

## Two Revolutions Betrayed

By Douglas Farah

Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian Revolution, vowing to create a new utopian "21st Century Socialism," has had significant repercussions across Latin America despite producing few of the promised results. Two of Chávez's staunchest allies whose campaigns he bankrolled, Evo Morales in Bolivia and Rafael Correa in Ecuador, swept into office with unprecedented and undisputed mandates to help their nations emerge from years of political chaos and uncertainty.

They won on the promise to end corruption, renew the flawed democratic processes and reclaim the nationalist mantle and limit foreign influence. Ironically, never in the history of either nation have so many foreigners (Venezuelans, Cubans and Iranians) been deeply involved, at the highest levels, in their countries' affairs. The new constitutions touted as indigenous were in fact largely written by a group of Spanish academics.

These revolutions have been betrayed from the outset and at their cores are profoundly anti-democratic. This is particularly tragic in Bolivia and Ecuador, whose painful and costly returns from often-brutal military dictatorships in the 1980s to semi-functional democracies were hard fought and truly revolutionary in many ways. The transformative power of the democratic movement was seen in tolerance for opposition leaders like Morales and Correa, whose rise to power would never have been possible without the unfettered freedom of the press and speech that allowed them to make their cases and the belief in leaving office after losing honest elections -- the very freedom they now systematically deny their opposition and attack.

Rather than fulfill the revolutionary promise of renewing democracy, establishing equality under the law and strengthening democratic institutions, the Bolivarian states have done precisely the opposite. Here a few highlights that are often overlooked will be examined.

Morales and Correa, with the support of Chávez, have embarked on twin campaigns of silencing the independent media; "criminalizing" any opposition movement through the use of a judiciary they control by simply making opposition illegal; dividing the political world into "us" and "them,"; expanding ties to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC, an internationally designated terrorist organization; and opaque but growing ties to Iran, a nation under economic sanction because of its nuclear program.

In short, they have moved to reestablish corrupt *caudillismo* with no accountability, based primarily on the desire to perpetuate themselves in power indefinitely and wrest control of every institution for their own ends. To facilitate this they have made common cause with the world's primary state sponsor of terrorism, a nation

with whom they have no cultural affinity, no shared language or religion and no common interest except one: an expressed desire to destroy the United States.

Perhaps the most dangerous effort undertaken has been to use the FARC's narco wealth and Venezuela's oil revenue and legitimizing cover to fan the flames of armed insurgency against non-Bolivarian states in the hemisphere. The depth of the efforts were revealed in the computer files of FARC captured from senior commander Raúl Reyes, killed on March 1, 2008, when Colombian troops bombed his camp in Angostura, Ecuador.

The lead actor in the effort is the FARC's most prominent front organization, the *Movimiento Continental Bolivariano* (MCB), formerly the *Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana* (CCB). According to the Reyes documents the CCB was founded in August 2003 in Chávez's approval and FARC funding. It formally changed its name to the MCB in its annual meeting, held in Caracas in December 2009.

At every plenary session of the movement, the keynote speaker is a member of the FARC directorate, and delegates analyze ways to advance armed revolution in Chile, Peru, Central America and elsewhere. A FARC leader holds one of the presidencies. One of the main reasons the Colombian military chose to act against the Angostura camp in 2008 was that the plenary session of the CCB was being held in Quito that year.

In addition to the numerous visits of delegates to the Angostura camp in the days before and after the plenary, Colombian and U.S. intelligence detected another cause for concern. The FARC was taking advantage of the meeting, held in a public space with the permission of the Correa government, to meet with numerous terrorist delegations including the ETA from Spain, MRTA delegates from Peru, the Provisional Irish Republican Army and others. The great concern was that this networking event would lead to the FARC acquiring new types of technology and military training, while opening new contacts among the terrorist underground. The Mexicans killed in the attack were part of a visiting delegation from that country to strengthen ties with the terrorist organization..

Another common consequence of the *Bolivarización* Venezuela has brought to Ecuador and Bolivia is the dramatic increase in the criminalization of the state and the creation of new safe havens for drug trafficking. Both countries have seen a dramatic rise in cocaine production and Venezuela has become the unquestioned transshipment hub for cocaine moving to the United States via the Caribbean and new cocaine flows to West Africa. Given the financial crises in these countries and the declared support for the FARC, now the largest producer of refined cocaine on the continent, it is not hard to discern the state benefits to the increased cocaine production.

As the Colombian government has successfully pushed the FARC out of the center of its country, Ecuador, long a safe have for the insurgents, has become a primary

rearguard supply and production area for the insurgents. For the first time in history the FARC has established large laboratories in Ecuadoran territory, under control of the 48th Front. A mid-level commander of that front, Oliver Solarte, is in charge of dealing with Mexican buyers, who arrive in the Lago Agrio area of Sucumbíos province to buy FARC cocaine on Ecuadoran territory.

It was for unimpeded access to this region that the FARC donated at least \$100,000 to the Correa presidential campaign and dealt extensively with the senior members of the Correa administration. The key drug trafficking organization uniting Mexican and FARC operators was run by the Ostaiza brothers, who in turn were well connected to Correa's internal security apparatus.

Ecuador offers several other significant advantages. One is geographic -- it sits on the relatively unmonitored Pacific coast, making the movement of cocaine northward less risky, particularly since the 2009 closing of the U.S. Forward Operating Location in Manta. The second is Ecuador's dollarized economy, which allows for Mexican payment for cocaine to the FARC to take place without any exchange mechanisms. Mexican traffickers arrive in Ecuador, deposit money for drug payments into FARC-controlled bank accounts, and the FARC can withdraw cash with ATM cards. Ecuador's banking system is so opaque that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) named it among the world's highest at risk jurisdictions in its February 2010 report, along with Iran, North Korea and Ethiopia.

The dollarization and opaque banking has also made Ecuador an attractive venue for Iran's hemispheric investments to avoid international sanctions because of its rouge nuclear program.

The primary banking relationship is between the Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) and the Central Bank of Ecuador, according to an agreement signed in November 2008, but not made public until almost a year later. The heart of the deal is for EDBI to deposit some \$120 million in Ecuador's state bank, to be used to foment export and import activity between the two countries.

This sum seems unusually high for legitimate commercial activity since total trade between the two nations has never exceeded \$2.3 million, a peak reached in 2003. In 2006 and 2007, Ecuador registered zero exports to Iran and imports of \$27,000 and \$16,000, respectively. The month before reaching the agreement with Ecuador's central bank, EDBI was sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) and designated a proliferator of weapons of mass destruction. EDBI was sanctioned for "providing financial services to Iran's Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics" in an effort to "advance Iran's WMD programs."

There is a further complication. According to the "Protocol of Cooperation" between the Central Bank of Ecuador and EDBI, Iran was also willing to take an unusual step in the agreement. Point 6 states that:

*EDBI manifests its readiness to establish a branch of Banco Internacional de Desarrollo (BID) in the Republic of Ecuador.*

The BID is reportedly a Venezuelan bank, which the EDBI would have no influence over. In fact, BID, sanctioned at the same time as the EDBI, is wholly owned by Bank Saderat, an Iranian bank under U.S. and UN sanction. The BID was sanctioned because it was deemed by the Treasury Department to be acting on behalf of EDBI. According to an OFAC statement:

*Bank Saderat has been a significant facilitator of Hizballah's financial activities and has served as a conduit between the Government of Iran and Hizballah, Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.*

In the Morales' MAS model, the traditional democratic limits between the social movements and the government are erased, meaning that one is "in" or one is "out," with no middle ground tolerated. The fusion of party, social group and government is demonstrated by Morales himself, who holds three positions simultaneously: president of the nation, president of the coca growers' syndicate, and the leader of the MAS. The model relies on constantly mobilizing of followers to fight the enemy, which in turn implies the constant need for an enemy. In order to be able to fight any enemy, internal or external, Morales needed the support of his own traditional enemies, the military and national police.

Nowhere has Venezuela's influence in Bolivia been felt more than in the military relationship. The two countries signed a bilateral military agreement shortly after Morales took office, while Morales moved quickly to purge the military high command and most of its senior leadership. The agreement called for Venezuela to train Bolivian troops, upgrade the equipment of the three military branches, help with the drafting of new military legislation, help in asserting "democratic control" over the military, and finance the construction of two military bases and 10 smaller installations for customs and border control around Bolivia's border regions, largely in areas where the opposition is strongest.

Under Chávez's tutelage Morales moved from an openly antagonistic stance toward the military to one of seeking to enlist the military leadership as allies. To do this he primarily sought, after purging the upper ranks of those he viewed as disloyal or those who were critical of the Venezuelan influence, to engage the military in development-related projects that have traditionally been the domain of the civilian cabinet ministries.

What takes the military-to-military relationship between Bolivia and Venezuela beyond the normal give and take of regional politics and alliances is the military doctrine that Venezuela imparts through its training, along with its aid. It is a military doctrine that is fully compatible with the strategies of Hezbollah and other

radical Islamist groups are already practicing, and one embraced to a significant degree by Iran, the primary state sponsor of those groups. The embracing of this doctrine provides an important link in understanding the ties of both Venezuela and Bolivia to Iran, and the growing military relationships. For example, the defense ministries of Venezuela and Iran just signed a new memorandum of understanding, aimed at deterring U.S. influence in the region.

Since 2005 Chávez has rewritten Venezuela's security doctrine to scrub it of all outside, "imperialist" influences. To replace the old doctrine, Chávez and the Venezuelan military leadership have focused on developing a doctrine centered on asymmetrical warfare, in the belief that the primary threat to Venezuelan security is a U.S. invasion.

One of the main books he has adopted is *Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam: Origins, Rules and Ethics of Asymmetrical Warfare (Guerra Periferica y el Islam Revolucionario: Orígenes, Reglas y Ética de la Guerra Asimétrica)* by the Spanish politician and ideologue Jorge Verstryngge. Although he is not a Muslim and the book was not written directly in relation to the Venezuelan experience, Verstryngge's book lauds radical Islam (as well as past terrorists like Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, better known as Carlos the Jackal) for helping to expand the parameters of what irregular warfare should encompass, including the use of biological and nuclear weapons, along with the correlated civilian casualties among the enemy.

Before writing extensively on how to make chemical weapons and listing helpful places to find information on the manufacture of rudimentary nuclear bombs that "someone with a high school education could make," Verstryngge writes:

*We already know it is incorrect to limit asymmetrical warfare to guerrilla warfare, but it is important. However, it is not a mistake to also use things that are classified as terrorism and use them in asymmetrical warfare. And we have super terrorism, divided into chemical terrorism, bioterrorism (which uses biological and bacteriological methods), and nuclear terrorism, which means "the type of terrorism uses the threat of nuclear attack to achieve its goals."*

Jorge Verstrynge

**LA GUERRA PERIFÉRICA Y  
EL ISLAM REVOLUCIONARIO**

Orígenes, reglas y ética de la guerra asimétrica



**El Viejo Topo**

Figure 1: Book by Jorge Verstrynge on irregular warfare

Verstrynge was invited by Chávez to give the keynote address to military leaders in a 2005 conference titled "First Military Forum on Fourth Generation Warfare and Asymmetric Conflict" held at the military academy. Following the conference Chávez ordered a special pocket size edition of the book to be printed up and distributed throughout the officer corps with orders that it be studied cover to cover. In a December 12, 2008 interview with Venezuelan state television Verstrynge lauded Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda for creating a new type of warfare that is "de-territorialized, de-state-ized and de-nationalized," a war where suicide bombers act as "atomic bombs for the poor."

The Bolivarian revolution is often portrayed as an historic struggle to bring true democracy to an oppressed and exploited region. In reality it is not a revolution at all but a regression to the ills that have plagued Latin America for centuries: authoritarian one-man rule where the ruler views himself as the embodiment of the people and mistakes his personal gain for the gains of the nation. In Ecuador and Bolivia we have corrupt client states, deeply dependent on foreign dictates and financial aid, a collapse of institutional democracy and ongoing attempts to silent all dissent. To sustain themselves in power the leaders are increasingly reliant on rogue states and transnational criminal organizations. This is not a Bolivarian revolution Simón Bolivar would recognize.