venezuela, giving the green light for high-ranking members of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) to arrive in the country and launch the colonial "Cubanization" of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB).

That very year the military salute "Motherland, Socialism or Death" was adopted within the FANB. It clearly shadowed Cuba's "Motherland or Death", but incorporated as well a clear component of politicization by including the word "socialism". That was also the year when Rivero was supposed to be promoted to Brigadier General. During the promotion ceremony, which was presided over by Chávez and aired on national network, he only gave back to the President the regular military salute. Five months later, he was terminated as director of Civil Protection and transferred back to the FANB in the frontier state of Bolívar, where he began to rub elbows more frequently with the Cubans amidst their military takeover.

"In September 2008, I was instructed to compile the enemy's Blue Book. It was supposed to contain all the information available about the United States military. In the past we used to be the Blues, but then we were the Reds, and the United States was the Blues. The first thing they gave me as a reference source was the Cuban FAR manual on the United States. In order to do some additional research for that mission I went to the Strategic Intelligence headquarters at the Ministry of Defense, and there I found the reports prepared in Cuba to adjust Venezuela to their military doctrine of the People's War."

In November 2008 he attended a course on military engineering together with 40 other professionals. "The course was to be taught by two people dressed as civilians. Initially I thought they were retired Venezuelan officers. But when they started talking, I realized they were Cubans. The basic topic was how to build tunnels. The first thing they said after the presentations was, 'From now on, everything we will say here is a State Secret.' I immediately stood up and left the room. How could a foreigner determine in my country what is or is not a State Secret?"



An Officer of the Cuban GRUCE group (they always dress in plain clothes) supervises military engineering works at the Venezuelan state of Zulia. Courtesy of Lt. Cnel. Carlos José Montiel López



Cuba's Minister of Defense, Army Corps General Leopoldo Cintra Frias, (center right), is escorted during a visit in Caracas by his Venezuelan counterpart, Vladimir Padrino López (center left).

Later on, that month General Rivero attended a meeting of senior officers led by the Army commander, General Carlos Mata Figueroa:

“They spoke about a top secret, five-prong plan, kind of a five-point star, let’s say engineering, communications, logistics etc. Each of the tips of the star was to be headed by a Cuban officer.”

“Mata Figueroa (then Minister of Defense) said that he had been in Cuba and that the idea of the tunnels seemed very positive to him. Then they took us to visit the basements of the Military Academy where the Cubans ran construction works meant to adapt them for use in case of war.”



A member of the Cuban GRUCE group inspects tunnel building projects at the Western Integral Strategic Defense Region (REDI), in the Venezuelan state of Zulia. Courtesy of Lt. Cnel. Carlos José Montiel López

Alleging contempt, the maverick General was also removed from his frontier-state assignment. During an Independence Day celebration in Bolívar, attended by Chávez, Rivero refused again to extend the President the socialist salute. Soon after, he was notified of his transfer back to Caracas: The notice read: “An excellent general, unfortunately not a good revolutionary: he does not respond to the Motherland salute.”

After consulting with some colleagues, who confirmed that the surrendering of the FANB to Cuba was authorized by Chávez himself, and that there would be no support for those who refused to comply, Rivero planned at the end of 2009 to submit his resignation, so he could feel free to air his concerns. He recalls that he only mentioned his plans to Gral. Vladimir Padrino, (current Minister of Defense) and Padrino said that he would support him.

In 2010 Rivero was discharged from the Army at his own request, then went on to denounce at the Attorney General’s office the Cubans’ interference within the Bolivarian National Armed Force. Soon after, a Court Martial was instructed against him. In April 2013, General Rivero was accused of participating in a destabilizing plan against the Maduro government. Days later

he was detained at the SEBIN (National Intelligence) headquarters, until May 2013, when he was granted parole.

In making his case Rivero says that he relied on collaborators from several garrisons throughout the country; they sent him information about the clauses of the secret military agreements; he received pictures of Cuban generals chairing meetings with their Venezuelan counterparts; where the islanders were stationed, etc. Still, one of his key findings was the creation in 2009 of GRUCE, a Cubans-only high command designed to turn the FANB and other Venezuelan military corps into a mere echo chamber of Cuba's FAR and MININT.

The GRUCE is born

The GRUCE, Cuban Cooperation and Liaison Group, sometimes referred to as the Cuban Coordination and Liaison Group or the Cuban Strategic Group, has always being headed by a general of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR).

According to Rivero, the GRUCE group was located for a while nearby the Fuerte Tiuna exit of the Los Valles del Tuy, Metro de Caracas line. Fuerte Tiuna is the most important military compound in Caracas, the capital city. The headquarters of the GRUCE would be temporarily transferred later to the military base on the island of La Orchila. In its previously mentioned location, it may have reached a 300 to 400-strong contingent by 2012, compared with 100 to 150 in 2010.

By then they were already organized as a battalion and members had been distributed throughout units of the National Guard, the Navy, the Air Force, and other service branches. Rivero remarks that they applied themselves harder to the creation of the (Bolivarian) Militia, which would allow them to activate "the people in arms", a notion of a convenient parallel army that Chávez – undoubtedly following Castro's advice – had been mulling at least since 2002.

Venezuela's National Assembly member and opposition leader María Corina Machado exposed the existence of GRUCE before that parliament in April 2012, an election year in Venezuela¹⁴:

"This morning I presented to the Defense Commission a request for an immediate investigation on a very serious situation that has aroused within our National Armed Force. It is about the existence of the Cooperation and Liaison Group of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, which is operating and giving instructions, illegally, unconstitutionally, inside our National Armed Force."

"This Command is led by Major General Ermio Hernández Rodríguez of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces, and has intervened in absolutely strategic decisions related

¹⁴ Video: "Solicitan investigar presuntas actuaciones de grupo cubano dentro de la FANB". April 2012.
https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq1elr#tab_embed

to the security and defense of our country, beginning with the modification of the defense strategy as a way to impose on us the notion of a prolonged people's war, a doctrine that is absolutely foreign to our armed forces. Additionally, this group, the GRUCE, composed of Cuban officers, is acting in key areas, such as the approval process for the purchase of weapons; the training of our officers, both at the Joint High School of War, and in four tactical schools and five officer schools; as well as in the modification of internal procedures, alternating the planning guidelines of the components of our military.”

“Furthermore, these officers of the GRUCE have been given weapons. And a case has aroused that the GRUCE proposed the elimination of the Region of Integral Maritime Defense, REDIMA, which was prevented by the intervention of the current Minister of Defense.”



In April 2012, Venezuelan opposition Congresswoman María Corina Machado denounced before the country's National Assembly that the Cuban Liaison and Cooperation Group, GRUCE, was illegally dictating orders to members of the Bolivarian National Armed Force.

Ermio Hernández is one of two Cuban Major Generals chosen by Fidel and Raúl Castro to secure military control of Venezuela, as part of the Cuban invasion. He was still heading the GRUCE in 2014, according to testimony given in August 2016 by Vice Admiral Pedro Miguel Pérez Rodríguez, former commander of the Venezuelan Navy's Marine Corps, to the Defense Commission of Venezuela's National Assembly.

Pérez Rodríguez explained that in 2014, when the protests against the Government began, it was up to him to present before the Operational Strategic Command (CEO), headed by General and current Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, the “concept of how to use the Marine Corps.” The presentations during the so-called meetings of the Chiefs of Staff were done in the presence of a group of mostly Cuban officers.



In 2014, two Cuban Major Generals, Leonardo Andollo (left) and Ermio Hernández (center) were in charge of the Cuban Coordination and Liaison Group, the former from Cuba and the latter in Venezuela.

The witness stated that the Cuban high-ranking officer who attended the meetings on military doctrine was the chief – on a strategic level with the FANB – of the Cuban Cooperating and Liaison Group (GRUCE). “At that time, it was Major General Ermio Hernández Rodríguez. Hernández Rodríguez was the head of the Cuban GRUCE at the strategic level with the Armed Forces at that time, when I was active, and he was the one who attended that type of meetings where everything related to military doctrine was being discussed. Another officer was a man who had been director of the Naval Academy of Cuba (probably Vice Admiral Luis González Navarro).”

In an interview with the website *El Estímulo*, the former chief of the Marines noted that a rejection of the Cuban concepts goes deep within the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB). He explained that there has been a “systematic, programmed process of demoralization and destruction of (FANB’s) institution.”

“Little by little [they] are getting under our skin, working to Cubanize the Venezuelan (military) model, turning it into a model based on guerrilla, fourth generation, people’s war, an army of military regions divided into watertight compartments, quite different from our country’s military doctrine,” he explained.

Cuban Major General Ermio Hernández

Born in Guayos, Sancti Spiritus, in central Cuba, Ermio Hernández began his military career in a battalion of militias¹⁵, participating in sweeps against insurgents entrenched deep inside the Escambray mountain range. He then joined the FAR as a professional soldier and was mobilized for combat during the Bay of Pigs exile invasion in April 1961. He specialized in armored vehicles, a knowledge he perfected in the Soviet Union and put in practice with the Cuban expeditionary corps in Ethiopia, 1977, and Angola, 1986. He was commander of the Cuban contingent in Cuito Cuanavale, where eventually these interventionist forces managed to turn to their advantage the conflict with South Africa's own interventionist troops in the Angolan civil war.

According to Cuban sources Ermio Hernández later joined a smear campaign against General Arnaldo Ochoa, who commanded Cuba's military mission in Angola during Hernández's tour of duty. During the Angola war Ochoa – executed by firing squad in July 1989, after a murky trial for alleged drug trafficking – had a bitter dispute with Fidel Castro. It was triggered by Castro's questionable order to advance with a tank brigade towards the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale at night and without previous exploration of the route by mine sappers. In the end Ochoa had no choice but to comply with the order issued from Havana by "El Jefe". The explosion of a mine along the road hit the leading vehicle, killing several members of a reckon patrol.¹⁶

Ermio Hernández resides in the Havana township of Playa, at Avenida 41 # 6809 entre 68 y 70. His landline phone number is (537) 202-3840.

Cuban Major General Leonardo Andollo

In 2010 General Rivero presented to the Attorney General Office in Caracas pictures and recordings of Venezuelan officers participating in a meeting with the Cuban GRUCE. Leonardo Andollo Valdés, another two-star general from Castro's military establishment was the leading voice during the meeting.

Apparently Andollo was in Caracas for a few days, making one of his periodic supervisory visits, since his main mission, according to Cuban sources, is to coordinate from Cuba with the GRUCE in Venezuela. This would be done through encrypted messages that travel along the submarine fiber optics cable that connects both countries and was named Alba-1. Such military usage could explain why the cable was not in service for civil purposes during the first two years after its arrival in Cuba on February 9, 2011.

¹⁵ Cuba al Descubierto: "¿Quién es el General de División cubano Ermio Hernández...?", April 1, 2014.
<http://cubaaldescubierto.com/?p=4952>

¹⁶ Cuba en Sucesión. Criterios y Opiniones: "¿Por qué Fidel Castro fusiló a su mejor General?" Jul.13 2013.
<https://manchiviri.blogspot.com/2013/07/por-que-fidel-castro-fusilo-su-mejor.html>



The coordinator with GRUCE from Cuba, Major General Leonardo Andollo, (left, in plain clothes with glasses), visits Venezuela in 2011.

Andollo Valdés is one of several Cuban military men that have been cataloged as “export repressors” by FHRC on its website www.represoescubanos.com.

He was born in 1945 of Canarian parents, in the Havana neighborhood of El Cerro¹⁷. He was also a founder of the neighborhood political surveillance and snitching organizations knowns as Committees for the Defense of the Revolution. He fought in the early 60s against the “alzados” (insurgents) in the Escambray mountain range and in 1961 he was a member of the Engineering Section of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was sent to the Soviet Union to study Military Engineering. Later on, he was part of the Cuban interventionist contingent in the Ethiopian civil war. He was successively Head of Engineering of the FAR Western Army; Head of the Military Engineering Directorate; 2nd Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and he is currently Chief of the Operations Directorate and a member of the one-party National Assembly of the People's Power.

“He is in charge of all the military work that Cubans do in Venezuela regarding matters of security and defense,” Rivero states. He says that Andollo and other GRUCE Cuban officers have been photographed in his country's military garrisons while Venezuelan officials shared strategic information with them.

¹⁷ Cuba al Descubierto: “General Cubano que busca esclavizar Venezuela...” Jul.11, 2012 <http://cubaaldescubierto.com/?p=2323&cpag=1#comment-17>



Venezuelan dissident General Antonio Rivero submitted to his country's Attorney General Office this picture of Cuban Major General Leonardo Andollo presiding over a meeting with the Venezuelan military as evidence of Cuba's interference.



Andollo lives in Havana on Avenida 49 # 3622 between 36 and 42, a property in the exclusive Kohly district of the Playa township; His landline telephone number is (537) 203-1795. His daughter, Deborah Andollo López, has a degree in physical culture and she is a diver who has registered several immersion records. She is married to a native of Luxembourg and has French nationality, recognized in her passport number 03FE10913.

The General also has a son living in the United States, Ernesto Ramón Andollo López, born in 1971. He left Cuba for Miami in 1994. Some sources say his father stopped talking to Ernesto from then on, until his sister Deborah arranged a reunion between Ernesto and Leonardo in Havana in 1997. Ernesto travels to Cuba often to visit his family, staying at his sister's house in the beachtown of Santa María del Mar, East of Havana. He is married to an American-born woman, Justine Stoddard Andollo. The couple resides in Naples, Florida, and has two children, Elena Grace and Marquitos. Ernesto's American dream came true in February 2011, when he opened his own business, Ecocrete of SWFL, LLC.

The GRUCE plans for... today?

A civilian-military plan outlined by the GRUCE, following the establishment of the illegitimate National Constituent Assembly in July 2017, and prior to the also spurious re-election of Maduro in May 2018, seeks among other goals “to prepare the staff for the functions and missions to be accomplished during exceptional situations.” This includes all Cubans sent to Venezuela, including thousands of aid workers.¹⁸



Cuban Brigadier General Juan Carlos Tamargo Baniela (center, wearing a striped shirt) is shown here in a meeting with officers of the Venezuelan Air Force. He is the latest known commander of the Cuban GRUCE group. Second from left is Cuban Brigadier General Ramón Alfredo Lausao, the GRUCE's Chief of Staff.

The project, of which General Rivero has a copy, was to be executed between December 7th and December 11th, 2017, but Rivero believes that this plan, or an update thereof, is being executed right now, in 2019.

A section entitled “Possible character of the actions of the enemy” seems to forecast the “exceptional situation” of the country after the programmed liquidation of the democratic system in Venezuela. However, it does not take the Venezuelan armed bodies into account at all.

The text states that President Donald Trump “is relentlessly determined to formulate a military action against the RBV (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) justifying himself with pretexts of human rights violations and a Maduro dictatorship.”

It also identifies as enemies the countries of the region and the European Union, as well as the leaders of the opposition's Democratic Unity Desk and pro-democracy parties like Primero Justicia, Voluntad Popular and Acción Democrática.

¹⁸ *Diario Las Américas*: “General exiliado detalla plan de acción de militares cubanos en Venezuela”. June 12, 2018. <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/general-exiliado-detalla-plan-accion-militares-cubanos-venezuela-n4153245>

The assumptions about the “Possible character of the actions of the enemy” would now be in the phase of practical application, as indicated by a recent news story.

The Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo* reported on March 17, 2019 that Colombia’s immigration department, Migración Colombia, arrested a Cuban citizen, who, “according to intelligence reports, was carrying out espionage work at the Palanquero Air Base.”¹⁹

“The man, identified as José Manuel Peña García, was an agent of the Cuban G2 and was arrested at 8:00 p.m. Friday in the municipality of La Dorada, Caldas, a town near the military installations,” the newspaper added.

“He monitored and informed how the Palanquero base operates (...) He had a device that allowed him to measure the dimensions of the planes and the armament,” the story reveals, adding that Peña García “went to Venezuela in 2014, as part of the doctors exchange program signed between both countries which, according to Colombian officials, has served as a facade for the smuggling of members of Cuban intelligence services to the neighboring country”.

The aforementioned GRUCE plan lists the Palanquero and Apiay air bases in Colombia, along with others in Curaçao, Aruba and Trinidad Tobago, as military facilities around Venezuela where “enemy” aircraft might be relocated in the foreseeable future.

In his Facebook profile²⁰, Peña García claims to be a biomedical engineer born in Santiago de Cuba and married to Sandra Patricia Ariza. According to Ariza’s Facebook profile²¹, she is a surgeon working in Venezuela for the People Power’s Ministry of Health. She also says she is a native of the Colombian Department of Caldas. *El Tiempo* reports that Peña was married in 2016 in Cuba to a Colombian-Venezuelan citizen. They did not return to work in Venezuela however, but settled instead at Ariza’s hometown, La Dorada, nearby the military base.

¿“Civilian” aid workers?

In the early 2000s the Castros contributed to the populist project of the Venezuelan “caudillo” by dispatching tens of thousands of Cuban professionals destined to the so-called social missions, among them teachers, sports coaches and advisers in different fields, but above all doctors and paramedics for the “Barrio Adentro” mission. “I was able to visualize the whole Cuban presence through the agreements in different areas,” says Rivero. “Health, agriculture, sports, customs and immigration, ID cards, passports ...”

These civilian aid workers, many of whom have military training and number about 45,000 according to the most recent official figures (2012), are required – in their condition of modern slaves – to function at the same time as proselytizers in favor of the Chavez government, and

¹⁹ *El Tiempo*: “Expulsan a espía cubano que rondaba la base aérea de Palanquero”. March 17, 2019 <https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/otras-ciudades/expulsan-a-espia-cubano-que-rondaba-la-base-militar-de-palanquero-338340>

²⁰ José Manuel Peña García, Facebook profile. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009029857395>

²¹ Sandra Patricia Ariza, Facebook profile. <https://www.facebook.com/sandra.p.ariza.75>

informants to pinpoint those who could be influenced by the political opponents of Chavismo – including the Cubans who are part of those missions. Also, when the time comes, they can be used as armed militias or support troops to defend the government in a crisis.

In anticipation of such circumstance they were required to have a backpack at hand so that they could regroup in no time as military units, at the place and time decided by the command of the Cuban Mission in Venezuela.

In addition to the fact that there is a compulsory and universal military service in Cuba, which all male citizens must be a part of at some point in their lives, for medical students there is an extra requirement to obtain their graduate diplomas: undergoing and passing a rigorous military training. As if they were ancient gladiators, they are expected to work as slaves and as such, if necessary, fight and immolate themselves.



As a requirement to obtain their MD diplomas Cuban medical students must pass a tough “Military College”. They are required to have a backpack always ready just in case that they are needed as support troops or to participate in intelligence missions.

Chapter VIII of the book *Cuba: Medicine and Revolution. Radiography of a Myth* (Eriginal Books, 2014), is entitled “Medicine with a rifle hanging from your shoulder”. The authors, Cuban M.D.s José Luis Comas and Luis Ovidio González, reveal the double role of Cuban international aid workers as professionals and military personnel:

“Medical students, just like others, have a curricular subject called Military College(...) In an intensive three-week period, medical students rotate through the College(...) The true objective of this training [is] to graduate a doctor who is at the same time a FAR officer ready for military action.”

“To conclude the military preparation and move from fifth to sixth year of the regular curriculum, a medical student had to take part during his vacation period in the all-male, so-called military concentration(...) During those three weeks, they received theoretical field classes, which covered cartography and weapons of mass destruction, practical infantry classes and military tactics and strategy, as well as rifle and pistol shooting

practices and grenade-throwing. Passing this military concentration was mandatory, otherwise the candidate was denied graduation the following year and therefore, his M.D. diploma.”

... “Each graduate doctor, apart from his medical degree, is granted the rank of lieutenant of the military reserve, which means that he must fulfill a dual function wherever he is dispatched to. They are even available to the control bodies, be it the military counterintelligence or the State Security department, which may require their collaboration on any task that requires it. Naturally, this availability also works when you leave the country on internationalist missions.”

General Rivero recalls that years later, while he was stationed with the Army in the state of Bolívar (borderline with Guyana and Brazil), he was assigned a Cuban doctor instead of a Cuban military “advisor”, “...so that he could take care of my health. I saw him disarm a rifle as if he were an expert.”

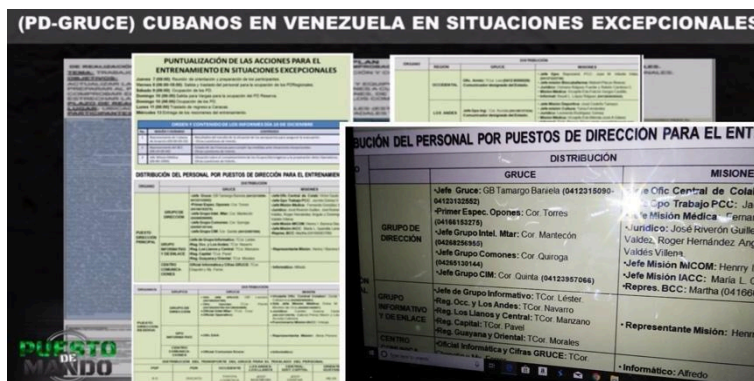
The GRUCES's top brass

The above-mentioned Cubans-only plan for exceptional situations identifies the GRUCE's top brass. The on-site chief of the Cuban command by then was Brigadier General Juan Carlos Tamargo Baniela.

Tamargo Baniela worked for the FAR's Direction of Operations. He started his military career in armored vehicle units. In 2010 he was Chairman of the Ministerial Examinations Commission at MINFAR. His cell phone number on the island is (535) 4101659. He used to live in San José de las Lajas (Calle51 # 10143 E/104 y Final), and probably resides now together with his sister, Mercedes Elisa Tamargo Baniela, in the house of his deceased mother, Bertina Baniela, at Pedroso # 12 Bajos E/Infanta y Cruz del Padre, Carraguo, Cerro, Ciudad de La Habana.



Cuban General Juan Carlos Tamargo (right), the latest known commander of the GRUCE group, receives a medal from the Chief of the Venezuelan Air Force, Major General Edgar Valentin Cruz Arteaga.



Venezuelan dissident General Antonio Rivero received from secret collaborators this copy of a GRUCE plan for exceptional situations. The enlargement at right, clearly shows who are the members of the group's high command.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the GRUCE, according to the document held by Rivero, also include the main specialist in operations, Colonel Torres; the chief of the Military Intelligence Group, Colonel Mantecón; and the chief of the Communications Group, Colonel Quiroga.

Colonel Nelson Torres is known to reside or have resided at 76 # 1518 E/15 y 17, in the Playa township, His telephone landline is (537) 209-1323; He is or was married to Caridad Serrano Pola, a FAR major; they have a son, Vladimir Torres Serrano, born in July 1981, and residing in the same house, which is located in an area dedicated to foreign tourism, with many fancy restaurants and rental houses.

Completing the commanding staff of the GRUCE is the head of the group's Military Counterintelligence, Colonel Quintas, most likely Raúl Quintas Montoro, son of Army Corps General Joaquín de las Mercedes Quintas Solá. Quintas Solá is another of the "Export Repressors" identified on FHRC's website, Cuban Repressors.

In January 2017 the Army Corps and Deputy Minister of the FAR Gen. Quintas Solá supervised in Venezuela a military exercise carried out at La Orchila Base and other points of the country called "Integral Anti-imperialist Action Zamora 200". The key is the word "integral" because, similarly to national security doctrines embraced by Latin American dictatorships in the 60s, this plan, designed by the Cubans, identifies national actors as the main enemy target.

Cuban Army Corps General Joaquín Quintas Solá

Born in 1938 in Santiago de Cuba, Quintas Solá is a member of the so-called historical generation of the revolution, having participated in the struggle against Batista, first as a

clandestine fighter and then with the rebel army at Sierra Maestra. After Castro seized power, he took part in the counterinsurgency siege against the rebels at Sierra del Escambray. He later served two tours of duty in Angola and kept rising in the armed forces to become chief of one of Cuba's four armies. He is a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and a member of the National Assembly of the People's Power. He has been awarded the title of Hero of the Republic of Cuba. Quintas Solá lives at 49 # 3415 between 34 and 36, in the exclusive Kohly neighborhood, township of Playa. His landline phone number is (537) 203-0004.



Cuban Army Corps General Joaquín Quintas Solá, (center) is shown here in Venezuela during the anti-imperialist war games Zamora 200. Left from him, Major General Raúl Rodríguez Lobaina, Chief of Cuba's Central Army. At the picture's right end, in plain clothes, the head of the GRUCE, Brigadier General Juan Carlos Tamargo Baniela.

Quintas' son Raúl, recently added to the Joint Chiefs of GRUCE in Venezuela, graduated in military counterintelligence (MCI) at the FAR's Superior School "Comandante Arides Estévez". He has been head of the Managua tank base, military unit UM-1011, located in the suburbs of Havana; was also head of counterintelligence of the Ciudad de La Habana military region; and second chief of MCI of Cuba's Western Army.

Raúl Quintas resides at 24 #733 entre 39 y 41, in the exclusive Nuevo Vedado neighborhood. He was previously married to Amanda Rosario Meneses Diaz with whom he had a son, Camilo Quintas Meneses. Camilo is a computer program specialist currently living in San Francisco, California. Raúl Quintas is currently married to an orthodontist, Karen Gutiérrez Muñiz, who works for the "Cira Garcia" clinic, a foreigners-only health facility located at the fancy Kohly neighborhood. They have two children, Marian and Joaquín.



Their customary plain clothes make them easy to recognize among their Venezuelan counterparts. First from right, second row, is Cuban General Ramón Alfredo Lausao, Chief of Staff of GRUCE, during the “Zamora 200 Anti-Imperialist Action” war games.

Other high ranking officers of the GRUCE operation who do not appear in the first tier are Brigadier General Ramón Alfredo Lausao Gallardo, born in Holguín and a former chief of the Camagüey military region (until the end of 2016); and the head of the Information and Liaison Group for the Venezuelan regions of Los Llanos and Central, Lieutenant colonel of MCI Liván Luis Manzano Hernández. Manzano lives in Cuba on 23 Street, Bldg. LH17, Apartment 60 E/308 y 310, in a military residential complex named Barbosa.

A former chief of the Cuban military group was Brigadier General (Guillermo Pablo Luis) Frank Yánez.

Carlos Romero, a political scientist at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV), mentioned in 2010 the role of Yánez in his country. He told the Miami newspaper *El Nuevo Herald* that General Yanez was at the time the head of GRUCE, leading “a military mission of 20 high-ranking officers stationed in Fuerte Tiuna, with an important command capacity over operations of the Venezuelan FAN.”²²

²² *El Nuevo Herald*: “Cubanos ocupan cargos estratégicos en Venezuela”. Casto Ocando.(Apr. 6 2010) <https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article2004312.html>



According to Venezuelan political scientist Carlos Romero, Cuban Brigadier General Frank Yáñez (right), a specialist in military counterintelligence, was the head of the GRUCE group in 2010.

According to the Cuban encyclopedia ECURED²³, “between 1976 and 1988 Yáñez fulfilled missions directly assigned to him by Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, in countries such as Angola, Nicaragua, Zambia and Namibia, with satisfactory results.”

Years later, Yáñez became the head of the Military Intelligence Directorate of Cuba (DIM), a position he held from 1999 to 2008 when, according to ECURED, “he is designated to fulfill other missions, which he successfully concludes in April of 2011.” Where he fulfilled these “other missions” is not revealed.

Yáñez died at 74 on September 1st, 2017. His residence in Cuba was located at 21 # 7013 E / 70^a and 72, township of Playa. The landline number of his residence was (537) 209-3304.

²³ ECURED: “Guillermo Pablo Luis Frank Yanes”



Major General Onelio Aguilera Bermúdez (left), Chief of Cuba's Eastern Army, on his way to a meeting between the GRUCE and officers of Venezuela's Western REDI (Integral Strategic Defense Region)



The head of Venezuela's Western REDI (speaking) chairs a joint meeting with the Cuban GRUCE. Second from right, in plain clothes, Cuban Major General Onelio Aguilera Bermudez. (Photos supplied by General Antonio Rivero).

Venezuela, G-2's laboratory for repression

Denunciations about the pervading presence of Cuba's G-2 in Venezuela are aplenty. This infamous, shadowy body multitasks in the Cuban-occupied country: It carries out advisory, intelligence, counterintelligence and repression work. Testimonies abound of detainees by the so-called Bolivarian Intelligence Service, SEBIN, who claim to have been tortured or interrogated directly by Cubans or in front of them.

In fact, although the presence of Cuban military and security advisors throughout Venezuela's state institutions and agencies – from the Presidency and the Armed Forces to the offices in charge of processing ID cards and passports – had been widely resented and seen as a surrender of the country's sovereignty, the Venezuelan people did not express visceral and widespread rejection of this foreign interference until they started to hear individual accounts about the cruel, all-out crackdown launched against the 2014 and 2017 massive protest demonstrations.²⁴

It was an unprecedented level of repression for this South American country, which Venezuelans have identified as “Made in Cuba”. It seems both ironic and tragic that Venezuela eventually became the testing ground for this brutal plan, which was designed to be used at some point in Cuba, but has not yet been applied on the Island.

The presence in Venezuela of hardened Cuban repressors tasked to give their expert advice to the discredited Bolivarian National Guard and the criminal elements of the so-called “colectivos” had a clear purpose: to dissipate at any cost, by any means, the worst nightmare faced by Castroism since the collapse of Soviet communism. During these two huge waves of protest, the repression focused on violating in a brazen, shameless, methodical manner, the sacred human right to life, seeking to create a climate of unprecedented terror in Venezuela.

One can figure out the method from the cold-blood coherence with which the repressive forces acted. *El Universal*, at the time one of Caracas' most trusted newspapers, published in 2014 an interactive map (it has been taken down from the Web ever since, although the URL still exists²⁵ with pictures of those who were killed during the protests and how they lost their lives. Translucent on the map are the reiterated patterns of these state-instigated murders:

Shot in the face

- Geraldine Moreno Orozco, 23, received one or two shotgun point-blank shots in her face February 19, 2014. An officer with the Bolivarian National Guard pulled the trigger while at a protest in Naguanagua, Carabobo state. She died on February 22nd.
- Jimmy Vargas, 34, died on February 24, after being shot likewise in the face, then dropped from a second floor at his residence in Las Pilas, Táchira state.
- Juan Carlos Montoya, 40, died on February 12 after being shot in the face on Avenida Sur 11, in Caracas' La Candelaria neighborhood.

²⁴ Video: “Venezuela: Video Footage Exposes Brutality of Repression”. Human Rights Watch. Jul 21, 2017
<https://youtu.be/8YiOi32ihigI>

²⁵ *El Universal*, “Fallecidos durante las protestas en Venezuela,”
See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/140224/fallecidos-durante-las-protestas-en-venezuela>



Geraldine Moreno, 23, died three days after a National Guard agent shot her in the face with a shotgun during the 2014 protests in Venezuela. The brutal repressive wave was directly advised by Cuban experts.



Genesis Carmona, a beauty queen, was killed with a shot in the head during a protest march in Valencia, Carabobo, in February 2014. Cuban advisers recommended taking positions on rooftops to “take out” leaders from the protest rallies.

Shot in the head

- Bassil Alejandro Da Costa Frías, 24, died on February 12, 2014 after being shot in the head during a demonstration in La Candelaria.
- Roberto Redman, 31, died on February 12 after being intercepted and shot in the head by a group of armed bikers, while he was demonstrating at Av. Arturo Uslar Pietri, in the Chacao neighborhood of Caracas.
- Génesis Carmona, 21, who won the Miss Turismo Carabobo pageant in 2013, died on February 19 after receiving a shot in the head during a march in Valencia on February 18.

Obviously, these and many other killings of demonstrators and leaders of the resistance in the guarimbas (barricades) were conducted in a most professional style: aiming at the heart, face, head or neck of the victims. The same method has been observed more recently in Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo's Nicaragua, where political opponents have also reported the presence of Cuban military and security advisers.²⁶

In an interview with Marti Noticias in February 2014, former Venezuelan ambassador to the UN and opposition leader Diego Arria²⁷ highlighted the cold-blooded cruelty and repeated patterns applied by the National Guard against the demonstrators, something this armed body had never shown before.

"I've been talking to a couple of ex Generals of the (National) Guard and they tell me that this has everything to do with the Cubans, that we have never had a repression of this kind, that they go out and kill students in the streets, that something like this has never happened before in the history of Venezuela. They are blaming groups of Cubans in there who are the ones who give orders to these people. And they go out to kill people, not to intimidate them or to scare them away, it's murder," said the Venezuelan politician, economist and diplomat.

He reviewed the testimony of Geraldine Moreno's mother: "She was shot twice in the face (with a pellet shotgun), the mother says. She even says that, of the two officers who were riding the motorcycle, one did not want to do it. 'Oh, you don't? Ok, then I'll do it!' said the other one and, boom!, he was the one who shot her."

Arria himself then posted on Youtube a recording whose authenticity he could not confirm, because it did not come directly from the person who recorded it but passed instead through the hands of three people. However, after listening to it he found it credible and fit to publish.

In the audio file a person with an obvious Cuban accent instructs an unidentified group (paramilitaries, undercover agents of the SEBIN?) on how to help the National Guard "repel" the demonstrations. The actual audio file has been repeatedly taken down from the Web or labeled "not available", although the URL still exists.²⁸

Here's a transcription of a copy FHRC made:

"Certainly, there are spaces that we have not yet been able to take, but it is a situation that at the moment we can control. The National Guard is supporting us in that sense, and the plan of all this is to locate those demonstrations where barricades are impregnable. We have had cases in different cities where the barricades are impregnable, but in other places there are enough breaches. Indistinctly, if there are breaches or there aren't, the

²⁶ Martí Noticias: "En Nicaragua, Masaya Libre resiste brutal asalto del gobierno de Ortega". Rolando Cartaya, Jun. 20, 2018 <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/en-nicaragua-masaya-libre-resiste-brutal-asalto-del-gobierno-de-ortega-/179565.html>

²⁷ Martí Noticias: "Escuela cubana de represión se extrema en Venezuela". Rolando Cartaya, Feb 26, 2014. <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/escuela-cubana-de-represi%C3%B3n-se-extrema-en-venezuela/32402.html>

²⁸ Video: "Militar cubano instruyendo a la Guardia Nacional cómo reprimir barricadas". Feb 24, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VakXS7-WmfY>

National Guard can repel this type of demonstrations anyway, as we have seen in some media.”

“The next step is to take over some residences. The reason for this is to locate some roofs and position ourselves there. We must take over the roofs of some buildings, in this case the tallest, and install some of our men there so that they can check out the area and have a better angle when we are assisting the National Guard. Because, fact is, it has been seen that in some cases they tend to throw gasoline and all these types of flammable stuff, and in that case, they can confront us, these people can push back the Guard. So the next step, as I was explaining here, is to take over the roofs of the tallest buildings, for us to have a better view, so that we can be able to guide the entire National Guard through different points of the city; for us to be able to say: 'Hey there's people here, but not there, here you can move on but not here'. That is the main goal of this meeting.”

“Another issue we should address here is that the barricades...they may not notice it, but the barricades they are building are leaving them trapped. We can even see that within their own ranks, the same people who support them, disagree with shutting down the streets, because, when the time comes to assist one of their own, no ambulance or any other vehicle can reach their location. That is, they are making a trap for themselves that we can take advantage of. That is why the National Guard enters these barricades, repels them easily, and the Guard can return.”

“At this point it is very important, and I want you to take notes, it is important that you work separately, do not work rubbing elbows, you have to work separately, because of what I explained before, that when they throw any combustible stuff from a building it can fall over five or six people. In this case you have to work separately, approximately 20, 30 meters between one another. We have applied this in Cuba, and we've managed to take people out without the rest of them noticing. We managed to repel certain people who show, well, a very violent attitude, and the others do not notice it. In other words, we can easily take them out of the protest without the rest of them noticing, basically that's it.”

“Repel?” “Take out?” Or does it mean “eliminate”? The reference to a better angle from a roof and the recommended work distance between these agents suggest the use of snipers, which have been seen operating during the recent crackdowns in Nicaragua. Arria pointed out that the use of snipers was not that necessary, because the armed members of the paramilitary “colectivos” and the National Guard had been firing shamelessly point blank. After all, they were shooting at unarmed civilians.

“Why do the National Guard and the SEBIN are suddenly switching to such a brutal mode, shooting people to death in public when they know they are being filmed?” the former diplomat asked himself. “Shots in the head: that's murder! We are already beginning to document this, which is, really, a State policy: to repress at all costs.”

In 2014, a Cuban MININT Colonel, Cecilio Díaz, defected and arrived in Miami. He was a communications specialist of the Cuban military and intelligence contingent in Venezuela. Díaz said during an interview that was later posted on YouTube²⁹ that he had been stationed at Fort Tiuna.

The former officer attested that during the repression of the protests that year, Cuban troops wearing Venezuelan uniforms were directly participating. “All of them are disguised as Venezuelan military elements, because they need a mask. It was the same in Angola”, he said. “When they went to Angola, the Cubans who went to fight were dressed like the Angolan army (the FAPLA). The first ones they sent were even black, to pretend that they were part of the Angolan army. Later they began to send Cubans with false passports, covered as engineers or technicians, but they were actually going to execute military missions.”



In May 2017, opposition activists from the city of Tariba, in the Venezuelan state of Táchira, detained Oyantai Hernández Campillo, who was wearing a uniform of the Bolivarian National Police. Then they found among his belongings his Cuban identity card, number 80082307482. Miami-based researcher Luis Domínguez found out that Oyantai resides in the municipality of Boyeros, in the City of Havana.

In May 2017, pictures of a Cuban Identity Card appeared in the local press, as well as in social media of the restive Venezuelan state of Táchira. It was found in the wallet of a uniformed officer of the Bolivarian National Police (PNB) who had been detained by anti-Maduro activists in Tariba.³⁰

²⁹ Video: “Entrevista al Coronel Cecilio Díaz”, Robert Alonso. May 18, 2014 <https://youtu.be/vErkL5fl6nM>

³⁰ Notitotal: “Tachirenses habrían detenido a PNB con identificación cubana”. May 17, 2017. <http://notitotal.com/2017/05/17/tachirenses-habrian-detenido-a-pnb-con-identificacion-cubana/>

Oyantai Henández Campillo had among his personal belongings this Cuban ID (Carné de Identidad) with the number 80082307482. Additional research by Martí Noticias and Miami-based investigator Luis Domínguez revealed more personal info about Oyantai in Cuba:

Although one of his Facebook profiles said he lived in San Cristóbal, Táchira, in Cuba he was then domiciled at L # 15809 e / N and M, in the Havana City township of Boyeros. He had worked as a driver at the Ministry of Public Health. He was married and had a daughter, Oyalmis, with Idarmis Tamayo, who has been employed by the 3ra y 70 market in Miramar. This is a hard currency store owned by the Gran Caribe military corporation, where a solid political backing and good contacts are required to get a job. Oyantai traveled to Cuba by the end of 2016 and returned to Venezuela in February 2017. In a chat on another of his Facebook profiles, someone asks him in November 2015: “Papuchi, where are you now?” And Oyantai responds: “I ‘m in Venezuela on business travel.”³¹

The *colectivos*: bike-riding death squads

To have their targets killed, the Cuban advisors have also relied on unscrupulous citizens. In March 2014, the Miami newspaper *El Nuevo Herald* reported, citing “Venezuelan former intelligence agents and sources with direct access to active officers within the Bolivarian National Armed Forces” that the crackdown of the protests carried out by the Chavista paramilitary groups known as “colectivos”, a loose mix of criminal and leftist elements, was coordinated by Cuban personnel³².

The report pointed out that a score of high-ranking Cuban military officers and officials had settled in Miraflores presidential palace to coordinate the actions of these gangs, comprised of some 600 to 1,000 armed men, because the dominant reaction at Fuerte Tiuna was to reject the use of violence against the civil population.

According to one *Herald* source, the orders to the “colectivos” were imparted “through the Secretariado Revolucionario de Venezuela, whose top leadership is fully controlled by Cuban officials.”

³¹ Oyantai Campillo, Facebook profile: <https://www.facebook.com/oyantai.campillo>

³² *El Nuevo Herald*: “Cubanos dirigen a paramilitares en Venezuela”. Antonio Maria Delgado. March 18 2014. <https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article2031792.html>



In March 2014 the Miami newspaper *El Nuevo Herald* reported that the brutal repressive actions launched against opposition demonstrators by the paramilitary groups known as “colectivos” were coordinated from the Miraflores presidential palace by twenty high-ranking Cuban officers. The colectivos are comprised of criminals who sympathize with Chavismo.

The newspaper cited multiple testimonies gathered after the demonstrations, according to which members of the “colectivos” had openly shot the demonstrators under the complicit watch of the National Guard, and the former were responsible for a large part of the dead and wounded in those days.

During the 2014 protests, 43 Venezuelans lost their lives and 486 were injured.³³ In 2017, between 127 and 157 people died³⁴, depending on the accounts of official or unofficial sources, and some 3,000 were injured. A brief review shows that they were not shot with the intent to stop or disperse them, but to kill.

Cuban Brigadier General Alejandro Ronda Marrero

Another Cuban “export repressor” to Venezuela who has been identified by the FHRC, and who is considered – for matters of intelligence and security – the eyes and ears of the feared Commander of the Revolution Ramiro Valdés, is the General of the Cuban Interior Ministry (MININT) Alejandro Ronda Marrero. In Cuba it is often said that a Cuban intelligence colonel

³³ INFOBAE: “Uno por uno, estos son los 43 muertos en las protestas contra el régimen de Maduro en Venezuela”. Feb.12 2015. <https://www.infobae.com/2015/02/12/1626403-uno-uno-estos-son-los-43-muertos-las-protestas-contr-el-regimen-maduro-venezuela/>

³⁴ *20 minutos*: “Las protestas en Venezuela causan 121 muertos y casi 2.000 heridos, según la Fiscal”. Jul. 31 2017 <https://www.20minutos.es/noticia/3103857/0/venezuela-muertos-protestas-constituyente-fiscal/#xtor=AD-15&xts=467263>

has as much power as an Army general: Ronda Marrero has reached the rank of Brigadier General at MININT.

During his last days working on the Island, Ronda Marrero was linked to Cuba's cyberwarfare program. That included monitoring dissidents' online activity as well as finding out what officials with home Internet access were helping them.

Ronda Marrero is not, however, a typical bureaucrat. He is described by former colleagues as "someone who has lived in the shadows, operating in risky situations, breaking whatever law of neutrality ever existed, and acting with harshness, violence, cold blood and precision." He is considered to be one of a few Castroist James Bonds, a mundane shadow adventurer cut out by the likes of his former comrades Tony de la Guardia and (Chilean) Max Marambio, all of them bragging of being Rolex-bearing, Rambo gun-tottering, "internacionalistas revolucionarios".

Highlights from Ronda's shadow warrior record:

- Liaison with the infamous international terrorist Vladimir Ilich Ramírez, "Carlos", a.k.a. El Chacal.
- 1973: Member of the Cuban military mission in Chile during the government of Salvador Allende. He stayed at La Moneda presidential palace with Patricio de la Guardia until Allende's death.
- 1974: Participated in "Operation Carlota", the Cuban military intervention in Angola's civil war that secured the power for the MPLA faction against the forces of Holden Roberto (FNLA) and Jonas Savimbi (UNITA). Between 1976 and 1977, he was head of special operations against UNITA's rearguard.
- 1979: Coach of Chileans who graduated as military officers in Cuba, then were dispatched to fight as the Chile Battalion in Nicaragua's Sandinista war against Somoza.
- 1980: Planned the logistics and coordination of the successful RPG attack that killed Somoza in Paraguay.
- 1982: Promoted to Brigadier General and appointed Chief of Tropas Especiales (Special Troops) at the Ministry of the Interior, so that he could coordinate the operative part of Fidel Castro's subversion agenda in Latin America. While the America Department of the PCC's Central Committee was in charge of developing political contacts with these groups, Tropas Especiales carried out the logistical and operational work: military and espionage training, arms transportation and field operations.
- 1983: Back in Nicaragua, in charge of training special units within the Sandinista Army, specialized in irregular warfare to confront the anti-Sandinista "Contras".
- 1986: Directed a large landing operation of explosives and weapons in Carrizal Bajo, Chile, and organized a failed attack against dictator Augusto Pinochet.

Also, the attack against Chilean Senator Jaime Guzmán (1991) and the escape by helicopter of the perpetrators held in a maximum-security prison (all of them members of the terrorist Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front) have both been attributed to Ronda Marrero.

At the same time Ronda has a reputation as a man of double moral standards, who never hesitated to snitch on former colleagues during the Ochoa-de La Guardia sequel trial known as Causa No.2 de 1989, which led disgraced Interior Minister José Abrantes to jail and eventually to death.

Like most loyal servants of the Castros, Ronda Marrero resides in an exclusive zone of Havana that is “frozen” except for VIP people like him, at Calle 184 # 1315 entre 13 y 15, in the Havana township of Playa. His landline phone number is (537) 271-2220.

He has two daughters, Saraí and Marisel Ronda Ramos, and a son, Juan Carlos, who currently flaunts a Rolex GMT, a gift from the late Fidel Castro to his father.

Cubazuela's branch of Cuba's Ministry of the Interior

The assassination and torture of political opponents and protesters is only the most dramatic aspect of the security, intelligence and counterintelligence work performed by Cubans in Venezuela. General Rivero, who states that he has been aware of the presence of Cuban intelligence officers in his country since the early 2000s, has identified other functions of that colonial personnel:

- Detection and identification of political groups, non-governmental organizations or companies opposed to the Chavista project. The opposition in Venezuela has denounced that Cubans handle the registries, know what properties Venezuelans have and their transactions, manage the identification system, identity cards and passports, also mercantile registries and public notaries; and have presence in ports, airports and immigration control points. Through the mixed company Guardian del Alba they have control of the computer systems of the presidency, ministries, social programs, police services and the state oil company (PDVSA).
- Transformation of the organizational structure and military doctrine of the FANB in order to make it a key supporting pillar of the socialist project.
- Evaluation and analysis of the new policies implemented at the level of institutions and sectors in order to verify their consolidation as revolutionary concepts.
- Intelligence work in all directions and levels meant to facilitate a permanent updating of country-situation.
- Transformation of the institutional structure, concepts and functions of Venezuela's civil and military intelligence.

- Police and intelligence work on Cubans serving a “misión” in Venezuela. Contingency plans to make the best use of Cuban civilian personnel with military training.
- Permanent psychological warfare through the management and distribution of misinformation and the implementation of “test balloons” to study the various reactions.
- Development of a complete and advanced technological platform for the control of social networks and internet as well as other means of communication. Submarine cable between Venezuela and Cuba under naval control.

Counterintelligence at the top

The priority assigned in the South American country to this work aspect of the G-2, as highlighted by General Rivero, is observed in a power point presentation prepared by Cuban specialists and entitled “Tarea Escudo” (Shield Task) in which they identify, among other targets:

- “Diplomatic, business representations; NGOs; accredited press agencies.”
- “The actions of the political opposition in partisan, government, justice, police, media, union, student and religious circles;” and
- “Key economic sectors and production facilities and services with national or dual impact.”

“The comrade who handles me”

It is traditional in Castro's Cuba for many citizens to be assigned a sort of "primary" State Security officer in charge of scrutinizing them, keeping a secret file on them, and interviewing them periodically in order to gather information about them, their relatives, co-workers, acquaintances and/or other people they might be interested in.

Cubans sarcastically call these political chaperones “el compañero que me atiende” (the comrade who handles me). This practice is so widespread in the island that a Cuban academic based in New York, Enrique del Risco, recently published *El compañero que me atiende*, an anthology of 57 Cuban authors who have written about the ominous presence of the State Security in their personal lives or in Cuban life in general.

A number of the three to five thousand Cuban military and intelligence/counterintelligence specialists sent to Venezuela have been cast to play the role of “the comrade who handles me.”

Following a scheme that had been previously applied throughout the Island by the Soviet KGB, they are introduced to high-ranking officials and military officers as so-called “advisors”, while their core mission is in truth to become “controllers” of these people, tasked with extracting their ideas, relationships, family situations and other relevant info that might cost them their positions in case the colonial overseers evaluate them as politically unreliable. Thus, depending on the weaknesses, greed or political loyalties detected, they are either blackmailed, bribed or persuaded to become “the comrade’s” own agents and/or informants.

One case that ended in scandal in Venezuela focused on an audio recording released in May 2013 by members of the opposition.³⁵ During the playback Mario Silva, a Chavista mouthpiece and anchor of the propaganda program “La Hojilla”, gives a Cuban intelligence agent a long, gossipy briefing about tensions going on inside the Chavista circles of power.

³⁵ Available at BBC: “La grabación que desató un terremoto político en Venezuela” 21 mayo 2013
https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2013/05/130520_venezuela_politica_chavismo_divisiones_mario_silva_diosdado_cabello_nicolas_maduro_az

The Cuban agent was identified by a National Assembly's opposition caucus member, Ismael García, as Lieutenant Colonel Aramis Palacios.

Silva is heard speaking nonstop about a number of topics, including the power struggle between Nicolás Maduro and Diosdado Cabello over the succession of President Hugo Chávez, whose demise had been officially announced two months earlier. Palacios seldom intervenes.

Among other political characters, Silva lashes out against Chávez's former Vice President José Vicente Rangel, and even against the late president's son-in-law Jorge Arreaza (he is Maduro's current Foreign Minister). Silva accuses Arreaza of having leaked much-valued State-Secret information about the illness of the President, which the Venezuelan print and TV journalist Nelson Bocaranda then revealed week after week in his popular television show and written column Runrunes.

According to García, the recording was in fact an intelligence report intended for Cuban president Raúl Castro, who in the end was, as García put it, "the one who guides and governs the politics in this country."

Divide, discredit, indict, "neutralize"

But Silva seems to be what the aforementioned Shield Task power point defines as an "active secret collaborator." This is, "...a fully verified citizen, a true believer in the revolutionary process, with whom relations of secret collaboration are established... He fulfills tasks as an informant, an influencer and a supporter of our work and O/T (operative technique); he must be prone to voluntary collaboration," with "political, ideological, ethical motivations, professional interest or personal benefit, thus achieving a mutually advantageous relationship."

In addition to these active collaborators who inform or exert influence, whose enlistment is based on ideological affinities, Cuban counterintelligence also recruits agents in Venezuela based on personal greed or coercive commitment (blackmail). Shield Task summarizes the job description of a CI agent: "Penetrates the enemy activity and its environment; based on this, must sit at the enemy's table; give him advice while sharing his pillow; slip into his offices; participate in soirees, cocktails and diplomatic tea parties; join his delegation to conferences and political, economic and social events, be they scientific or not; enjoy his hobbies."

These advanced pawns are assigned specific tasks such as compelling the "enemy" to reveal, consciously or unconsciously, the information "of interest" that he has; preventing him from carrying on his "subversive" actions by way of persuading him to retract or postpone them, proposing initiatives that might divert him, or secretly hindering his access to the necessary means.

Importancia:

- ♦ El agente es el medio principal para enfrentar la Actividad Subversiva. Penetra la actividad enemiga o su ambiente y en función de esto debe sentarse en la mesa del enemigo, aconsejar en su almohada, deslizarse en sus oficinas, participar en recepciones, cócteles y té diplomáticos, integrar sus delegaciones a conferencias, eventos políticos, económicos y sociales de carácter científico o no; disfrutar sus mismos entretenimientos.

Taken from a Power Point presentation on counterintelligence work entitled “Task Shield” that was prepared in Cuba to be shown in Venezuela.

According to the counterintelligence manual prepared in Havana, when a decision is made to terminate (operative cut) what is defined as SEA (Subversive Enemy Activity), they should try to introduce information intended to cause a break-up between leaders and subordinates; besides, they encourage and fuel political-ideological discrepancies, make arrangements to discredit the leaders, and strive to boost rivalries.

Cuban prodemocracy activists are well aware of these tactics applied on the island by the so-called “Departamento 21 de enfrentamiento a la contrarrevolución” (Department 21 for the confrontation of counterrevolutionaries).

If, even after all this CI work has been implemented, the proposed goals have not been achieved, then the manual recommends applying “public measures”. Some of these are to indict the “enemy” for criminal responsibility (such as the Maduro regime’s accusations against Vene-zuelan opposition leaders for “instigating hate crimes”); demand administrative liability and expose them “publicly or officially”.

If none of this works, the Cuban experts recommend a measure that they do not give details about in their power point: “neutralization”.

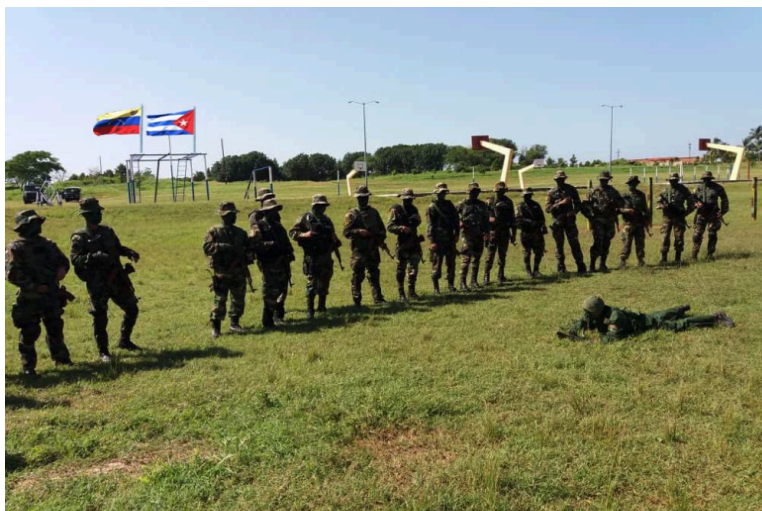
Cuban Black Wasps at the Colombian border

Data about the actual presence of Cuban combat troops in Venezuela has been fragmentary and difficult to confirm. General Rivero states that there is no such force there beyond a squad of special forces. However, at the end of September, a contingent of Black Wasps, the special troops of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba, was deliberately exposed, as a show of force, participating in what the Strategic Operational Command of the Bolivarian National Armed

Forces (CEOFANB) described as a “Combined Strategic Defensive Operation”,³⁶ a military deployment along the 2,219 kilometer-long border with Colombia, which CEOFANB chief Remigio Ceballos said included one hundred thousand men in uniform and was supported by Russia, China and Cuba.

The only foreign forces presented were, however, the well-known Cuban elite troops, of which images captured in Venezuela were included in a message from the Twitter account of the CEOFANB on September 28, 2018. The text states:

“Integrating to win; #Faces of our #FANBEsVenezuela, strengthened their knowledge, skills and military skills for the Integral Defense of the Nation, in #OperationStrategicDefensive Combined together with the ‘Black Wasps’, the Special Forces of Cuba’s FAR.”³⁷



In September 2018, Cuban Special Forces known as “Avispas Negras” (Black Wasps) showed up the Venezuelan-Colombian border. Photo CEOFANB ³⁸

The provocative border deployment prompted a reaction from the United States voiced by Vice President Mike Pence, during a speech at the UN headquarters in New York:

“News reports today are that the Maduro regime has moved military troops to the border of Colombia as they have done in the past, in an obvious effort at intimidation. And let me be clear: The United States of America will always stand with our allies for their security. And the Maduro regime would do well not to test the resolve of the President of the United States or the American people in this regard.”

³⁶ Martí Noticias: “Tropas de Cuba, Rusia y China en frontera colombo-venezolana motivaron advertencias de EEUU”. Rolando Cartaya. Oct. 6 2018

<https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/participaci%C3%B3n-de-tropas-de-cuba-rusia-y-china-en-maniobras-fronterizas-venezolanas-motiv%C3%B3-advertencia-de-washington-/214145.html>

³⁷ Twitter @ceofanb Sep 28 2018. <https://twitter.com/ceofanb/status/10457962334853898258>

³⁸ See at: <https://twitter.com/ceofanb/status/1045796233485389825>

Speaking out amounts to “treason to the Motherland”

Venezuelans and international Venezuela-watchers wonder how Maduro can clinch the loyalty of not only the unethical “colectivos”, but of the police (PNB) and the National Guard (GNB), as well as their participation in the repulsive acts of repression they perpetrate. In contrast, more than 4000 defections have been reported from the GNB alone during the last 12 months. As he crossed the border into Colombia last February a defecting GNB member, Sergeant Efrén Alejandro Linares, said that 80% of his colleagues are against the Maduro regime, but they are afraid to speak out. “You cannot speak, you cannot say anything against the government because it is considered treason to the Motherland.”³⁹

A young sergeant interviewed in late February 2019 by the BBC inside Venezuela, said that up to 98% of his colleagues are against Maduro but they share the same fear: “Nobody can speak freely, phones are tapped, even whistling can be dangerous.”

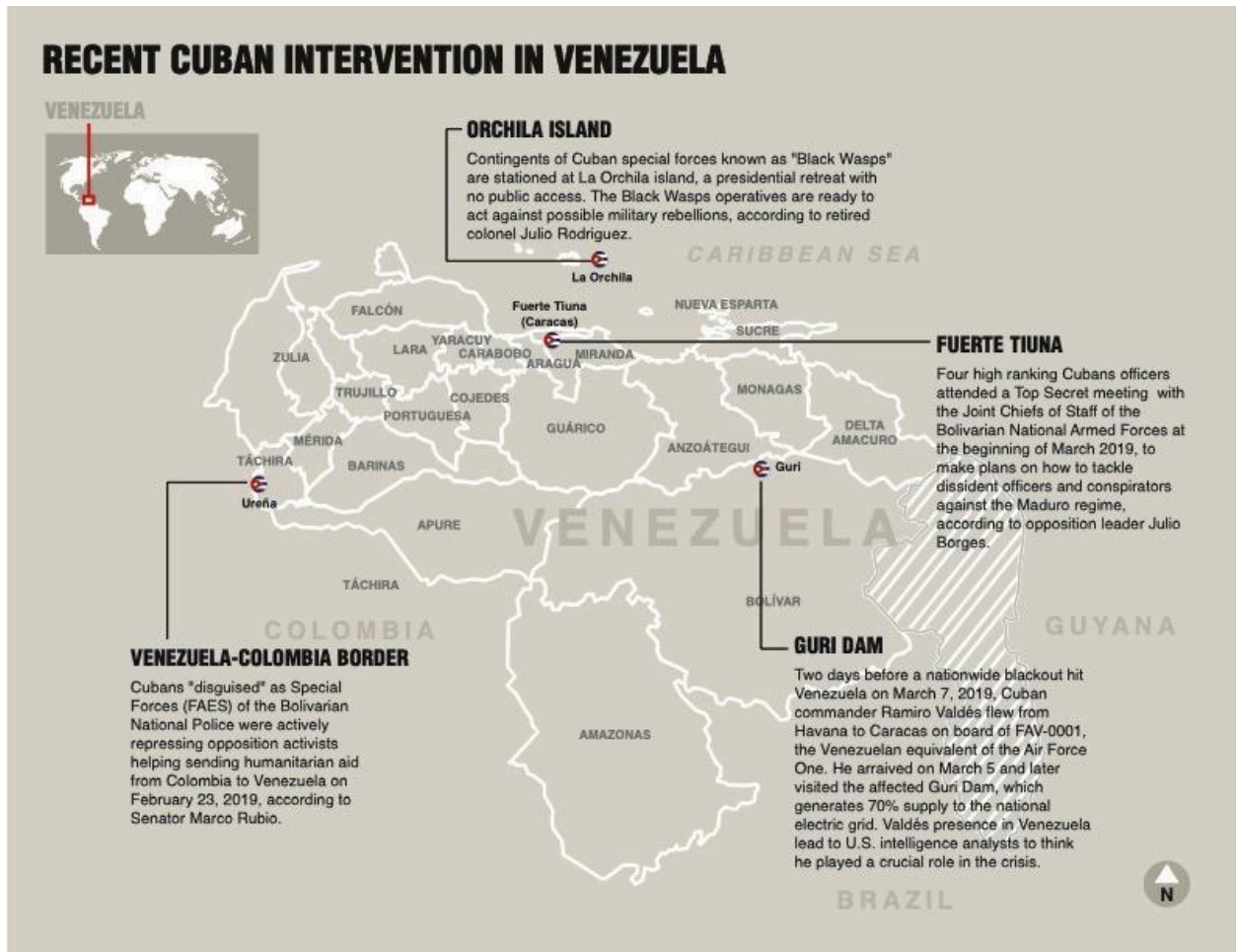
Two soldiers who were interviewed separately by the British news service answered in the same vein: “They intimidate you by talking about your family. They’d come and say: ‘Look, your son had bad grades.’ And they scare you.” one of them said.⁴⁰ The second interviewee opined, “The military are scared. The Armed Forces have been infiltrated by the Cuban G-2, so whoever says bad things, you can only imagine what they would do to him.”

A recent report presented by the NGO Casla Institute to OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro exposed 40 new cases of torture this year, attributed to the Directorate General of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM). Several of the clandestine torture centers are residential houses confiscated from drug traffickers, said Tamara Sujú, Executive Director of the Casla Institute, quoted by the Miami newspaper *El Nuevo Herald*.⁴¹

³⁹ Video: “Sargento Segundo Efrén Alejandro Linares desertó de la Guardia Nacional Bolivariana”. Feb. 23 2019 <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=154767158756410>

⁴⁰ ABC: “Las víctimas ponen cara a los torturadores de la inteligencia militar de Venezuela”. March 21 2019 https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-estos-torturadores-inteligencia-militar-venezuela-201903211651_noticia.html

⁴¹ ABC: “Las víctimas ponen cara a los torturadores de la inteligencia militar de Venezuela”. (March 21 2019). https://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-estos-torturadores-inteligencia-militar-venezuela-201903211651_noticia.html



In these clandestine centers, as well as at the DGCIM headquarters in the Caracas neighborhood of Boleíta Norte, “soldiers have been hanged by their limbs, beaten, bound hand and foot, their heads covered with a hood for days, lying on the floor without water and food,” Sujú said.

The activist highlighted the cruelty displayed against military detainees who were apprehended on November 30, 2018, together with Colonel Oswaldo García Palomo. According to the Venezuelan lawyer they endured hangings by the limbs, electric shocks, beatings, kicks in the face and blade cuts on their feet and buttocks.

Part of the report is based on the testimony of Air Force Lieutenant Ronald Dugarte, a former member of the DGCIM.⁴²

Dugarte said he had been trained by Venezuelan and Cuban personnel in intelligence work, and he reported on the degree of control that Cubans have over the operations of the DGCIM.

“From the moment the Cuban Intelligence Militia entered any of the RECIM (Military Counterintelligence Region), they started giving – they still give – orders to the generals in

⁴² *Diario Las Américas*: “Teniente revela torturas y participación de agentes cubanos en Venezuela”. March 20 2019. <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/teniente-revela-torturas-y-participacion-agentes-cubanos-venezuela-n4174098>

charge of each RECIM (...) and also to the analysts, imparting instructions on how to perform intelligence work (...), and always sowing hatred against anyone who opposes communism,” he explained.

To the core

The Cubans recently reinforced their control over Venezuela’s military as defections increased – more than 400 on the Colombian border in February-March 2019 – and uneasiness grew among their ranks.

In an interview with the website Libertad Digital⁴³, Venezuelan journalist Sebastiana Barráez, who has covered for many years her country’s armed forces, remarked how the presence of Cuban officers in the Venezuelan Army barracks has become more evident, because Maduro distrusts the FANB and even the previously loyal National Guard, and now relies more and more on the “colectivos” (mostly criminals and Colombian guerrilla fighters), and on the Cubans. About the Cubans, says Barráez:

“They have always kept a low profile; especially after the death of Hugo Chávez they lowered their visibility, mostly in the National Armed Force. But now they are interrogating officers, giving orders inside the barracks.”

Hugo Carvajal (a.k.a. “El Pollo”), former director of Military Counterintelligence in Venezuela under Chávez, is a controversial character. He was arrested in Aruba in July 2014 under a US warrant, based on the alleged abuse of his powers to protect the Colombian FARC’s drug trafficking. He was ultimately released to Caracas by the Netherlands because he supposedly enjoyed diplomatic immunity as Venezuela’s consul to Aruba.

In a video released in late February 2019, the old friend and namesake of Hugo Chávez recognized Juan Guaidó, head of the elected Venezuelan National Assembly, as the legitimate President of Venezuela. Carvajal also demanded that the transport of humanitarian aid into the country be authorized.

The former Counterintelligence operative, who knows first-hand the 20-year-old history of the Cuban invasion, recently responded on social media to a commentary by politics expert Nicmer Evans. Evans called to depose tyranny in Venezuela without “events of any kind that might compromise our sovereignty.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Libertad Digital: “Maduro no se fía del Ejército y recurre a paramilitares y cubanos”. Feb. 28 2019. <https://www.libertaddigital.com/internacional/latinoamerica/2019-02-28/maduro-no-se-fia-del-ejercito-y-recurre-a-paramilitares-y-cubanos-1276633948/>

⁴⁴ La Patilla: “Si la FAN es dirigida por cubanos, ¿cómo deponer la tiranía?: La pregunta de Carvajal a Evans”. Feb. 24 2019 <https://www.lapatilla.com/2019/02/24/si-la-fan-es-dirigida-por-cubanos-como-deponer-la-tirania-la-pregunta-de-carvajal-a-evans/>

“Dear Nicmer,” wrote Carvajal, “our sovereignty is already compromised to the core. If the one force that could defend it (the FAN) is under Cuban control, how in the world can we depose tyranny?”.

Cubans in Venezuela

Executive Summary

- 1) After almost two decades of close collaboration between Caracas and Havana, the Cubans managed to penetrate almost all aspects of the political, military and economic power in Venezuela, generating billions of dollars in profits for the Castro regime, and creating an unprecedented control structure comprised by thousands of Cuban agents, which still persists in Venezuela and focuses mainly in the intelligence and military fields.
- 2) Cuba's intelligence service is currently considered the cornerstone for Nicolás Maduro's sustainment in power. According to numerous sources consulted for this report, the foremost influence exerted by the Cubans centers on maintaining control of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), but they also infiltrate and influence Venezuela's intelligence community, from the Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM) and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN), to the Bolivarian National Police and the various intelligence services of the Armed Forces.
- 3) Cubans are present throughout Venezuela's key military garrisons and branches in Venezuela, as is the case of Forte Tiuna, the country's largest military fort. They also hold all kinds of decision-making positions, which include in the presidential protection rings, the security of the presidential palace, surveillance and countermeasures to prevent military uprisings, a strategic penetration to crush discontent within the Bolivarian National Armed Forces, as well as organizing and directing repressive activities in general against oppositionist forces.
- 4) Cubans also operate inside government bodies such as the Venezuelan Foreign Ministry, where they play a crucial advisory role for the Maduro regime foreign policy.
- 5) Cuban advisers oversee electronic espionage systems such as those at the Center for Security and Protection of the Motherland (CESPPA), the closest Venezuelan equivalent to the United States National Security Agency (NSA).
- 6) According to unpublished sources and testimonies, the Cubans give advice at and have continuous access to military facilities where systematic tortures are carried out against political prisoners and military and police officers who have expressed criticism of the Madurista regime. Likewise, they have an active participation in the drug trafficking and money laundering networks developed by the Cartel de los Soles and other criminal organizations that operate in Venezuela with the approval of the regime.

History

After nearly two decades of close collaboration between Caracas and Havana, the Cubans managed to penetrate almost all walks of political, military and economic power in Venezuela, thereby earning millions of dollars in profits for the Castro regime and an unprecedented structure of control over Venezuelan state institutions that is exercised on a daily basis by thousands of Cuban agents, mainly in the intelligence and military fields. Cuba's control over the key power structures in Venezuela persists until today.

The Cuban intelligence service – which is still classified by the United States as one of the most efficient ones in the world – is currently considered to be one of the central mainstays keeping Nicolás Maduro in power. According to numerous sources consulted for this report, the most notable influence exercised by the Cuban presence is, in the main, its focus on maintaining control of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), but it also exercises its influence over Venezuela's intelligence community, from the Military Counterintelligence Directorate (DGCIM) and the Bolivarian Intelligence Service (SEBIN) to the Bolivarian National Police and the various intelligence services of the Armed Forces.

Cuba's activities are coordinated by the so-called Cooperation and Liaison Group (GRUCE), which maintains units in both Cuba and Venezuela and which functions as a structure to link all of the largest garrison commands for territorial defense, covering virtually all of the military bases in the country.

Cuba's tentacles reach to the central nerve of IT surveillance for the purposes of political and social control through the Center for the Security and Protection of the Motherland (CESPPA), which is the equivalent of the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States.

They also penetrated SEBIN'S command structure, which although originally a police organization supporting judicial investigations, gradually became a security apparatus with a repressive scope throughout all sectors, including the military.

The Cubans have also managed to benefit from a broad range of economic activities, from the oil export business, the purchase of food stuffs and mining production, to the issuance of identity documents and passports, and Venezuela's notarial registries, through a number of binational agreements, the details of which have been kept secret for the most part.

But it is in the State security agencies and the Bolivarian National Armed Forces where the Cubans' most decisive and pernicious influence has been felt in Venezuela.

Joint operations

The physical presence of Cuban personnel – from advisers, political commissars and troops to spies and special forces – is distributed throughout the largest military garrisons and REDI (Integral Defense Regions) and ZODI (Integral Defense Zones) operating centers. It also covers the local offices of the intelligence and surveillance services such as SEBIN and the DGCIM.

The intelligence services and the strategy for social control formed a basic part of the defense strategy and the control over society established in the alliance with Cuba developed by Hugo Chávez right from the first years of his government, in 1999.

A good part of Cuba's activities in Venezuela are kept top secret, such as its participation in repression, spying on military commanders and spying on opponents and dissidents.

However, on occasion, Cuban military chiefs have been seen in public during exercises and events of a civil and military nature in Venezuela.

At the end of September 2018, for example, Admiral in Chief Remigio Ceballos, the head of the Operational Strategic Command (CEO) the highest of the Venezuelan military high commands, publicly announced that soldiers and groups of Venezuelan special forces participated in joint operations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Cuba "for the strengthening of the military integration of both nations."⁴⁵

Previously, in another joint "anti-imperialist" exercise, a top Cuban official, General Joaquín Quintas Solá, travelled to La Orchila Island in January 2017 to command the so-called "Zamora 200"⁴⁶ military exercises.

The historic commander Ramiro Valdés, Vice President of Cuban's Council of State and Council of Ministers (according to the profile on his Twitter account, @ValdesMenendez), has also made several public appearances in Venezuela.

In February 2010, Valdés arrived in Venezuela, presumably at the behest of then President Hugo Chávez, as a special envoy to help solve the electoral crisis in the oil producing country, a task that created all kinds of reasonable suspicions about the true nature of his presence and mission in Venezuela ⁴⁷.

Valdés's most recent appearance was a few days before the blackout that left almost all of Venezuela in darkness, on March 7 last. According to Venezuelan intelligence sources, Valdés arrived in the country two days before the blackout, which fed theories that the blackout was intentional and ordered to increase the chaotic situation and cause leadership problems for Interim President Juan Guaidó. According to sources, Valdés stayed in the country for at least a week, before returning to Cuba after the arrival in Venezuela of another important member of the Cuban *nomenklatura*, the ex "super-minister" Marcos Portal León, who was sent to analyze the severe energy crisis facing the regime of Nicolás Maduro.

⁴⁵ CEOFANB and the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces strengthen military integration, Venezuela News Agency (AVN), September 29, 2018. See: <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/n332150.html>.

⁴⁶ Zamora 200 civil-military exercises were held on La Orchila, official website [www.albaciudad.org](http://albaciudad.org), January 14, 2017. See: <http://albaciudad.org/2017/01/la-orchila-ejercicios-civico-militares-zamora-200>.

⁴⁷ Cuba hire in Venezuela raises concern, CNN, February 5, 2010. See: <http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/americas/02/05/venezuela.cuban.adviser/index.html>

Geographical location/Cubans in Venezuela

It is estimated that, out of the tens of thousands of civil and military Cubans deployed in Venezuela, a “hard core” of between 3,000 to 5,000 can be distinguished, including agents and special troops used to form the personal security ring around the President, the Minister of Defense, espionage and counterespionage experts, as well as officers and soldiers of the special assault forces with in-depth military training. This interventionist force, together with the other tens of thousands of Cubans, helps Nicolás Maduro maintain social control and prop up the dictatorship.

This group of men is distributed throughout the entire country, at all of the military installations and its main task is to bolster the military’s loyalty to the Bolivarian revolution, pursue dissidents and prevent a military uprising like the one that occurred in April 2002.

Rings of protection

One of the main functions of Cuban intelligence is to form and manage the rings of security to protect Nicolás Maduro and his entourage, as well as Vladimir Padrino’s, the Minister of Defense and General in Chief, which plays a key role in maintaining cohesion within the Military High Command.

The Cubans control the first ring of security that protects Nicolás Maduro, both as he works in his office in Miraflores and also as he moves around, inside and out of the Venezuelan capital.

It is estimated that about 100-150 men under Cuba’s direction participate in the overall operation to protect Maduro and his cronies.

They also help with security for Minister Padrino while working every day from his office in Fort Tiuna, the most important military fort in the country; and also, wherever he spends the night, which until recently was in the Piedra Azul Development, a complex of 12 houses to the east of Fort Tiuna and next to the Armed Forces Communications Service station (SECODENA).

According to sources that were consulted, Maduro is sometimes flown from Caracas to La Orchila Island and back to spend the night there for security reasons.

There is no public access to this Caribbean island, since it is a presidential refuge and a strategic unit of Cuban special forces (Black Wasps) is posted there with the mission of taking action wheresoever needed: air transport units, special border operations, or they can be deployed in the event of a military uprising, said Venezuela military expert Colonel Julio Rodríguez (Ret.) .

In the past, La Orchila has been used as a secret location for meetings between high-ranking Venezuelan and Cuban officials.

“It is a strategic location, isolated, less visible and safer. Over the years, we have confirmed that high level summits between Chávez and Fidel and Raúl Castro have taken place there, and in recent years between Maduro, Raúl Castro and Ramiro Valdés,” the Colonel stated.

White Palace/Miraflores

The Cuban high military command moved from Fort Tiuna, the largest military form in Venezuela, to the White Palace, a building located opposite the presidential palace in Miraflores in the Venezuelan capital.

It is estimated that several hundred Cubans are working there, between military chiefs and operating units combined with battalions of the Guard of Honor Regiment, which is responsible for the immediate defense of the Presidential Palace.

This personnel lives and sleeps in these facilities, which also include offices, reinforced concrete bunkers and tunnels that lead to the Presidential Palace.

CESPPA

The Cubans also play a part in this intelligence and electronic interception office that is run out the White Palace; its mission is to intercept communications between dissidents and opponents and to monitor the flow of social networks for prosecution in the courts.

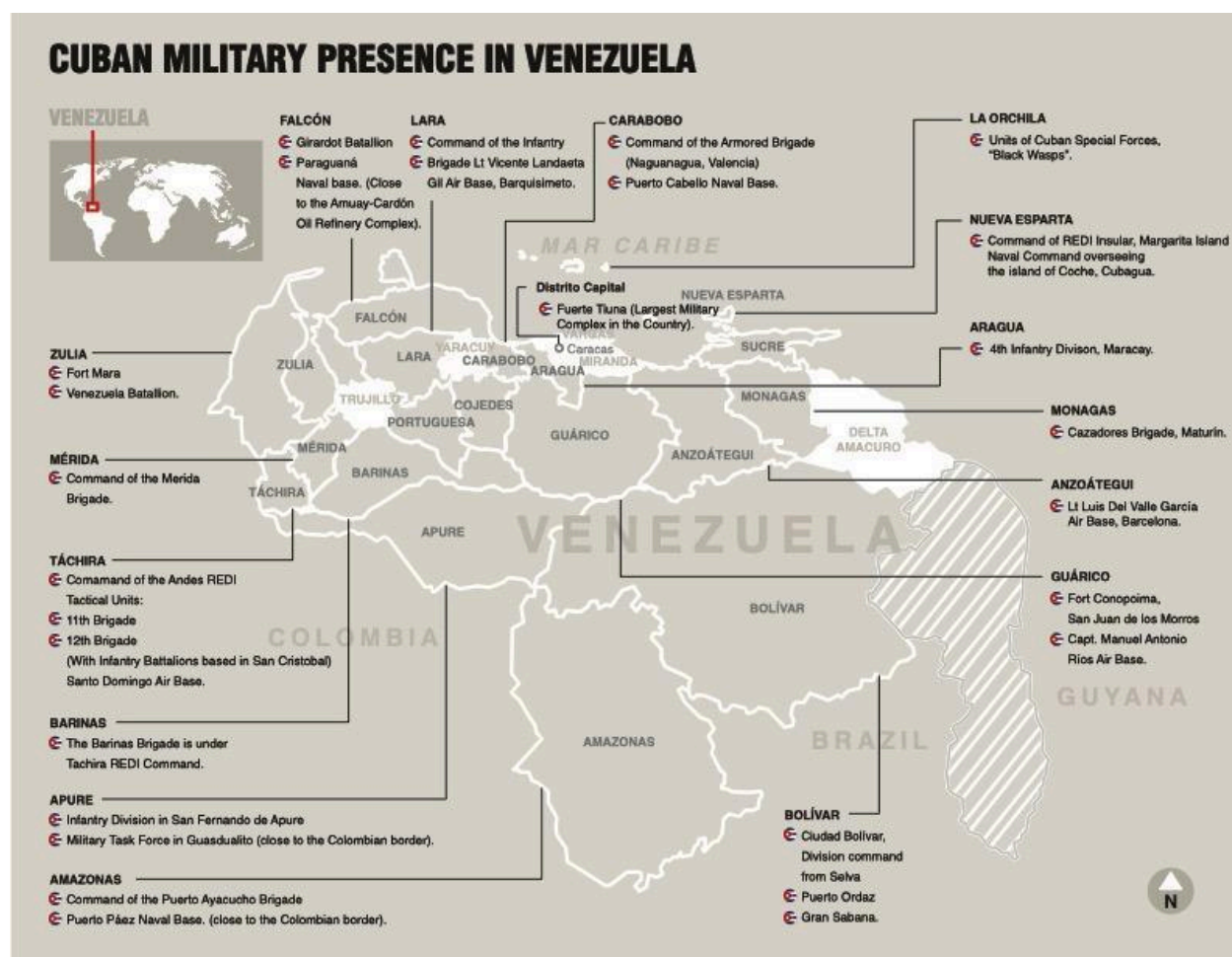
CESPPA was created by Nicolás Maduro in 2013 to unify the confidential information previously handled separately by the Military Intelligence Directorate (DIM), the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN) and the police agencies.

According to testimony from a Venezuelan intelligence official who fled to Spain in 2017, all of the information gathered by CESPPA “ends up in the hands of the Cuban intelligence services, the G2.” Venezuelan official Gyoris Guzmán stated that Cubans working at CESPPA receive “preferential treatment.”⁴⁸

The Cubans also control the group of IT experts and hackers that works at CESPPA on the electronic surveillance of opponents and military personnel who might participate in potential conspiracies to oust Maduro from power.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Former Chavist official: The Cuban G2 controls the intelligence service in Venezuela, Radio Television Martí, April 5, 2017.

⁴⁹ “Inside the machinery of Nicolás Maduro’s spy network,” VerticeNews, April 5, 2016.
See: <https://www.lapatilla.com/2016/04/05/vertice-news-dentro-de-la-maquinaria-de-espionaje-de-nicolas-maduro/>.



ZODI/REDI/Military Barracks

A basic part of the Cubans' influence in the Venezuelan military sector was the reorganization of the Armed Forces, which was gradually set in motion from 2005 to 2008 in a concept based on the "integral defense of the nation" similar to the Cuban military model of the "war footing of the entire population", which involved the creation of Strategic Regions of Integral Defense (REDI), and Operating Zones of Integral Defense (ZODI).⁵⁰

The Cubans have a presence in all REDI commands, a total of 7 in the country in all; these form the structure for coordination with the ZODI commands in military garrisons throughout the country:

- 1) REDI West, which covers the states of Falcón, Lara, Yaracuy and Zulia. Central command is in Maracaibo in the State of Zulia.

⁵⁰ "The 'Bolivarian' National Armed Forces, Current functioning structure", Control Ciudadano, March 2016 p. 4.

- 2) REDI The Andes covers the states of Mérida, Táchira and Trujillo. Central command is headquartered in the city of San Cristóbal in the State of Táchira.
- 3) REDI Plains covers the states of Apure, Barinas, Cojedes, Guárico and Portuguesa. The command is based in Fort Cedeño in San Juan de los Morros in the State of Guárico.
- 4) REDI Central, with jurisdiction in the states of Aragua, Carabobo, Miranda, Vargas and the Capital District, with its command base at Fort Tiuna, Caracas.
- 5) REDI East, which includes the states of Anzoátegui, Monagas and Sucre, with its command headquartered at Guanta in the State of Anzoátegui in eastern Venezuela.
- 6) REDI Guayana, which covers the states of Amazonas, Bolívar and Delta Amacuro. The command is located in Caruachi Hydroelectric Complex in Puerto Ordaz in the State of Bolívar.
- 7) REDI Maritime Islands, with authority over the State of Nueva Esparta and Venezuela's marine and underwater spaces, including the maritime island territory. The command is based in Pampatar Hydrographic Station at Punta Ballena in the State of Nueva Esparta.

It is also estimated that at least two Cubans, a political commissar and an intelligence officer, are posted to each of the ZODI commands in Venezuela, a total of 23 nationwide.

ZODI/Military garrisons

The number of military garrisons in Venezuela is the same as the number of states that comprise the Bolivarian republic. The Cubans have a presence in all of the military garrisons in the country, according to testimony gathered from various sources in Venezuela.

This is the list of garrisons where, apart from any action taken to transfer or regroup the Cubans elsewhere, they have been posted to carry out their work:

- **Caracas**, Federal District Garrison, based at the Third Infantry Division, at Fort Tiuna.
- **Maracay**, with the Fourth Infantry Division.
- **Valencia**, Armored Brigade command in Naguanagua.
- **Zulia**, they work out of two locations, at Fort Mara and with the Venezuelan battalion, which is in the fort inside Maracaibo in the State of Zulia.
- **Falcón**, with the Girardot Battalion, and at the Naval unit in Paraguaná.
- **Maturín**, with the Hunters' Brigade.

- **Bolívar**, in Ciudad Bolívar, in the southeast of the country, with the Jungle Division command. They are in Puerto Ordaz and in Gran Sabana, where there are two Jungle infantry divisions to protect the border with Brazil.
- **Anzoátegui**, at Luis del Valle García air base in Barcelona.
- **Guárico**, at Fort Conopoima in San Juan de los Morros. They are also located at Manuel Ríos air base, where the central satellite command works; a total of three satellites are currently in operation; Simón Bolívar (launched in 2008 and used for telecommunications); Francisco de Miranda (launched into orbit in 2012 and specializing in “observation”); and Antonio José de Sucre (launched in 2017, with notable technological advances, such as infrared and night vision, used mainly for national security purposes). The satellites operate with Chinese technology.⁵¹
- **Táchira**, Santo Domingo Air Base, the center of border operations. Also, tactical units (brigades), 11 and 12 brigades, which have infantry battalions, based in San Cristóbal.
- **Mérida**, the command of the Merida Brigade.
- **Apure**, at the Division in San Fernando and the Command of the Work Force in Guadualito, which is more operational.
- **Barinas** is under the influence of the command in Táchira and the unit is attached to Táchira. It is a known safe zone for FARC and ELN dissident groups.
- **Lara**, they are working out of Teniente Vicente Landaeta Gil air base in Barquisimeto and in the Infantry Brigade. A lot of troops and a Cuban presence that is vital to the control of deserts.
- **Amazonas**, they are at the Puerto Ayacucho garrison and in Puerto Páez, from whence a lot of operations on the Black River and in Amazonas are controlled, on the border with Colombia.
- **Nueva Esparta**, which covers the islands of Margarita, Coche and Cubagua; the Cubans operate in the same zone that harbors Hezbollah, ISIS, and Russian and Iranian operatives.
- **Puerto Cabello**, the largest naval base, where Cubans participate in the control of the Bolivarian Ports or Boliports.

⁵¹ With three satellites in orbit, Venezuela is moving towards technological independence, Vice President of Venezuela website, December 22, 2017.

See:

<http://www.vicepresidencia.gob.ve/index.php/2017/12/22/con-tres-satelites-en-orbita-venezuela-avanza-hacia-la-independencia-tecnologica/>

Cubans at Fort Tiuna

The Cubans continue to maintain a substantial presence in the largest military complex in Venezuela and engage in important activities currently designed to contain the eventuality of a military uprising or a movement to disobey Nicolás Maduro, through intimidating espionage and scare tactics.

Most of the Cubans live in the so-called “Transition” Family Block, next to the Military Court, a complex of 150 houses inside Fort Tiuna where the officials’ families live.

“They are sleeping there and leave in the morning for the different battalions and regiments to control operations and contain desertions,” stated a source who was consulted.

Another group of “decentralized” Cubans live in family housing rooms that are unoccupied, inside Fort Tiuna, mixed in among civilians.

The administrative office is located next to the Arms Service headquarters and it coordinates the activities of the Cubans who are inside Fort Tiuna.

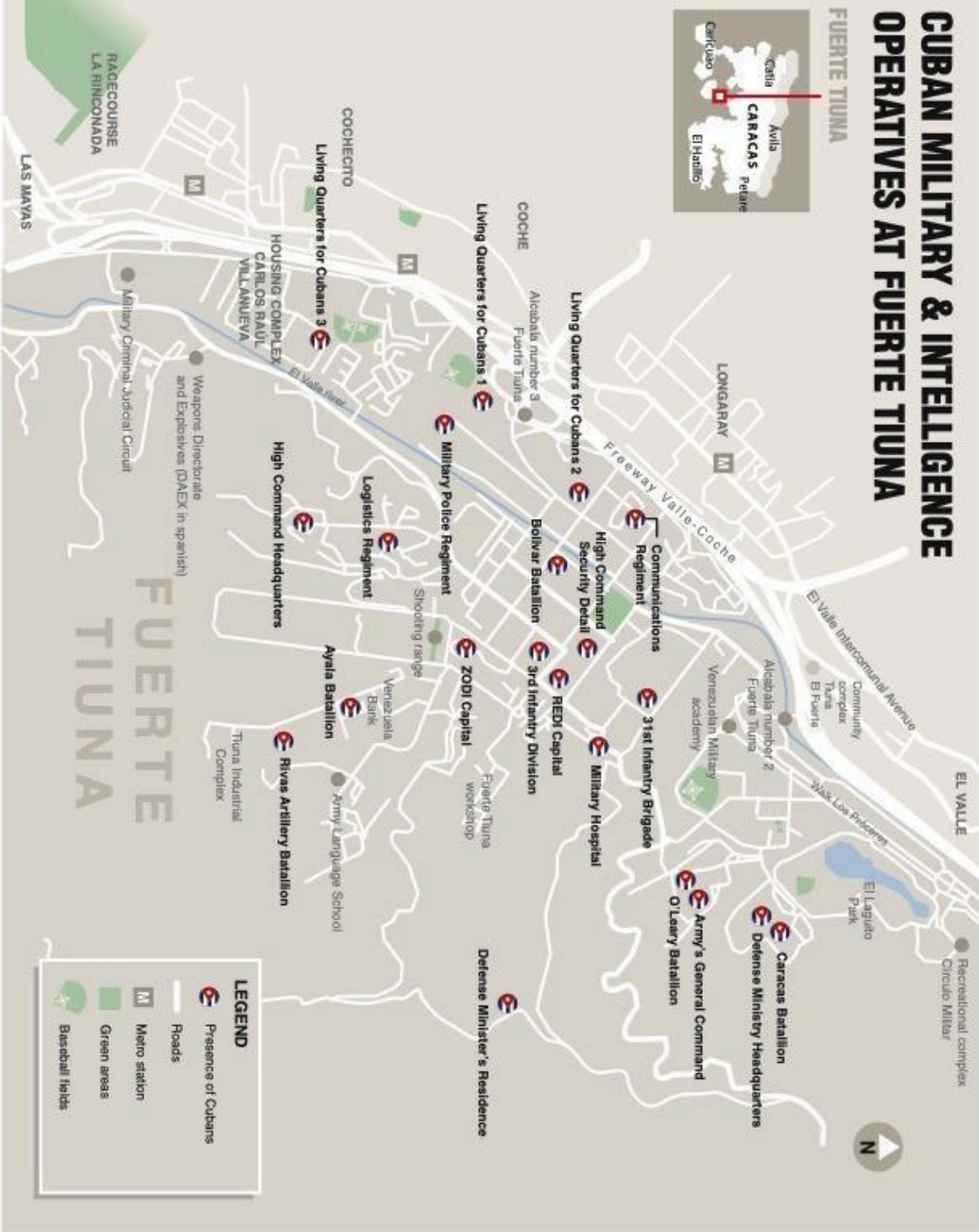
It is estimated that between 200 and 500 Cubans operate in Fort Tiuna at different times, their main mission being to monitor and contain discontent and/or subversive attitudes or actions inside the following military units:

- Military Police Regiment.
- Agraz Communications Battalion. (A group of Cubans also sleep at the Military Police facilities in this unit. This battalion handles two very important facets of the war: the electronic war and military counterespionage inside the Fort, two aspects in which the Cubans actively participate.
- Bolívar Infantry Battalion.
- Ayala Tank Battalion. (Overseen by Generals)
- O’Leary Battalion (the Army’s General Barracks Battalion, it reports to pro-Cuban General Jesús Suárez-Chourio, the Army’s Commander-in-Chief)
- Rivas Artillery Group.
- Communications Regiment.
- Language School (There is a hotel there that used to be used for officers passing through Caracas, but it is currently for the exclusive use of the Cubans at Fort Tiuna).

Cuban control consists of surveillance of Unit commanders, immediately reporting any suspicions, intimidating units, sowing terror, directing counter-measures to prevent desertion, information filtration and dissuasion tactics.

CUBAN MILITARY & INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVES AT FUERTE TIUNA

FUERTE TIUNA



Military chiefs at Fort Tiuna and their relationship with the Cubans

Most of the current members of the military high command in Venezuela were trained in Cuba and/or have received instructions from their Cuban counterparts for the command functions of all defensive activities in Venezuela.

General Vladimir Padrino, the current Minister of Defense, spends most of his time between the Miraflores Palace and Fort Tiuna. “He has a personal relationship with the Cubans in Venezuela” and acts as a “middleman” between the high-ranking military and the civil environment of Nicolás Maduro.

Admiral Remigio Ceballos, the current head of FANB’s Operating Strategic Command. He has entire operating responsibility for the Armed Forces. He was not trained in Cuba, but he travelled to the island a lot. “He wants to be a Minister and he has ambitions”, reports a source who is familiar with his activities. His promotion is to retire. “He is seen as a Taliban with radical stances. He is brilliant and well trained in the United States Marines Infantry,” added the source.

Major General Jesús Suárez-Chourio is an individual who is very close to the Cubans. He is seen as “Cuban” from the standpoint of military training and ideological loyalty. He was molded and trained in Havana and accompanied Chávez during his contacts with Havana “all the time”, since he was his bodyguard. He took the Military Staff course in Havana. “He is completely indoctrinated,” said the source.

Suárez-Chourio is the first cousin of Division General Christopher Figuera Chourio, the current head of the DGCIM, who for years was private assistant to Hugo Chávez, now deceased. Figuera Chourio was also trained entirely in Cuba and he worked as Chávez’s personal bodyguard during the last decade of his life.

General Iván Hernández Dala, who is completely loyal to Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores, is seen as one of the “brains” behind the throne. Hernández Dala is at the same time the head of the Military House and the DGCIM. He is considered to be the “Torturer in Chief”. Trained in Cuba. Indoctrinated. Both Hernández Dala and General Christopher Figueras, the current head of SEBIN, have a great relationship with the Cubans when it comes to persecuting and torturing opponents and dissidents.

There are other high-ranking members of the military who were trained by and adhere ideologically to Cuba and who occupy lesser positions, such as General Manuel Bernal Martínez, the commander of REDI Andes; he was also trained in Cuba.

The high military command acts under the supervision of Cuban agents, who attend meetings at the highest strategic level, according to reports issued by opposition Deputy Julio Borges.

“We are informed from inside our Armed Forces that 4 Cuban agents at the highest level, have attended the latest meetings of the Armed Forces Military Staff. This clearly shows that Nicolás

Maduro no longer trusts the military institution, which is why he is handing it over to them and his submission to Cuba is complete,” Deputy Borges stated recently.⁵²

The deputy also described the “repression” job done by the Cubans inside the barracks.

“Nicolás Maduro continues on in power in Venezuela thanks to the Cubans and they are the ones who handle the entire repressive apparatus against the Venezuelan Armed Forces and democratic factors. In view of this, it is very important that the free world not only puts pressure on the Maduro dictatorship, but also on the Cuban regime”, he said.

Bolivarian National Guard (GNB)

This component is responsible for controlling borders, customs, means of communication and public demonstrations among other things. The GNB’s central command is in Caracas, but it maintains 24 Zone command posts throughout the country, one for each territorial political entity (state) in Venezuela.⁵³

Forces of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior who are specialists in the control of public demonstrations and infiltration by opposition groups operate in the GNB.

The presence of Cubans in the GNB was highlighted in recent confrontations on the border between Venezuela and Colombia, particularly in the Venezuelan town of Ureña in the State of Táchira.

“The forces are attacking civilians in Ureña under the direction of Cuban agents disguised as Venezuelan national guards. The situation is becoming very tense and dangerous,” reported U.S. senator Marco Rubio.⁵⁴

Special Action Forces (FAES)

This body is the elite force of the Bolivarian National Police, which is currently in charge of large-scale repression throughout the country, under the leadership of Bolivarian National Guard Brigade General Rafael Bastardo Mendoza, and Freddy Bernal, both of them sanctioned by the OFAC.

⁵² Julio Borges denounces Cuban infiltration of FAN Military Staff, *Diario de las Américas*, March 15, 2019. See: <https://www.diariolasamericas.com/america-latina/julio-borges-denuncia-infiltracion-cubana-el-estado-mayor-superior-la-fan-n4173769>

⁵³ Citizen Control, op. cit., p. 26

⁵⁴ U.S. reports that “Cuban agents” in the Venezuelan National Guard are attacking demonstrators, Europress, February 23, 2019. See: <https://www.europress.es/internacional-noticia-eeuu-denuncia-agentes-cubanos-guardia-nacional-venezuela-estan-atacando-manifestantes-20190223163551.html>

“This is a body that is widely infiltrated by Cubans,” reckons Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas, a retired Venezuelan officer who put pressure on Hugo Chávez during the 2002 military uprising.

The FAES has its operational center in Caracas, but it moves all across the country, according to need. Freddy Bernal, who has maintained a trusted and privileged relationship with Havana since the seventies, coordinates with the Cubans on what type of operations to engage in and their scope. There are Cubans disguised as members of the FAES in critical zones, such as the border between the State of Táchira and Colombia, stated Colonel Rodríguez.

Bolivarian Militias

This component was created by the government of Hugo Chávez in apparent violation of constitutional law; it was established as a nationwide defensive body, also under the control of the Cubans.

The Militia is considered to be the fifth component of the FANB and falls directly under the purview of the President of the Republic, in his capacity as Commander in Chief of the FANB, although for operational aspects, it is commanded by a Division general and falls under the Ministry of Defense and the CEO-FANB.⁵⁵

According to official calculations, the Bolivarian Militia consists of about 1.6 million militiamen.⁵⁶ It was partly trained in Cuba, according to Venezuelan military expert Rocío San Miguel.⁵⁷

Collectives/Francisco de Miranda Front

The so-called Collective Groups, which are strongly-armed paramilitary bands that operate as the revolution’s militia guard, were an idea that Chávez and Fidel Castro came up with, inspired by the Cuban Rapid Action Brigades⁵⁸, and they have been systematically trained in three-month courses in Havana in which hundreds of these fanatics with a vast criminal record⁵⁹ have participated.

⁵⁵ Citizen Control, *ibidem*.

⁵⁶ “Maduro announces that the Bolivarian militia has 1.6 million members,” *El Comercio*, December 18, 2018. See: <https://elcomercio.pe/mundo/venezuela/nicolas-maduro-dice-milicia-bolivariana-1-6-millones-miembros-defender-venezuela-noticia-588910>

⁵⁷ “Venezuelan Militias would be trained in Cuba”, Radio Televisión Martí, June 6, 2014. See: <https://www.radiotelevisionmarti.com/a/milicias-de-venezuela-se-formar%C3%ADan-en-cuba/36038.html>

⁵⁸ “Venezuela and the death collectives”, Cubanet, April 7, 2017. See: <https://www.cubanet.org/opiniones/venezuela-y-los-colectivos-de-la-muerte/>

⁵⁹ “El Miranda: Chávez’s henchmen,” *El Tiempo de Colombia*, July 26, 2012. See: <https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/MAM-2115103>.

Their origin is to be found in the so-called Bolivarian Circles, which were created by Chávez at the beginning of his term in office and organized by Miguel Rodríguez Torres, the former head of SEBIN but currently in prison.

After the creation of the Collectives, Chávez decided to have them begin to form part of the defense strategy of the revolution in parallel with the Bolivarian National Armed Forces.

Their basic mission is to act as a “Praetorian Guard” for the revolution, for which they have a substantial arsenal of weaponry. They are financed by the government from the profits of their own criminal activities⁶⁰, including extortion and drug-trafficking.⁶¹

The collectives have participated in a diverse range of action in defense of the revolution, from supporting pro-government concentrations in the Venezuelan capital to the violent intimidation of opponents of the regime.⁶²

They recently began to act outside their natural enclaves in low-income districts within large cities and have also moved to border areas of conflict, such as the border between Venezuela and Colombia in the State of Táchira.⁶³ Through their new leadership and through Freddy Bernal – who heads the FAES paramilitary group and who trustworthy sources have stated that he has been working in close collaboration with the Cuban Ministry of the Interior since 1979 – they maintain fluid communications with the Cuban-led groups. It is estimated that infiltrated Cubans are operating inside the collectives, mainly in collectives such as La Piedrita, which controls the January 23 people’s zone in the Venezuelan capital.

Currently, the collectives, with their infiltrated Cubans, are playing a key role in the containment of the entry of humanitarian aid across the border with Colombia in the State of Táchira, as well as the flow of migration between the two nations through the so-called “trails”.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “The devolution of State Power: the ‘Colectivos’,” Insight Crime, May 18, 2018. See complete report at: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/devolution-state-power-colectivos/>.

⁶¹ “Armed civilian bands in Venezuela prop up unpopular president,” *The New York Times*, April 22, 2017. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/22/world/americas/armed-civilian-bands-in-venezuela-prop-up-unpopular-president.html?ref=nyt-es&mcid=nyt-es&subid=article>.

⁶² The threat of Chavist collectives to opposition demonstrators in Montalbán: “Eviten despertar nuestra furia”, Infobae, July 25, 2017. See: <https://www.infobae.com/americas/venezuela/2017/07/25/la-amenaza-de-los-colectivos-chavistas-a-los-manifestantes-opositores-en-montalban-eviten-despertar-nuestra-furia/>

⁶³ “The collectives, the threat lurking on the border between Colombia and Venezuela,” *El Espectador*, February 26, 2019.

See: <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/el-mundo/los-colectivos-la-amenaza-que-acecha-la-frontera-de-colombia-y-venezuela-articulo-842045>.

⁶⁴ “Collectives and irregular groups control passage along the trails on the border with Cúcuta,” *El Pitazo*, March 18, 2019. See: <http://elpitazo.net/los-andes/colectivos-y-grupos-irregulares-controlan-paso-por-las-trochas-en-la-frontera-con-cucuta/>

It is calculated that the collectives could comprise a contingent of more than 7,000 men in 16 states in the country, according to the most recent estimates.⁶⁵

Several of the most notable collectives, such as “Tres Raíces” maintain solid links to intelligence groups such as SEBIN, the military counter-intelligence agency (DGCIM) and the FAES.⁶⁶

Cubans and torture

Several Venezuelan non-government organizations have gathered testimony from political prisoners that mention the presence of Cuban personnel when they were being tortured.

The Casla Institute, a non-government organization dedicated to substantiating human rights violations in Venezuela and placing said files before the International Criminal Court, has documented 106 cases in 2018, in which 11 of the victims claim that their repressors were Cuban.

“This year, we have, for the first time, compiled 11 cases in which the witnesses told us that Cuban individuals, with Cuban accents, allegedly tortured them,” stated attorney-at-law Tamara Suju, the executive director of the Casla Institute.⁶⁷

The most common methods were beatings, chaining prisoners up and near-strangling them. The torturers also allegedly used tear gas and electric shocks to interrogate the detainees.

According to a report in *El Nuevo Herald* on March 20 last, the Casla Institute submitted an updated report to the Inter American Human Rights Commission in which it stated that “Cuban agents give orders to generals and they coordinate activities at clandestine torture centers in Venezuela and it pointed to a report that stated an increase in the systematic use of physical torment by Nicolás Maduro’s regime.”

Chancery

According to a source inside the so-called Yellow Palace, the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Cubans form part of a high-level advisory group that participates in foreign policy decision making in the actual office of Chancellor Jorge Arreaza.

⁶⁵ “Maduro’s muscle: motorcycle gangs known as ‘colectivos’ are the enforcers for Venezuela’s authoritarian leader,” *Sun Sentinel*, March 14, 2019. See: <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/nationworld/ct-maduro-venezuela-motorcycle-gangs-20190314-story.html>.

⁶⁶ “The Devolution of State Power: The ‘Colectivos’,” Insight Crime Report, May 18, 2018. See: <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/devolution-state-power-colectivos/>

⁶⁷ “The Casla Institute: 11 ‘torture victims’ in Venezuela reported that their torturers had a ‘Cuban accent’”, *El Universal*, November 27, 2018. See: <http://www.eluniversal.com/el-universal/26909/instituto-casla-11-torturados-en-venezuela-denunciaron-que-sus-victimarios-tenian-acento-cubano>

This advisory group also consists of Russian and Iranian experts. “The Cubans have access to the issuance of diplomatic passports,” the source claimed.

Social Missions

Cubans working with the different social missions that function under binational agreements, at the same time form part of contingents that can be activated in the event of a threat to the stability of the revolution.

The doctors themselves need to pass a period of intense military training in order to obtain their graduating diplomas. For the Castro regime, this turns them into a sort of military reserve that can be mobilized in Venezuela if need be. Meanwhile, as *The New York Times* of March 17 last has just revealed, they fulfill multiple functions that have nothing to do with their profession; some of these include being proselytizers and informants for the Cuban intelligence apparatus, scattered throughout the military and civil structures in Venezuela.

The figures for this group of Cubans that are publicly acknowledged have been gradually falling. The figure has allegedly dropped to 25,000 from 45,000 in 2012. But the Cuban Government can increase the number quickly, as it already did when it sent about 2,000 *supposed* doctors who recently got back from Brazil to close on a program there with President Bolsonaro, similar to the one that Chávez had introduced through the Lula Work Party.

Although the Cuban Ambassador in Caracas himself, Rogelio Polanco, estimated that there were 22,000 Cubans in Venezuela⁶⁸, the Secretary General of the OAS, Luis Almagro, calculated that there were currently 46,000 Cubans [there] “propping up” Nicolás Maduro in power.⁶⁹

Cuba and drug-trafficking in Venezuela

Although the reality of the integration of drug-trafficking at top government levels is, for Venezuela, a historic phenomenon without precedent, the history of the Cuban regime’s links to the movement of drugs has a long track record dating back four decades, according to experts and testimony.

So, it can be said that it was Cuba that advised, facilitated and cooperated with a group of Venezuelan military personnel and civilians to transform Venezuela into a narco-state, at the same time as they were teaching it to adopt socialist ideology and rhetoric to mask the true

⁶⁸ More than 22,000 Cubans will participate in the referendum in Venezuela, *Granma*, December 24, 2018. See: <http://www.granma.cu/mundo/2018-12-24/participaran-en-referendo-mas-de-22-mil-cubanos-en-venezuela-24-12-2018-09-12-55>

⁶⁹ Luis Almagro, the Secretary General of the OAS: “the 46 thousand Cubans engaged in repression and intelligence work and torture must leave Venezuela”, Nodal, December 19, 2018. See: <https://www.nodal.am/2018/12/luis-almagro-secretario-general-de-la-oca-los-46-mil-cubanos-realizando-tareas-de-represion-inteligencia-y-tortura-deben-desocupar-venezuela/>

nature of this Cuban-Venezuelan transnational criminal endeavor. After the drug-trafficking scandal in 1989, when the Cubans were discovered with their hands in the cookie jar, the Cubans set about searching for a way to resume these activities, but this time transferring the risks to their national to a third country, in the event that they were once again discovered.

Fidel Castro's first documented incursions into the drug business took place in 1978, with the creation of a department for Ministry of the Interior covert operations inside the Cuban corporation CIMEX, for money laundering and marijuana trafficking⁷⁰. CIMEX was registered in Panama by an official of Chilean origin called Max Marambio, alias "Guatón", so as to mingle legitimate commercial operations with covert ones under the umbrella of that corporation.

According to claims made by deserter Norberto Fuentes (he was the author of a book on the subject), at the beginning of the 80's, Commander Ramiro Valdés supervised Marambio's drug-running routes with a number of transshipments of marijuana using an island in northern Cuba called Bahía de Cadiz Key. In this case, the operation was personally approved by Fidel Castro.⁷¹

In 1982, the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida indicted four Cuban officials for drug-trafficking activities. The accused included Castro's first ambassador to Colombia, Fernando Ravelo Renedo, and his subordinate, Gonzalo Bassols, for facilitating, in exchange for shipments of weapons for the Colombian guerrilla M-19, the smuggling of large shipments of marijuana and metacualude to the US through Cuban waters and territories.

The Cuban side of the operation was initially arranged by Ravelo and Bassols with and Colombian drug trafficker Jaime Guillot Lara. The actual smuggling was protected and supported by Cuba's coastguard and Navy ships, which is the reason that the chief of the Cuban Navy, Vice Admiral Aldo Santamaría Cuadrado, was also charged. Indicted as well was the president of the Cuban Institute of Friendship with the Peoples (ICAP) René Rodríguez Cruz. Santamaría and Rodríguez were members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba.⁷²

The entire decade of the 80's saw an increase in Cuba's cooperation with large-scale drug trafficking that originated in Colombia. According to claims in two sets of testimony, one by Mrs. Ayda Levy, the widow of Roberto Suárez Gómez⁷³, and hit man and leader of the Medellín Cartel, John Jairo Velásquez, better known as "Popeye", Pablo Escobar entered into a solid agreement with Fidel and Raúl Castro to transfer cocaine through Cuba for shipment to the United States, at the rate of 10 to 12 tons per flight, for which the Castro brothers charged

⁷⁰ *Narcotráfico y tareas revolucionarias. El concepto cubano*, Norberto Fuentes, Ediciones Universal, Miami, 2001, p. 96.

⁷¹ *Idem*, p. 104-105.

⁷² United States Of America V. Jaime Guillot-Lara, Fernando Ravelo-Renedo... <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/drugs/indictment-82.htm>

⁷³ *The King of Cocaine, My life with Roberto Suárez Gómez and the birth of the first narco state*, Ayda Levy, Edición Vintage Español, New York, 2012. The book dedicates a chapter to "The Cuban Connection", from pp. 133 to 144.

“\$2,000 per kilo of cocaine shipped and \$200 for each kilo in custodianship,” wrote Popeye in his book *The Real Pablo*.⁷⁴

Other witnesses who managed to escape from the Island revealed that the Colombians kept a fleet of 13 boats and 21 planes operating in Cuban territory, through the Colombian drug trafficker Carlos Lehder and other operators.

According to this testimony, the Cuban Special Forces played a key role in the shipments of cocaine to the United States⁷⁵. In 1982, a federal grand jury in Miami indicted four Cuban officials for drug trafficking.

In 1988, five members of an anti-drug network based in Miami were sentenced for smuggling \$10 million worth of cocaine into the United States through Cuba the previous year, and one of the conspirators revealed that Tony de la Guardia, one of Fidel Castro’s favorite operators, actively participated in the drug-trafficking operations.

The following year, Fidel and Raúl Castro oversaw a dramatic trial in Havana of several of their top officials, including General Arnaldo Ochoa and Colonel Tony de la Guardia, on charges of organizing a drug distribution network, so as to rid themselves of the drug-trafficking indictments filed against them in the United States.

But what went away in 1989 when Bill Clinton put the charges against Castro on the back burner, was reactivated when Hugo Chávez swept into power in 1999.

The Cuban intelligence services, which had already had contacts in the mafioso world of international drug-trafficking crime since the seventies, began to see the potential of bringing two networks together that would become the largest suppliers of cocaine in the world; the communist narco-guerillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) with whom they were already acquainted, and the Venezuelan security forces with whom they would now forge closer ties.⁷⁶

With the help of Cuban spies, who had their own clandestine networks of agents throughout the region and the United States, as well as more than four decades of experience in covert operations, the Venezuelan military, which Chávez used to arm his government, set up what began to be called the Cartel of the Suns, referring to the sun emblems on the uniforms of the Venezuelan generals.

Although the flow of drugs was kept under control during the Chávez era, with the arrival of Nicolás Maduro the drug trafficking and money laundering reached unprecedented levels.

⁷⁴ “The secret history of the relationship between Fidel Castro and Pablo Escobar,” Infobae, November 28, 2016. See: <https://www.infobae.com/america/america-latina/2016/11/28/la-historia-secreta-sobre-la-relacion-entre-fidel-castro-y-pablo-escobar/>

⁷⁵ “How Cuba helped make Venezuela a Mafia State”, *The Daily Beast*, June 2, 2018. See: <https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-cuba-helped-make-venezuela-a-mafia-state>.

⁷⁶ *Idem*.

The 2010 capture of drug trafficker Walid Makled showed that the drug-trafficking networks reached into the top military command in Venezuela. The phenomenon prompted the United States to punish dozens of officials because of their links to drug-trafficking.

A good number of these officials were high-ranking officers in the police force or intelligence service, organizations that were advised by and in some cases practically controlled by Cuban intelligence agents.

Money laundering

For decades, the Cartel of the Suns, under the command of Diosdado Cabello, jointly with other cartels in the region, and especially with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Sinaloa cartel, developed a parallel economy well-funded by cocaine trafficking and a huge money laundering machine, basically assembled on top of Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) infrastructure.

According to an investigation by National Security Adviser Douglas Farah, Venezuela developed, jointly with FARC and government operators in Nicaragua and El Salvador, a money laundering and cocaine trafficking machinery using PDVSA agreements with these countries to justify the flow of money that actually came from drug trafficking.

Cuba played a role in this laundering strategy that linked players such as Tarek El Aissami and Elías Jaua in Venezuela, Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua and José Luis Merino in El Salvador to organizations such as Albanisa and the organization of Sandinista mayors, Alba Petróleo, the FARC in Colombia and established businessmen in the United States.

For example, according to Farah, during the peace negotiations that Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos held with the FARC in Havana, several operations took place involving the transfer to Cuba of cash that the Colombian guerrillas were keeping hidden in caches in Colombia.

Farah said that he confirmed that the FARC removed from Colombia more than \$2,000 million in cash with Cuba's help.

“What FARC did was get the drug trafficking money out of Colombia to Cuba on the negotiators' flights. And since President Santos granted diplomatic pouch privileges, the FARC could get anything it wanted out. In this way they managed to get a lot of the cash they had buried, and gold and other things, out to Cuba, where they linked up with the structure of their big buddy and friend of the FARC, Salvadorean José Luis Merino, known as Commander Ramiro,” said Farah.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ FARC terrorists laundered \$2,000 million through Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, *La Tribuna del País Vasco*, October 29, 2017.

See:

The Caracas-Havana drug connection

The most recent episode implicating the Havana regime in the shipment of drugs and money laundering in combination with top officials in Venezuela took place over the last two years, and it involved the use of PDVSA aircraft for the transfer of drugs and large amounts of cash from Venezuela to Cuba.

According to sources that were consulted for this report, several federal agencies are keeping open a criminal investigation into a drug-trafficking and money-laundering network through which dozens of tons of cocaine are shipped weekly in at least five planes registered in the name of PDVSA; these planes land on runways controlled by the Cuban government.

Several of the planes, which are loaded with drugs or cash, land at the Jardines del Rey airport in the northeast of Cuba for unloading.

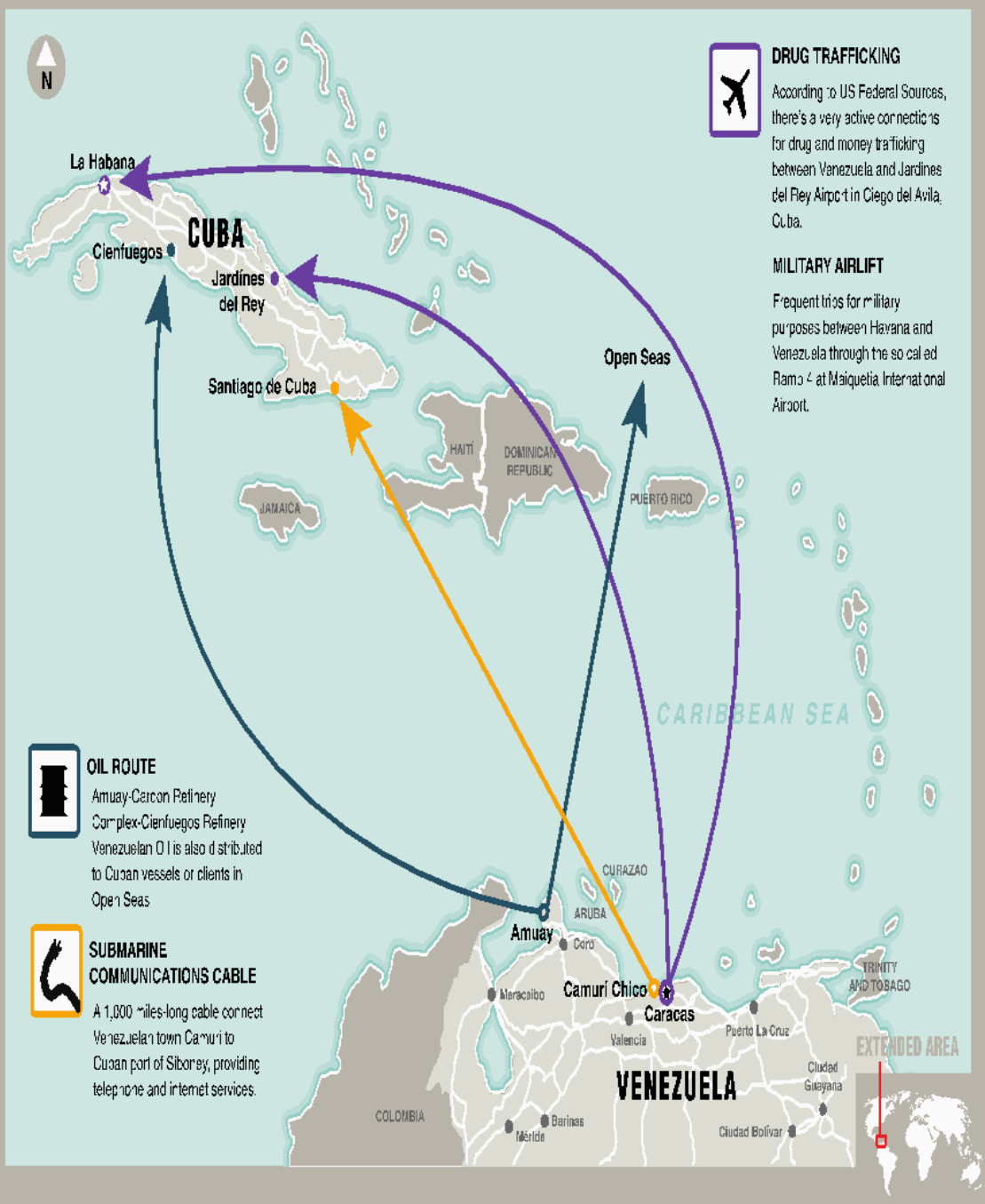
According to witnesses who are currently protected by the U.S. government, Cuba received up to 30 percent of the cash amounts brought in from Venezuela, in exchange for making transfers to bank accounts in the United States, in order to legitimize the money earned from drug-trafficking.

The investigation, in which several prosecutors participated in coordination with the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, confirmed that part of this money laundered on the orders of the government was transferred to businesses set up in the United States in order to purchase equipment and parts for the oil industry, which were then exported to Venezuela or sold on the international market to obtain foreign currency that was already laundered.

This network, of which top officials in Nicolás Maduro's regime were members, also operated in connection with other companies and operators in Nicaragua and El Salvador, that formed part of the Petrocaribe agreements fomented and financed by PDVSA.

<https://latribunadelpaisvasco.com/art/7526/los-terroristas-de-las-farc-blanquean-2000-millones-de-dolares-a-traves-de-cuba-nicaragua-y-venezuela>.

VENEZUELA-CUBA STRATEGIC CONNECTIONS



About the Authors

Juan Antonio Blanco (Cuba, 1947).

Juan A. Blanco holds a PhD in History of International Relations from the University of Havana. He took a postgraduate training in Conflict Transformation at the UN University of Peace. In Cuba he worked as a university professor. Later on he served as a diplomat in Cuba's Mission to the United Nations (NY) where he acted as facilitator of negotiations for the Bureau of Non Aligned Countries of that international movement. His last governmental assignment was as senior analyst of US-Cuba relations for the Communist Party of Cuba Central Committee's Department of the Americas.

After his defection in Canada, he became the Director for Latin American programs at Human Rights Internet, an international NGO based in Ottawa. As such he assisted the first democratically elected government of Mexico in establishing its first dialogue with the country's human rights NGO community. In the United States he worked as invited Assistant Director at the Cuban Research Institute of Florida International University, and later on as Executive Director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Initiatives at Miami Dade College.

As an international analyst of Cuba's foreign policy, Mr. Blanco has been invited to make presentations at prestigious universities and think-tanks in the United States and Europe, such as the Council for Foreign Relations, the Inter-American Dialogue, Rey Juan Carlos University, and Madrid's Elcano Royal Institute. He is often invited to participate in TV and radio shows on Cuba and other international relations topics.

Juan A. Blanco is currently the Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in Cuba.

Rolando Cartaya (Cuba, 1952)

Graduated at the School of Journalism, University of Havana. Cartaya worked for the arts & culture section of Cuba's newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*. In the United States has worked for United Press International, Voice of America's WorldNet service, and as an editor of the Spanish-language editions of *Newsweek*, *Discover* and *Motor Trend* magazines. Translated more than 20 books for Thomas Nelson, Inc, a Christian-oriented publisher.

With the US government Radio Martí since 1989, has been editor, newswriter, reporter, special envoy and director and scriptwriter since 2001 of the program *Sin Censores y Censura* with Cuba's independent press. From 2012 to 2019, was writer-editor of the martinoticias.com website. Has been a guest analyst of Cuban issues for the TV programs *Levántate Cuba* (Martí) and *Ahora con Oscar Haza* (Mega TV). In the late 1980's was a vice president of the Cuban Committee for Human Rights, an organization that pioneered the human rights movement on the island.

Luis Domínguez (Cuba, 1962)

He left Cuba in 1971 when he was 8 years old and lived in the Canary Islands until moving to Hartford, Connecticut in 1978. He currently resides in Miami Florida and is an expert in Internet research.

He founded Secretos Cuba Forum, and is currently the director of Cuba al Descubierto blog. Many of the articles of the blog have been written about in the first page of *El Nuevo Herald* and the *Miami Herald*, articles such as “Cuba-Espionaje”, “En la Mira el proceso de paz en Colombia” (2014), “Aviones de Lujos para La Habana” (2014), “Revelan datos de varias figuras del régimen Cubano” (2011), “Fidel’s son tricked in a revealing love sting” (2009).

His work has been published in TV Marti: “La secreta vida de lujos de Fidel Castro” (2017), “Amplio centro de espionaje en la Embajada de Cuba en Colombia” (2018). Luis Domínguez is often invited to many television news shows including “A Fondo”, and “El Espejo” in Americateve, and would previously appear in “A Mano Limpia”, and “María Elvira Live.”

Casto Ocando (Venezuela, 1965)

Ocando is an independent investigative reporter who has developed an extensive career in Hispanic media in the United States and Latin America. Throughout his career, Ocando has specialized in topics like corruption/money laundering, drug trafficking and transnational crime in Latin America, with particular emphasis on Venezuela, where he is originally from.

Ocando is the autor of *Chavistas en el Imperio*, an extensive investigation that covered more than a decade of the troubled dealings of the Hugo Chavez regime and its associates, in the United States. He holds a B.S. on Journalism from the University of Zulia, Venezuela.

His work has been awarded by important American organizations. In 2014 he received an Emmy Award, and also an Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) Award for co-producing a documentary about Mexican drug lord Chapo Guzman (*El Chapo: el Eterno Fugitivo*). In 2013 he was part of the investigative team that received a Peabody Award from the University of Georgia as co-producer of the documentary *Fast and Furious*, about a failed federal operation to track guns sold to smugglers that went to Mexican Cartels. A year before, in 2012, a Telly Award by his work of investigative reporter in the documentary *The Iranian Threat (La Amenaza Iraní en América Latina)*. In 2008 Ocando received the Benjamin Spears Award, issued by the Overseas Press Club of America, the oldest press club in the U.S., for his coverage of the Venezuelan Crisis for *The Miami Herald*. Ocando has also received the Sunshine State Journalism Award (2008), the most important in Florida, and several distinctions by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ).

Between 2002 and 2010 Ocando served as an investigative journalist for The Miami Herald Media Company. Between 2011 and 2014, he worked as News Consultant and Associate Producer for Univision Media Company. Since 2014, he has been working as independent Investigative Reporter for several news and corporate outlets and firms.