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Politics

### International media distorts border reality

Instead of recognizing the rights of Venezuela to stop paramilitary violence and illegal smuggling along its border with Colombia, a new smear campaign against the Bolivarian Revolution aims to discredit its struggle for peace and safety. **Page 3**

### Opposition extremists sentenced for 2014 violence

After 18 months of judicial process, radical members of the US-backed opposition were finally sentenced for their involvement in the 2014 street violence that left 43 people dead and hundreds more wounded. **Page 4**

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### Venezuela, Vietnam and China build new alliances

As part of ongoing efforts to consolidate a multi-polar world, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro visited both Vietnam and China to sign numerous trade and development deals. Recognizing both nations for their heroic resistance to imperialism, President Maduro called on Venezuelans to understand the shared histories and values between the peoples of all Global South nations. **Page 6**

# CORREO | DEL | ORINOCO

Friday, September 25, 2015 | N° 222 | Caracas | www.correodelorinoco.gob.ve **ENGLISH EDITION** / *The artillery of ideas* **INTERNATIONAL**

## Venezuela disrupts paramilitary violence, takes firm action along border with Colombia



In a widely popular decision considered urgent by most Venezuelans, President Nicolas Maduro launched an historic effort to tighten security along the border with Colombia and prevent the spread of paramilitary violence and other illegal activities. Just weeks after thousands of police and military personnel were sent to strengthen controls along the porous border with neighboring Colombia, dozens of paramilitaries have been captured, thousands of liters of gasoline prevented from leaving the country, and tons of foods, medicines, and other basic goods returned to the Venezuelan people. In spite of the attacks on his new policy by corporate media and the Colombian elite, President Maduro committed to maintaining the effort until the border becomes both “peaceful and productive”. **Page 2**

### Venezuela to take in 20,000 syrian refugees

T/ TeleSUR English  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro announced this month that his country will receive 20,000 Syrian refugees fleeing Western interventionism, war and violence.

This is the same number of refugees U.K. Prime Minister David Cameron committed his country to accepting over the next five years.

Speaking to the press, Maduro also spoke about the U.S. and its Western allies and their ongoing attempts to topple the Syrian government of President Bashar Assad, who was democratically elected.



Instead, Maduro said, those countries should seek to promote peace in Syria, where a U.S. and Europe-backed civil war that began in 2011 has left over 250,000 people dead and over 11 million displaced, including 3 million externally.

The U. N. agency for refugees recently reported that Venezuela has received over 200,000 refugees in just the last couple of years, of which over 95 percent are Colombians looking to avoid the violence, poverty and war that reigns in neighboring Colombia.



### Presidents of Venezuela and Colombia meet in Ecuador

T/ Telesur English  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa read a statement including a 7-point agreement following a mediated closed-door meeting between Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his Colombian counterpart, Juan Manuel Santos in the capital of Ecuador on Monday.

Correa affirmed the importance of bilateral dialogue and international respect in resolving tensions and disputes.

“There can be differences (between the two countries), but the love, affection ... allow any difficulty to be overcome”, President Correa said.

Reading from the 7-point statement, the Ecuadorian leader said that Venezuela and Colombia would reinstate their ambassadors, carefully investigate the border situation, while working to progressively normalize the border. The two countries will also continue talks supported by Uruguay and Ecuador, with a follow up meeting of ministers scheduled for Sept. 23.

“I’ve told our peoples, there is no room for hatred, for intolerance or for revenge”, said President Maduro, adding that peace always triumphs in the end in an effort to promote brotherhood between the two countries.

Correa also added that the two countries will examine how to cooperate despite their different economic models.

“We have two very different models of country development models”, President Santos said. “But we can work toward common goals agreed to by our two peoples”.

The meeting between the two leaders was facilitated by Correa and Uruguayan President Tabare Vazquez and held under the auspices of Unasur and CELAC Latin American regional blocs.

T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Agencies

Paramilitaries, smuggling, drug-running, currency manipulation, and even child prostitution “infiltrated” from Colombia are some of the problems which forced Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to close strategic crossings along the Colombian border this month, declaring a State of Emergency in most of the border municipalities and calling for a “new type of border - one of peace, of productivity”.

Following the closure of the highly transited border crossing in Tachira State along with strong pressure from his allies, Maduro has extended the measure to include the Zulia State and Apure State border crossings. Only the Amazonian crossing remains open.

“The pressure I put on the initial zones showed very positive results” explained Maduro. “It will be applied to four new zones to exert the control needed in order to clean up our border”.

The “positive results” which Maduro mentions have been felt by nearly the entire Venezuelan population, but in particular those living in the border regions.

The newly created social mission “Borders of Peace” is tasked with “creating a border with a fair, healthy, economic life” and provide an alternative to money laundering, currency manipulation, or other damaging economic activities. It also looks to ensure the execution of social programs in housing, education, and health to those living on the border.

In the indigenous Guajira border region of Zulia State, the national government has already announced plans to rehabilitate 150 schools, donate 10 new buses, 1,660 Canaima laptops and 1,900 grants for school children, as well as to invest in roads and hospitals.

#### LESS SMUGGLING, LESS SHORTAGES

During the first two weeks of the border closure, some 500 tons of food which were due to be extracted from Venezuela through smuggling had been confiscated by authorities.



## Border with Colombia to become “peaceful and productive”

Before the closure, it was estimated that 40% of subsidized food products were smuggled out of the country, creating shortages, black market and generating enormous profits for the smugglers.

“The classic corn flour for ‘arepas’” explained Tachira Governor Vielma Mora “costs 19 bolivars in Venezuela and in Cucuta (Colombia) 650 bolivars”. Other products found in their truckloads or in secret underground deposits include sugar, meat, chicken, cooking oil, and rice.

Gasoline extraction smuggling has also effectively stopped, with more than 30 million liters of gasoline confiscated in the first few weeks. It is estimated that by reducing gasoline extraction smuggling the State will save roughly USD \$10.9 billion a year.

“A tanker-load of petrol costs \$6 in Venezuela, but \$31.600 in Colombia” so explained Carabobo Governor Francisco Ameliach. “This is a profit margin of 526,700%”. Such smuggling

was previously commonplace on the border, as the most profitable economic activity.

Since closing the border, basic products have started appearing with more regularity across the country, and residents in border regions have also reported that queues for food and petrol disappeared almost overnight.

#### A BORDER OF PEACE

Another of the significant benefits being felt is in crime fighting: “the border has become rotten” explained Maduro. “We are the victims of capitalism, the paramilitary capitalism of the Colombian Right” where “a new economic class, the drug-trafficking bourgeoisie transformed itself into the paramilitary bourgeoisie, imposed their rules on Colombia, organized parallel armies, and rule through drug gangs”.

Venezuela has been “infiltrated” by such groups, he proclaimed, “because the North gave the order to destroy the nation of Bolivar”.

Since closing the border, more than 100 paramilitaries have been arrested in Venezuela, often with long distance weapons, grenades, military uniforms and other equipment, and more than 200 illegal crossings destroyed. Vielma Mora also announced “basements used for torture and rape of kidnapped victims” and “children prostitution rings” discovered in Tachira.

High profile assassinations by Colombian paramilitaries such as that of Venezuelan lawmaker Robert Serra have rocked the nation recently.

#### DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS

As tensions remain high between the two neighbors, efforts to resolve the border problems through consensus were greatly advanced by the announcement of a Presidential meeting between Santos and Maduro.

“I am putting all of my will into diplomacy” stated Maduro before the meeting. “We need frank dialogue for solutions which the people of Co-

lombia and Venezuela want” stated Maduro.

As both nations enter election periods, President Santos sabre-rattled against his homologue before ceding to the meeting.

Diplomatic efforts have been made difficult by accusations of air space violations, as well as accusations of human rights abuses. A Venezuelan military jet mysteriously disappeared whilst patrolling the border in a separate incident.

1,482 Colombians have been deported from Venezuela for a series of crimes including smuggling or being undocumented since the closure. There are currently five million Colombians living in Venezuela, with roughly 25,000 emigrating from Colombia every year to the cheaper, more secure Venezuela with its free health and education and low cost transport and housing.

The recently created “Bolivarian Movement of Colombians Living in Venezuela” backed up Maduro’s measures and “denounced and rejected the paramilitaries” as “a strategy of imperialist wars in association with the extreme right in Colombia and Venezuela which looks to suffocate and destabilize the integration and unity of the Latin American peoples”.

Following the Colombian Governments accusations against Venezuela of human rights abuses, Venezuela’s Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez denounced manipulation of the facts: “yet again, transnational communications firms which respond to the interests of Capital are trying to distort the reality... to sell a great lie, a media spin”.

President Maduro has underlined his solidarity with the Colombian people against the activities of the bourgeois narco-paramilitary class be they in Colombia or Venezuela: “we have never had even an ounce of anti-Colombianism, never; we will never fall into the game of hating which Bogota has launched against us”.

Recent polls in Venezuela suggest that more than 62% of the Venezuelans support the strong measures taken by Maduro, and which are expected to continue into Christmas.



## Anti-smuggling efforts lead to corruption arrests

T/ Rachael Boothroyd Rojas,  
venezuelanalysis.com  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

Venezuelan authorities this month intercepted three state oil company (PDVSA) chartered tankers loaded with illegal cargos of fuel and allegedly en route to the Caribbean.

Speaking to press agencies, Andres Gomez Rojas, Admiral and Commander of Zodi-mainoc (Operative Zone for Integral Maritime Defence and Western Peninsular) confirmed that his forces had made the discovery after raiding three tankers on the Peninsular of Paraguana as part of ongoing efforts to halt illegal contraband.

One of the ships, “La Negra Hipolita,” was reportedly carrying a cargo of at least 60,000 barrels of diesel, despite only being authorized to transport 10,000 barrels.

Seven employees at the Venezuelan state-owned oil firm PDVSA have been arrested in relation to the incident, including La Negra Hipolita’s Captain and First Mate. All are accused of smuggling extracted goods and association to commit crime by Venezuela’s Public Prosecution. Authorities believe that the crew intended to resell the fuel at a significant profit abroad.

“They were taking it to the Caribbean, we put handcuffs on them and now they’re prisoners”, stated Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in relation to the recent PDVSA arrests. Maduro has publicly vowed to “go after” state and public officials who collaborate in the fuel smuggling racket.

Nonetheless, the PDVSA employees’ legal defense has

attributed the six-times overloaded tanker to an “administrative error” and a failure in communications.

Over the past month the government has ramped up its efforts to halt the illegal contraband of tons of highly subsidised fuel out of the country, even taking the controversial measure of closing the Venezuelan-Colombia border in the smuggling hotspot of Cucuta.

At least 50 members of the National Guard have since been arrested by authorities for their participation in border smuggling.

### TOP HEALTH DIRECTOR ARRESTED

The PDVSA arrests were followed by the controversial detention of the Director of Health Economy for the Ministry of Health, Jose Gregorio Velasquez Lozada, who is also accused of smuggling vital medicines.

Some 531,000 medical items are alleged to have left Lozada’s department without being accounted for. They were later located at a warehouse in Aragua state by the Bolivarian National Guard following a tip-off.

Lozada, whose accounts have also been temporarily frozen, is reported to have authorized the deviation of the items from their original destination.

Three other arrests have been made in relation to the discovery of the cache, including that of an airforce lieutenant who is reported to have been involved in transporting the contraband items.

Last year, the former Minister of Health, Eugene Sader, was arrested on three charges relating to corruption and the misuse of funds. The ex-minister continues to protest her innocence.

# Venezuela: international media is trying to distort reality



T/ Telesur English  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodriguez denounced this month that international media were looking to “scam” the world over what is happening on the border between Venezuela and Colombia.

“The transnational corporate media is trying to distort the reality on the ground”, she said during her speech at an international human rights conference in Caracas.

“Venezuela isn’t violating the human rights of our Colombian brothers and sisters”, she explained. “Venezuela is looking to protect the lives and dignity of all those who live in Venezuela and along the border, whatever their national origin”, she added.

The conference titled “International Human Rights on the Border: Implications of the Mass Colombian Exodus” took place at the Teresa Carreño theater in central Caracas.

She highlighted that since President Nicolas Maduro decreed a state of exception in August to combat the crime, paramilitarism, and contraband affecting Venezuela, mainstream media in Venezuela, the U.S., and elsewhere have

attempted to misrepresent the reality on the border.

Corporate media outlets around the world have reported on the repatriations of over 1,000 undocumented Colombians on the Venezuelan border back to Colombia, stating that this was a violation of human rights. They have, however, ignored the crime, youth prostitution, and paramilitarism that was discovered by the Venezuelan military in the area during border operations, which was the impetus of the repatriations.

There has also been very little mention in the mainstream media of the fact that Venezuela has received more than 5 million Colombians over the country’s half-century long internal conflict.

“They are trying to sell a great lie to the world”, said Rodriguez. “Maduro has closed the border with Colombia in order to contain the paramilitary threat ... And this paramilitarism has penetrated the structures of the Venezuelan opposition”.

Rodriguez remembered the assassination of the Venezuelan National Assembly representative Robert Serra, who was killed last year by paramilitaries in Caracas.

During her speech, Rodriguez highlighted that the Ven-

ezuelan constitution guarantees the human rights of all people, and she called on the world to “reflect on the causes of world migration ... not just in neighboring Colombia, which has one of the highest levels of forced displacement”.

In Rodriguez’s speech, she cited statistics from international organizations that in 2014 there were 60 million displaced people in the world who did not have access to basic human rights.

“Let us come together to act against the causes”, she said. “This is a humanitarian crisis ... as a result of the crisis of an economic model that is not sustainable for people or the planet”.

Venezuelan Executive Vice President Jorge Arreaza reiterated Rodriguez’s point, adding that

“the mainstream media continuously fails to report on the true reasons behind migrations and refugee crises - war, poverty, and an economic system that benefits ruling elites”.

“Instead of millions of Venezuelans fleeing what the mainstream media calls a ‘failed socialist project’, the reality is that millions of Colombians continue to flee the results of capitalism, war and exclusion”, he added.

# Opposition extremists sentenced for 2014 violence

T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Agencies

Following 70 sessions and over 100 pieces of evidence, US-backed opposition extremist Leopoldo Lopez and three others were found guilty this month of instigating intentional arson, damage to public property, and criminal association following their role in the 2014 street protests which caused the death of dozens of people in a failed attempt to end the democratically-elected government of President Nicolas Maduro. Lopez, who led the calls for Maduro's ouster, was sentenced to almost 14 years in prison. A fifth extremist fled to Miami before sentencing.

Lopez was tried alongside Demain Garcia and Angel Gonzalez who both received four years and six months each. Also charged was Christian Holdack, who received ten years, six months and seven days. All were charged under Articles 37, 83, 285, 343, 473, and 474 of the Penal Code, and Articles 27 and 29 of the Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing Law.

Marco Coello - also on trial - escaped sentencing after he fled to Miami a week before the verdict. He is now requesting political asylum despite a red alert on Interpol for his capture.

Harvard-educated Lopez and the others were charged for their



involvement in the activities of February 2014, when, following a rally in Caracas, "the politician made declarations in the press and the social networking sites that clearly incited his supporters to generate violence in the streets... actions which unleashed a negative euphoria and which led to the attack against the Public Ministry".

Lopez later led "The Exit" movement in which fascist protests, street barricades, and paramilitary activities left 43

citizens dead and more than 800 injured in attempts to overthrow the Government. He was not charged for these crimes.

## LIGHT SENTENCE

The Guarimba Victims Committee, made up of those who have suffered directly the violent acts of Lopez and his followers, celebrated the imprisonment of Lopez, proclaiming that "our struggle hasn't been in vain", but commented that "it wasn't the justice which

we waited for... there were 43 deaths and 878 injured". They suggested bringing further charges against him.

The Patria Para Todos and Venezuelan Communist party issued similar statements, explaining that "in the streets people feel indignation for an unjust decision for the man responsible for 43 deaths", whilst recognizing this "victory in the fight against impunity against someone who tried to drive the country to violence".

Socialist Party spokesperson Jorge Rodriguez explained that Lopez "should thank God that this trial happened in Venezuela, because if he had committed the same crimes in the USA he would have been given the death penalty or various life sentences... if he instigated the beheading of motorbike riders, the murder of bus drivers, if he had burnt the US Congress, if instead of promoting a coup in Venezuela he had done it against Barack Obama, what would the Washington Post have said then?".

The Washington Post and US State Department, who expressed their "deep concern", have led international support for Lopez following the verdict.

National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello "rejected" the verdict for "being unjust" to the memory of the 43 victims.

"This man should be tried for instigating murder. I hope there are new accusations in this process so that he be tried for terrorism and murder. How can one explain to people that the man responsible for the deaths of their father, their mother, the man who had people beheaded, is only going to serve a sentence of 13 years in prison?"

With 18 months already behind bars, Lopez is now expected to serve the remaining 12 years of his sentence in Ramo Verde Military Prison.

## Regional bodies reject foreign meddling in Lopez verdict

T/ Lucas Koerner, venezuelanalysis.com  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

The Latin American regional blocs, ALBA and PetroCaribe, issued statements this month rejecting foreign government interference in the Venezuelan judiciary's conviction of violent opposition radical Leopoldo Lopez.

Lopez was sentenced to thirteen years in prison for his role in leading last year's violent anti-government protests, known as the "barricades," or guarimba, that led to the death of 43 people, over half of whom were security personnel and passerbyers.

Following the ruling, representatives of various anti-Bolivarian governments, including US Secretary of State John Kerry, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, the Chilean Senate, as well as the foreign ministries of Costa Rica, Peru, and Paraguay, publicly assailed the court decision, making accusations regarding the fairness of the trial.

In response, the Bolivarian Alliance for the People of Our America (ALBA) released a statement opposing the posture of those states that "seek to interfere or intervene in the... judicial decisions adopted in Venezuela by the corresponding public organ."

The eleven countries that make up the regional bloc also



denounced the "double standard" in which foreign governments "attempt to hide the grave human rights violations in their own territories" by attacking Venezuela.

Also this month, the nineteen nations conforming PetroCaribe likewise issued a declaration affirming their "policy of respect and of non-intervention in the internal affairs of the

nations devoted to our historic struggle for emancipation".

"We recognize and respect the full exercise of judicial power within a democratic, constitutionally lawful state, such as that of Venezuela, where the competent judicial organ has in exercise of its sovereign jurisdiction, issued a sentence in order to confront terrorist acts and ensure the effective safe-

guard of the human rights of the victims".

The declarations by the regional blocs echo an official statement emitted last week by the General Secretary's office of the Union of South American States (UNASUR) underlining the organization's "respect for the decisions adopted by the juridical authorities of its member states".

ALBA was founded in 2004 by Presidents Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro as an alternative to the US-proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, and to promote regional social and economic integration on the basis of solidarity-oriented development.

PetroCaribe was established in 2005 also on the initiative of President Hugo Chávez to provide neighboring Caribbean nations with Venezuelan oil at preferential rates, which is repayed with exports and medium to long-term credit.



## Struggle against economic war continues

T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Agencies

As part of ongoing efforts by the Bolivarian Revolution and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro to counter the economic war being waged against working families in Venezuela, numerous people were arrested for hoarding and price speculation this month.

Profiting off of regulated prices, subsidized imports, high inflation, and black markets created by shortages, the practice of buying products and hoarding them away for informal resale has become a serious problem for average Venezuelans.

In one example this month two public workers in Tachira State were found with 72 tons of basic products in their homes including 105,000 diapers, 60 tons of sugar, toilet paper, and nine tons of vegetable oil all destined for speculative resale or extraction smuggling.

"If they are involved in an act of corruption, or if they took advantage of their jobs as public workers, then they must face the Venezuelan justice system" declared Tachira Governor Vielma Mora.

Similarly, a restaurant owner in Yaracuy State was arrested for hoarding, modifying products, and overpricing at Pronto Market Restaurant. Popular price inspectors found 179 packets of diapers, 198 packets of sanitary towels, 1,293 razors and 69 boxes of razors, 115 packets of detergent, and 669 boxes of fruit juice all illegally hoarded with the intention of generating exorbitant profits for the owner whilst average people queue for hours to purchase such products.

In the poor Caracas district of Catia, a warehouse full of

925,000 children's toys and 70 tons of food - including 37 tons of sugar, 770 packets of cooking oil and other products such as rice, flour, and sauces - was found in similar circumstances. As is custom, the confiscated goods were sold to the local community at regulated prices, returning the hoarded goods to the people.

In Carabobo and Miranda States, hauls were made at Clover Company warehouses, which had 145,000 tins of powdered milk hoarded away since 2014, exasperating milk shortages. Also, in Guarico State, two people were arrested for hoarding 130 car tires, and in Mérida State three people were found with 6.8 tons of powdered milk and 22.5 tons of sugar in their home.

### POPULAR PRICE INSPECTORS

Two thousand ordinary citizens were trained and dispatched as popular price inspectors this month with orders to check businesses producing, distributing, and selling school products, as millions of Venezuelans go back to classes.

Following initial inspections, 210 businesses were fined for incompliance of the Law of Fair Prices, including Caramba Shop and the Bloomer Palace in Barinas State, where more than 60,500 school uniforms which had been hoarded since 2008 were being sold overpriced.

In Caracas, popular brigades found irregularities in dozens of supermarkets, especially those located in the poorest neighborhoods with difficult access to alternative markets. All stores found in violation of laws designed to protect working families were heavily fined for hoarding and overpricing.

# Venezuela works towards stabilizing oil markets



T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Agencies

With oil prices at a record low, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro went on a new offensive this month defending price stability at the 10th PetroCaribe Summit as well as during activities marking the 55th anniversary of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

In Jamaica for the 2015 PetroCaribe Summit, Maduro reinforced the historic importance of projects that promote regional integration and price stability.

"PetroCaribe is part of a successful test of energy integration based on solidarity which today we can say is constructing an alternative model, a successful non-capitalist model assuring stability in the economic, energy, and social fields of the Caribbean".

At the summit, which also celebrated ten years since PetroCaribe's founding, Maduro proposed a series of goals for the next ten years, including "the creation of a Special Economic Bloc", the "consolidation of our energy sovereignty", and a "common social security system for the eradication of poverty". He also proposed a natural disaster prevention

and response program for the 19 member nations.

Since 2005 - when PetroCaribe was created to administer oil at market rates but with favorable payment plans, including payment in kind or over long, low interest periods - the bloc has enjoyed a 26% GDP increase and significant improvement in life expectancy and other indicators. Other than oil, PetroCaribe has administered 432 social programs with an investment of over \$3.9 billion.

"Jamaica's capacity to deal with its energy requirements has been favorably affected" commented Jamaica's Information Minister, Sandra Falconer.

"We must keep ourselves united against the attacks of the extreme right who want to weaken regional integration" warned Maduro "we are ready to pay the price we must to construct a new world".

### OPEC SUMMIT

"To reorganize, defend, and stabilize the oil market, it is necessary to hold an OPEC summit of the highest level, with OPEC and non-OPEC nations" announced Maduro at activities held to mark 55 years since the foundation of the oil producer's alliance. "We declare ourselves in permanent activity in the OPEC".

At the activity held at the Headquarters of Venezuela's nationalized oil firm in Caracas, Maduro reinforced the historic role of OPEC in "defending natural resources and price stability".

"To have survived 55 years is no mean feat" he claimed. "Founding countries such as Venezuela took a big step forward in breaking the bonds of colonialism, and independence struggles became much more important in order to defend natural and energy resources and establish autonomous production mechanisms".

Maduro emphasized that "an oil extraction model was imposed (on Venezuela) which made us dependent on the oil rent... generating a parasitic dynamic in our economy and society". To further his call for an international price floor for oil, Maduro announced that he will soon be going on more international trips to "key nations".

Maduro visited Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran and Russia earlier this year to counter imperialist efforts to artificially force oil prices down through fracking and market flooding so as to tie the hands of non-aligned oil producing nations such as Iran, Venezuela, and Russia by limiting their budget and spending power.

T/ Paul Dobson  
P/ Agencies

Coinciding with important national celebrations in both countries, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro visited Vietnam and China this month, signing numerous economic agreements with what he described as “historic anti-imperialist allies”.

In Vietnam, Maduro celebrated 70 years of independence and commemorated 46 years since the death of popular communist leader Ho Chi Minh.

“Venezuela and Vietnam have had very close ties ever since the heroic struggles of the 60’s and 70’s. We have always admired the Vietnamese people and their victory is celebrated by our people across Venezuela”, he explained.

In China, Maduro participated in activities for the 70th anniversary of the victory in the Sino-Japanese War, explaining that “what has finally come of it all is the great potential that is China today... as these years of struggle pass one by one, Venezuela and China are more united than ever”.

Whilst in Vietnam, Maduro signed agricultural and energy agreements with his homologue, President Truong Tan Sang, with a focus on the transfer of technology in rice and milk production, cattle farming, as well as investments in Venezuelan oil and gas fields.



## Maduro visits Vietnam and China, signs important agreements

We have come to “diversify agriculture” commented Maduro. “We are going to create a powerful productive alliance”. He also announced the increase in the commercial value of relations between the two countries from US\$100 million to US\$1 billion.

### INDUSTRIALIZATION OF VENEZUELA

In Beijing, President Maduro signed 14 agreements at the High Level Venezuela-China Mixed Commission, which now sums 452 projects since its creation in 1999, 231 of which have already been completed.

Amongst the new agreements which will benefit Venezuela’s development are: the construction of a factory to build light, medium, and heavy construction machinery; another to produce structures and fencing for the Great Housing Mission; another to

produce car tires; another to assemble medium and heavy trucks; the expansion of existing telecommunications factories; the transfer of new technology for gold mining; the creation of Special Economic Zones; and US \$5 billion in financing for the development of the oil sector, which currently ships 700,000 barrels a day to China.

Maduro also enjoyed an exchange of experiences in the area of efficient food distribution, and agreed to build a Confucius Center in Venezuela.

“We have elaborated and signed a Development Plan with China for the period 2015-2025” he explained, and “we have discussed new financing formulas, perfecting what has been created and guaranteeing the resources which we need in the midst of these complications which we have: the brutal economic war and the fall in oil prices”.

“This trip brings enormous benefits for the Venezuela people” analyzed Yul Jabour, President of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Venezuelan National Assembly.

“Strategic relationships like these with China and Vietnam are being strengthened, we know of the internal growth of their economies and we know about the alliance which looks to advance towards the transformation of our economy away from its rent based nature and towards a productive economy”.

## US runs into trouble with dual discourse

T/ Mark Weisbrot\*, Al Jazeera America  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

In April the White House began to experiment with a diplomatic approach to Venezuela, after experiencing a regional backlash against the economic sanctions that it imposed against the country on March 9. As I noted in previous columns, this effort included an unprecedented meeting between President Barack Obama and President Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela at the April Summit of the Americas, the dispatch of a high-level diplomat (Thomas Shannon) to meet with Venezuelan officials and abstention from hostile rhetoric against the government of Venezuela for perhaps the longest period in 14 years. These were positive signs and were undoubtedly related to Washington’s begin-

ning of normalizing relations with Cuba, which culminated in the opening of embassies in Havana and Washington on July 20.

More recently, however, there are disturbing signs that the White House is not as serious about normalizing relations with Venezuela as it is with Cuba.

One of those signs has been recent statements from Secretary of State John Kerry and the State Department calling for “credible and timely electoral observation” for Venezuela’s December elections to the National Assembly. Though the State Department has not explained what is meant by “credible and timely,” the statements closely coincide with a major lobbying effort on the part of the Venezuelan opposition to have the Organization of American States (OAS) send an observation mission. As I noted previously, there were

signals in June from the more hard-line right in Washington foreign policy circles that this would be part of an attempt to delegitimize the elections. Now Kerry appears poised to adopt this position, and if he does, it will be correctly seen throughout the region as a very hostile move. Given this recent history and context, Kerry’s statements are not just insulting but also somewhat threatening.

The other disturbing sign from the White House is Obama’s appointment of Mark Feierstein to the position of senior director for Western Hemisphere affairs at the National Security Council. Feierstein has a long history of involvement in regime change efforts in Latin America, going back to Nicaragua’s Sandinistas during Ronald Reagan’s and George H.W. Bush’s administrations. He has worked against the Venezuelan government, and as a senior official at USAID, he

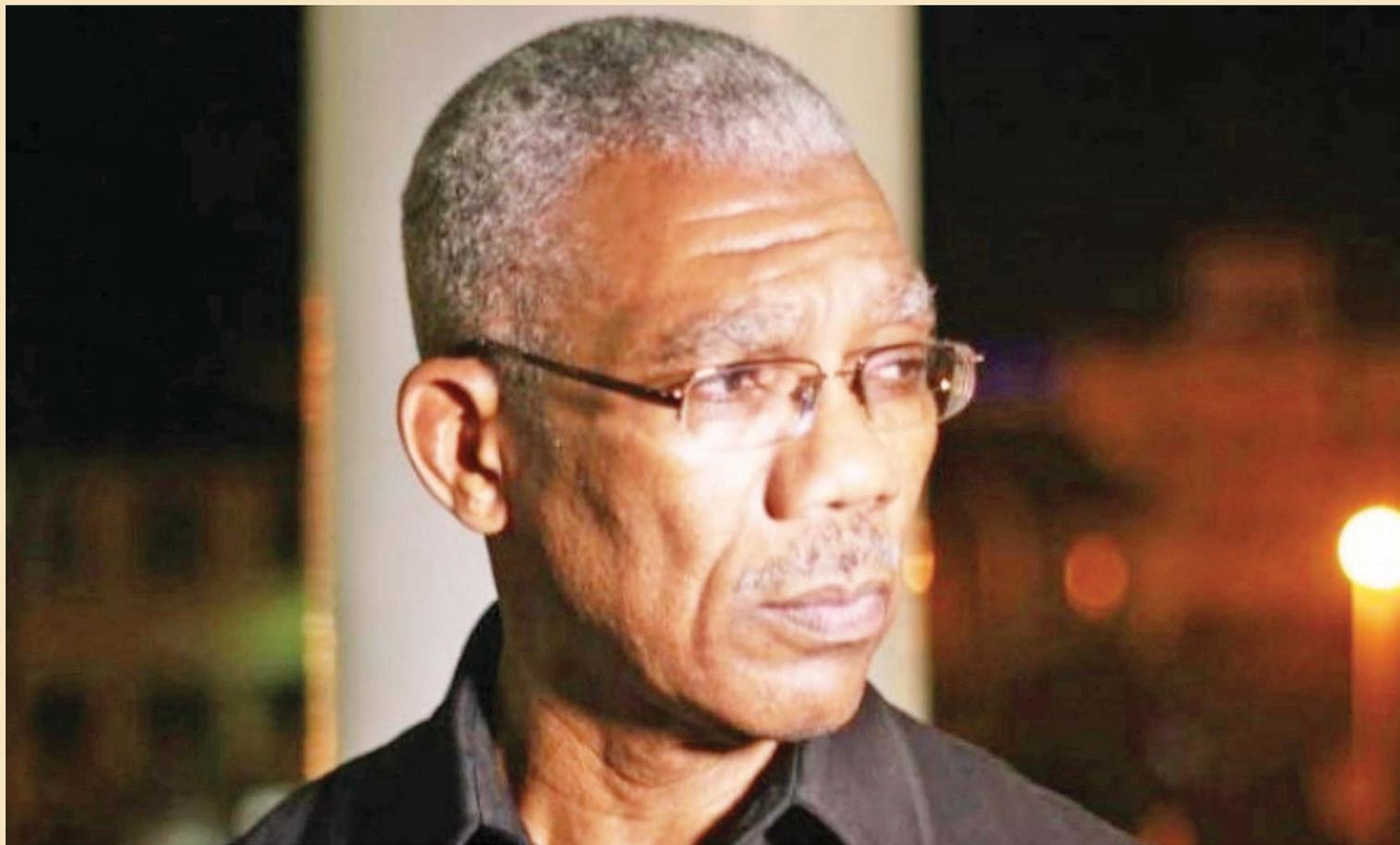


presided over a major covert operation against the Cuban government that caused great embarrassment when it was exposed by The Associated Press. The latter effort was almost certainly illegal, since U.S. law prohibits USAID from engaging in covert operations. No one in Washington seems to know why Obama appointed a hard-liner like Feierstein to be his main adviser on Latin America, at a time when the White House is working to normalize relations with Cuba.

It has taken more than half a century for Washington to begin to once again acknowledge the sovereignty of Cuba and its people and to normalize relations. Let’s hope it does not take that long to begin this process with Venezuela.

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# The secret agenda behind the Venezuela-Guyana conflict



T/ Eva Golinger, coha.org  
E/ COI  
P/ Agencies

It all began in 1835 when the British Empire sent a German-born naturalist and explorer to conduct geographical research in the South American territory it had colonized and named British Guiana. In the course of this exploration, a map was drawn that well-exceeded the original western boundary first occupied by the Dutch and later passed to British control, provoking the beginning of a territorial confrontation that has remained unresolved to this day.

In 1850, after decades of arguing over the boundary line separating Venezuela from its colonized neighbor, both sides agreed not to occupy the disputed territory under further determinations could be made. But as the demand for gold and other natural resources grew in the region, the British again tried to claim the territory declaring the Schomburgk Line the frontier of British Guiana, in clear violation of the previous accord with Venezuela.

Ironically, Venezuela appealed to Washington for help at the time, using the Monroe Doctrine as a justification to prevent further

colonization by the British Empire in the hemisphere. US President Grover Cleveland eventually declared the matter of US interest and forced Great Britain to sign a Treaty of Arbitration with Venezuela in Washington in 1897. Two years later, the Arbitration Tribunal, which had no representatives from Venezuela but instead two arbitrators from the United States said to be acting in Venezuela's interest, ruled in favor of Britain. Venezuela rejected the decision, alleging there had been political collusion and illegal pressures in favor of the other side.

More than half a century went by until the dispute was re-introduced on the international stage, this time at the United Nations. Venezuela denounced the corruption that had led to the arbitrators decision in 1899 and reiterated its claim over the territory known as the "Essequibo". In February 1966, at a meeting in Geneva, all parties to the conflict – Venezuela, British Guiana and Great Britain – signed the agreement to resolve the dispute over the border between Venezuela and British Guiana, known as the Treaty of Geneva. They agreed neither side would act on the disputed territory until they could resolve a definitive border, acceptable to all parties.

## OIL

The Cooperative Republic of Guyana is the second poorest country in the Caribbean, only surpassing Haiti in per capita income. The country's main economic activity is agriculture, specifically rice and sugar production, which account for over 30% of export income. Despite being surrounded by vast oil and gas reserves in neighboring Venezuela, which today has the largest oil reserves on the planet in its Orinoco River Basin, and nearby Trinidad and Tobago, up until recently Guyana had no known oil reserves within its territorial boundaries.

Enter Exxon Mobil, one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, and a declared enemy of Venezuela. Until 2007, Exxon had a significant investment through its Cerro Negro Project in Venezuela's Orinoco River Basin. Initially, U.S. oil and geological experts had classified the oil-based substance found in mass quantities in that area to be bitumen, a thick black tar-like asphalt, therefore rendering it not subject to the 1976 Hydrocarbons Law in Venezuela that nationalized oil and gas reserves. After President Hugo Chavez suspected the area actually contained huge oil reserves, he had his own research done and was proved right: the Ori-

noco River Basin was certified with over 300 billion barrels of heavy-crude petroleum.

On May 1, 2007, Chavez officially declared all hydrocarbons in that region subject to the prior nationalization laws, legally binding any foreign companies operating there to engage in joint-ventures with the Venezuelan public oil company, PDVSA. The law required a minimum of 51% ownership by the Venezuelan state, with a maximum of 49% for foreign companies. Only two companies refused to cooperate with the new laws. Both were from the United States: ConocoPhillips and ExxonMobil. Both sued Venezuela over the nationalizations.

## EXXON-U.S. AGENDA

As the Obama administration was amping up hostility against Venezuela, declaring it via Executive Decree an "unusual and extraordinary threat to U.S. national security" and imposing potentially vast-reaching sanctions on government officials, Exxon was making a deal with Guyana to explore oil deposits in the disputed Essequibo territory.

In May 2015, just as Guyana was swearing in a new president, the conservative military officer David Granger, a close U.S. ally, Exxon was making a huge discovery in the Atlantic Ocean near the Venezuelan coast. Ac-

ording to reports, the deposits found by Exxon in the 'Liza-1 well' hold over 700 million barrels of oil, worth about \$40 billion today. The find could be a major game changer for Guyana, representing more than 12 times its current economic input, that is, if the oil actually belonged to Guyana instead of Venezuela.

On January 26, 2015, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden hosted the first Caribbean Energy Security Initiative, where he declared "...whether in the Ukraine or the Caribbean, no country should be able to use natural resources as a tool of coercion against any other country".

Without mentioning it by name, Biden was referring to Venezuela and its PetroCaribe program that provides subsidized oil and gas to Caribbean nations at virtually no upfront cost. PetroCaribe has been fundamental in aiding development in the region during the past ten years since its creation. And clearly, its perceived as a threat to U.S. influence in the Caribbean, and an affront to traditional corporate exploitation of small, developing nations.

In addition to the Obama administration sanctions aimed at isolating Venezuela in the region and portraying it as a 'failed state', the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative takes a direct stab at Venezuela's lifeline: oil. In the U.S. Senate Report on the Department of State's Foreign Operations Budget for 2016, \$5,000,000.00 was recommended for "enhanced efforts to help Latin America and Caribbean countries achieve greater energy independence from Venezuela".

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has pledged to send a commission to both Venezuela and Guyana to seek resolution for a problem that now, as Washington hoped, is dividing the region. Venezuela has been making its case before regional leaders, encouraging other Caribbean nations to support its claim over the Essequibo, or at least approve the involvement of the UN to arbitrate the dispute. In the meantime, Guyana continues to aggressively push forward with Exxon to pursue what could become the largest oil theft in the Americas.

## Opinion



## Crossroads of hope for the Bolivarian Revolution

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In order to understand the Venezuelan reality, it is necessary to go beyond the headlines that appear every morning on a smart phone and go beyond the basic news treatment by some local radio or TV outlets, as Venezuela is not only facing a series of controversial circumstantial situations, but also has set out a social, cultural, and political project that defines contemporary world history and is facing an important crossroads: the challenge of losing or preserving and deepening a socialist revolution.

Many other nations, peoples, and organizations throughout the world have many expectations about the future of the Bolivarian revolution. Will the current economic crisis be overcome? What does the future hold for Colombian-Venezuelan relations? Will the people continue to support the party of Chavismo? Will the lack of basic goods condemn the revolution? To answer these questions it is necessary to do a review of the structural causes of the recent political and economic phenomena in this country.

Despite the amount of time the Chavista government has been in power, and despite the advances in various social matters, the Bolivarian process has not been able to overcome capitalist and rentier logic based on a single-product economy, dependent entirely on the price of oil, with limited industrial development, which worsens with the ongoing global crisis. All of this is in addition to the moral blow with the death of the promoter of the revolutionary project in Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who promoted overcoming that dependency, the diversification of the economy, the political strengthening of the state, welfare and a series of goals organized within his last platform, known as the Plan of the Homeland.

Other contradictions have emerged in this process that impede the radicalization of the socialist project: the opportunist and reformist policies that have been inherited by old political traditions, which in the face of today's ambiguity, do not fight against corruption and bureaucracy but rather maintain it, which undoubtedly slows the strategic objectives of the revolutionary plan. This situation is the result of a power struggle between two antagonistic socio-

economic models within a revolutionary process with pacifist characteristics.

In the midst of this contest, the immediate reaction by a part of the hegemonic national and international powers has been swift, precisely because the Bolivarian revolution has acted as a brake on their economic, financial, and political interests, becoming an alternative to the prevailing neoliberal model. Violent barricades with painful results, economic sabotage, a boycott of the national oil company and even a coup d'état, have been some of the reactions of the historically dominant class. Now they have sharpened and are using different political strategies, such as the hoarding of basic goods, hyper inflation, the devaluation of the national currency, the export of contraband goods in the border regions, currency flight, social decomposition, among other problems that have, without a doubt, affected the daily life of the Venezuelan people. They are putting the Bolivarian government in "check" and feed the perception of ungovernability, precisely in the year that will electorally define the confidence of the people in their process, in the upcoming

National Assembly elections (in December).

Nonetheless, the Chavista government has spared no effort in confronting these different issues, efforts that have essentially consisted of a solid alliance between the government, the armed forces, and the organized people; a strong institutional presence grounded in the optimal management of different areas like the distribution and subsidy of basic foodstuffs, adjustment and control of prices, citizen security, the spreading of education to the masses, the stimulus of the productive apparatus through research and funding, without forgetting a coherent participation on the international scene, which coincides with solidarity with other countries in the world. But unfortunately this has not been enough to defeat the aspirations of the empire and the national bourgeoisie: the majority of national production is still in the hands of private companies; the state-owned companies or those created by the revolution have not reached an optimal organizational level nor optimal operation; the role of the party of the revolution, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), has been timid and ambiguous in

overcoming the logic of electoralism, diminishing the strength of the role of a vanguard organization that guides its government and its people through the true revolutionary paths. In addition, the government of Nicolas Maduro has based its strategy on dialogue and consensus with the enemy; which evidently has not resolved the conflict, to the contrary, it has worsened it.

In that sense, the establishment of new means of defending the revolution is indispensable. In the words of Chavez in the speech that was called Strike at the Helm: "Conditions that guide the transition to socialism ... with this new cycle starting, we must become more efficient in the revolutionary construction of a new political, economic, social, and cultural model." This will only be achieved through the radicalization of what, until this point, has been built. Starting with urgent policy measures in different areas, such as the nationalization of the banking sector, placing the financial apparatus at the service of the revolution, avoiding the flight of capital abroad, speculation and the increase of activity of the parallel currency exchange market, nationalization of foreign trade, planning of imports, activating national production and regulating prices. Also, conglomerating all nationalized companies, bringing them together in an organic system that President Maduro himself requested in September, 2014:

"We must strengthen the administrative, direction, management capacity (...) create a large conglomerate of the system of state-owned and socialist enterprises in Venezuela, with its various corporations that will group together service and production facilities." A measure that has been delayed but one that represents a key way out of the dependence on oil profits and traditional commercial relations, all those manifestations of capitalist logic.

There is an urgent need to go to the root of the issue, to transform the essential. We should understand that the crossroads facing the Bolivarian revolution is not for more dividends and benefits, but between a murderous, outdated and harmful system like capitalism, and a system of organization that is liberating and highly humanist, such as socialism.