



The Americas Report

From the Menges Hemispheric Security Project

Center for Security Policy

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Argentina



Bolivia



Brazil



Canada



Chile



Colombia



Costa Rica



Cuba



Dominican Republic



Ecuador



El Salvador



Guatemala



Haiti



Honduras



Mexico

*The Americas Report is the continuation of the work of **Dr. Constantine C. Menges'** original Americas Report. For almost two years that report chronicled the efforts of the Castro-Chavez axis and their allies in their efforts to undermine the new spirit of democracy and freedom in Latin America, in favor of autocratic forms of regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. The report also monitors events in the area as they effect regional and US security in this era characterized by the emergence of terrorist groups of global reach seeking international influence. The current Americas Report and the Menges Hemispheric Security Project of which it is a part will continue to support genuine democracy, free trade and the fostering of strong inter-American relationships as well as exposing growing tyrannies in the area.*

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For any questions, comments, or those interested in receiving this report or seeking to have their email removed from our list please contact **Nicole Ferrand** at: themengesproject@centerforsecuritypolicy.org or themengesproject@gmail.com. If you have news stories that you think might be useful for future editions of this report please send them, with a link to the original website, to the same e-mail address. If you wish to contribute with an article, please send it to the same address, with your name and place of work or study.

Highlighted Story – [Chavez’s Move Into Peru with His “Casas del Alba.”](#)

By Nicole M. Ferrand.

For some time now, we have been reporting the interventions of Hugo Chavez into several countries in Latin America such as Peru, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Colombia and Ecuador. In July and August 2007 the staff of The Americas Report published two articles regarding this matter: [Chavez’s dangerous intervention in Peru](#) and [Peru’s reaction against Venezuelan intervention](#) by Nicole M. Ferrand. This past February, we followed a story regarding protests that were occurring in Cuzco, Peru which resulted in that beautiful city losing its status as one of the twelve venues for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) meetings. This was due to violent clashes between the police and some groups of farmers believed to have been promoted by former Presidential Candidate,



Nicaragua



Panama



Paraguay



Peru



The United States



Uruguay



Venezuela

Ollanta Humala, and financed by Venezuelan President, Hugo Chavez. (Please read The Americas Report from February 28, 2008 titled: "[Danger in the Region: Who's behind the Protests in Peru.](#)" By Nicole M. Ferrand). **As Luis Fleischman pointed out last week: "Hugo Chavez is the leader of a new plan that goes beyond Venezuela. He advocates not merely socialism but also a totalitarian project. This totalitarian vision is not only aimed at Venezuela but also towards as many Latin American countries as possible, forming alliances with regimes that have mastered the art of violence."** (Please read "[The Americas Report March 27, 2008 - The US must be able to Identify and support forces of Democracy and geo-political stability in Latin America.](#)" By Luis Fleischman.) **Here is what is happening in Peru: recent evidence has come to light showing the Chavez – Humala menace is more dangerous than previously thought.**



Former Peruvian Presidential Candidate, Chavista Ollanta Humala. Source: Living in Peru.

What are the "Houses of ALBA"?

The Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA) is a joint Venezuelan-Cuban initiative based on, according to its founders, "fair trade" in opposition to the U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Agreements with several countries in Latin America. With initial financing of more than US\$1 billion provided by Venezuela, this initiative has created the Bank of ALBA (formed as alternative to IMF and World Bank), which claims "to promote projects of economic integration and infrastructural development as well as progress in social, educational, cultural and health programs in member nations. It also aims to eliminate the economic weaknesses of these countries and eradicate economic asymmetries as a result of the process of financial globalization", Venezuelan economist Jesús Faría explains.¹

ALBA in Peru

In Peru, the staunchest defender of ALBA and Chavez is Hernan Fuentes, the regional president, or governor, of the province of Puno (please see map to see closeness with Cuzco and neighboring country, Bolivia). Fuentes wears bright red shirts, mimicking Chavez's trademark color of choice, calls himself a proud foot soldier in Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution and in his private office there is a life-size photo of the Venezuelan leader. Fuentes visited Caracas last year to attend the annual summit of Chavez's regional

¹ Summit of the Bolivarian Alternative (ALBA) Concludes in Venezuela. January 30, 2008. Center for Research on Globalization.

union. Meanwhile, **ALBA houses have proliferated in Peru's southern highlands, serving as dissemination points for *chavismo*.** Government officials say that these so-called “anti-poverty centers” have sprung up across Peru to **promote political agitation** which may have fueled protests against the government’s free market economic policies. Many centers were linked to a radical leftist organization known as the **Continental Bolivarian Committee.**²



Hernan Fuentes, the regional president, or governor, of the province of Puno. Source: Correo, Peru.

There are an estimated 200 “Casas del ALBA” operating in Peru. The residences, mostly private homes with an ALBA sign on the front, have been described by Peruvian officials as meeting places for pro-Chávez radical leftist and coca-grower groups which in many cases have ties to armed terrorist groups. Apparently, they do “charity work,” including sending nearly 5,000 Peruvians for eye operations in Venezuela over the past year.



The Peruvian Congress unanimously voted to investigate whether these pro-Chávez meeting points have ties with violent groups or another government that is interfering in the country’s internal affairs. **There is evidence that “Chavista” agents from Venezuela and Cuba came through Bolivia to Peru using local hospitals and the offices of ALBA to co-opt sympathizers to destabilize the country. There is proof regarding the presence of Venezuelan military and civilian personnel and that this has been accomplished by**

² Agentes chavistas captan a peruanos en el altiplano. July 2, 2007. Diario Expreso, Perú.

the existing friendship between Fuentes and Chavez. “Some authorities in Puno want to mortgage out Peru to a foreign power,” Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo has declared adding that “President Chavez wouldn’t tolerate outposts of my political party in Venezuela. **Why are photos of Chavez in the ALBA centers?”**³ The installation of the ALBA offices has not been authorized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, therefore is illegal.

ALBA, Humala and Chavez – New evidence

Peruvian police arrested seven suspected Peruvian militants on March 29, 2008 on the border with Ecuador as they returned to their country after participating in a meeting of the Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (CCB) which took place in Quito, Feb. 24-28. The CCB is a public forum that brings together civil society organizations interested in promoting the “Bolivarian Revolution” in Latin America. The Bolivarian Revolution, inspired by Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, calls for Latin American unity, socialist political ideals and the promotion of widespread protest activities as a means of resistance to global capitalism. According to media reports, some participants in the Quito CCB meeting discussed protesting the Latin American-European Union (ALC-UE) and Asian Pacific Cooperation (APEC) international summits to be held in Peru in May and November, respectively. **The seven, members of the CCB Peruvian chapter (CCB-P), were detained under suspicion of “Affiliation and Collaboration in Terrorism.”** Their names are: Arminda Valladares Saba, Melissa Rocío Patiño Hinostroza, Guadalupe Alejandrina Hilario Rivas, Maria Gabriel Segura, Carmen Mercedes Asparrent Riveros, Roque Gonzáles La Rosa and Damaris Velasco Huiza. **They allegedly received cash and directions from Venezuela via leftwing allies in Bolivia and Ecuador in order to create chaos inside Peru. Most of the detainees are said to be former members of the terrorist group known as the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA).** Roque Gonzalez, a former high-ranking member of the MRTA, is charged with forming part of an international terrorist group with ties to Chavistas and the FARC with the mission of bringing down the current Peruvian regime. Authorities say that **Gonzalez paid for members of a pro-Venezuela group to travel to an international leftist conference in Ecuador last month, and that he purchased multiple tickets all under his name to hide their identities.** “How did Roque Gonzalez, a prominent member of the MRTA who does not have any kind of employment, buy 15 tickets for his group to travel to Ecuador and back?” Peruvian Prime Minister del Castillo said he suspects Venezuela of providing **“under the table” funding, but stopped short of accusing Chavez directly.** “There is evidently a hand that’s financing this,” Del Castillo said. “I won’t venture to single out anyone for now, to say ‘Hugo Chavez,’ for now.” Del Castillo said Peru will not tolerate any foreign meddling and would exercise its “right to defend its sovereignty” if the allegations are confirmed.⁴

Some of the suspects expressed their gratitude to Venezuela’s president saying that this would boost support for Ollanta Humala, Chávez’s Peruvian protégé who narrowly lost the presidential election in 2006 and has vowed to run again. “We’re all Chavistas on this bus. Viva Humala!” said one suspect. There is no doubt Chávez is seeking to project his influence across South and Central America and the Caribbean. Opposition movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua claim Chávez has made

³ Ibid.

⁴ Peru claims interference of pro-Chávez groups is notorious. March 17, 2008. El Universal.

clandestine payments to their governments to consolidate his anti-American alliance.⁵ Prosecutors in the United States are investigating the case of a suitcase filled with U\$800,000 in cash allegedly destined for the election campaign of Argentinian President Cristina Kirchner, a Chávez ally. More seriously, Colombian authorities revealed that Venezuela's President gave US\$300 million to the FARC to help topple Colombia's Uribe regime.

In addition, **Peruvian Interior Minister Luis Alva Castro said he has evidence that the "Houses of ALBA" are linked to extremist groups encouraging violent protests that intend to boycott international summits to be held this year in Peru. Alva Castro told radio station CPN that the Peruvian government is in possession of some checks a country -which he would not name- paid, which "clearly state the purpose and the receiver."** While he avoided pointing to Venezuela as the place where the funds are coming from, he said the police are concerned about the participation of some radical and extremist organizations in social protests in the country. Alva Castro said that what is known so far allegedly establishes a connection between the Houses of ALBA and the Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (CCB).⁶

On March 10, 2008, the congressional investigation concluded that Venezuela actually is funding Peruvian radical leftist groups. They looked into the bank and telephone records of 88 "humanitarian centers" for suspected ties to protests, road blocks and boycotts organized against Peruvian President, Alan Garcia.

The Humala – Fuentes - Chávez Link

Ollanta Humala's popularity remains robust in some parts of Peru, especially in the southern highlands. Anti-government protests regularly shut down roads and cities, including one last month that closed the tourist city of Cuzco. Peruvian officials say that Humala and Chavez sympathizers are behind all this. According to Governor Fuentes "We in Puno are like another country...We don't see the economic bonanza of Lima. The benefits are not felt here."

Ollanta Humala remains a threat to democracy and a free market economy due to his socialist and nationalistic rhetoric. Some people remain convinced that he continues to receive financial support from Chavez and that he is quietly campaigning in many provinces. According to the newspaper "Expreso" from Peru, it is said that Humala receives more than \$600,000 dollars a month from Hugo Chavez to finance demonstrations and promote social unrest to destabilize the country. In fact, the violent clashes between some groups of farmers and the police are believed to have been promoted by Humala who has organized "The People's Social Summit", which is to take place from May 13 - 15, the dates on which world leaders will come to Lima for the European Union-Latin America and Caribbean (EU-LAC) Summit. Money is apparently being sent through Bolivia from Venezuela to pay people to carry out attacks against government facilities. Peru and Colombia now constitute a headache for Chavez's socialist revolution as they are examples of functioning democracies, with strong economic growth.

⁵ Peruvian leaders cry foul as Chávez exports healthcare. March 24, 2008. The Guardian.

⁶ "Houses of ALBA" linked to extremists in Peru. March 3, 2008. El Universal.

Both the Executive Branch and the Congress are investigating ALBA, its operations, activities and funding, as well as other pro-Chávez groups. **According to Defense Minister Antero Flores-Aráoz, “the Houses of ALBA have reportedly become centers where the people are indoctrinated to reject the Peruvian government. Further, the houses are now promoting subversive acts.”** While the minister clarified that there was no certainty that Venezuela or pro-Chávez players were funding the Houses of ALBA in Peru, “there is the incident of the cash-filled suitcase” that US-Venezuelan businessman, Guido Antonini unsuccessfully tried to smuggle into Buenos Aires last August. “We should presume that this method is used in Peru too,” he added. **The Peruvian government says that while the charity houses offer help to the poor, they also provide heavy doses of leftist ideology.**⁷

Chavez is funding ALBA to boost his “Bolivarian Revolution” and a Chavista Region

Peruvian officials say that Venezuela is funneling support for ALBA homes through Bolivia. Peruvian President Alan Garcia claims that Chavez plans to build a seven-story office in La Paz, the Bolivian Capital, to serve as a “general headquarter” to coordinate Venezuela’s joint operations in the region with its leftist allies Cuba and Nicaragua. Their ultimate goal is to destabilize Peru so that the country adheres to their type of thinking, which would lead to the downfall of the Andean nation. The accusations come in the context of a regional showdown over alleged Venezuelan and Ecuadorian attempts to destabilize Colombia’s U.S.-backed government.⁸ Peruvian officials believe the building, in the Obraje neighborhood, will be **used for military training of young Indian people from southern Peru.**

Fuentes to Declare Puno Autonomous

Peruvian Prosecutors are accusing Puno’s Governor Fuentes of corruption for misusing public funds; allegations that surfaced days after he decided to declare independence from Peru’s central government. He maintains there is nothing seditious or radical about his proposal to turn Peru into a federated union of state governments, similar to the United States. **Fuentes is considering seeking asylum in Venezuela or Bolivia** for what he calls “political persecution by the central government” and is in deep trouble: apart from being accused of mismanaging public funds, there are reports he is receiving cash from Venezuela to finance protests against the Garcia regime. Locals are accusing him of living the “high life,” and of paying family members and friends for their loyalty, all this with funds coming from the government of Venezuela. **Either way, according to del Castillo, Fuentes wants to leave Peru because he is scared: There is an article in the Peruvian Penal Code that is related to the behavior of Mr. Fuentes, which states “A person who practices an act intended to separate a part of the Republic will be reprimanded with a prison sentence of no less than 15 years.”** If Fuentes doesn’t leave, he risks prosecution and imprisonment.

In conclusion, **The Americas Report has written extensively about Chavez’s actions and interventions into other sovereign states. Chavez has promoted or taken advantage of any indication of social unrest in other Latin American countries by buying support or using one of his cronies, and then stepping in to agitate people,**

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Megaembajada bolivariana se instala en La Paz. March 19, 2008. La Razón, Bolivia.

promoting and pushing for what he calls “The Bolivarian Revolution.” He did it in the recent conflict between Ecuador and Colombia, where, out of nowhere, he sent ten battalions to Venezuela’s border with Colombia and was threatening to start a war with the help of the FARC to overthrow Uribe. He did not succeed since Reyes, the terrorist groups second in command and leader of the FARC’s operations was killed. Thus, Chavez’s plan to destroy the Colombian regime fell through. Plus it is said that the Venezuelan army didn’t want to fight due to their disenchantment with Chavez. Now he is using a similar strategy in Peru. Luckily, authorities were quick enough to discover his deeds and the Fuentes factor.

Chavez knows his popularity is diminishing in his own country and in the region. His strategy to promote an Indian uprising in South America and create an “Aymara Nation” which would bring Bolivia, southern Peru and northern Chile together into one single nation for his “Bolivarian Project” is losing support. It is now up to the Peruvian government to remain vigilant against attempts by Chavez to destabilize their country and even dismantle the Casas del Alba if they are Chavez supported and the cause for social unrest inside Peru.

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News Stories –The following are a summary of several news stories found in different media outlets. To access the information, we have provided the hyperlink below each news story.

[Reyes Files Suggest Venezuela Bid to Aid Colombia FARC – NYT.](#)

Files provided by Colombian officials from computers they say were captured in a cross-border raid in Ecuador this month appear to tie Venezuela’s government to efforts to secure arms for Colombia’s largest insurgency. Officials taking part in Colombia’s investigation of the computers provided The New York Times with copies of more than 20 files, some of which also showed **contributions from the rebels to the 2006 campaign of Ecuador’s leftist president, Rafael Correa.** If verified, the files would offer rare insight into the cloak-and-dagger nature of Latin America’s longest-running guerrilla conflict, including what appeared to be the killing of a Colombian government spy with microchips implanted in her body, a crime apparently carried out by the rebels in their jungle redoubt. The files would also potentially link the governments of Venezuela and Ecuador to the leftist guerrillas of the FARC, which the United States says is a terrorist group and has fought to overthrow Colombia’s government for four decades. **Vice President Francisco Santos said Colombia’s stability was at risk if explicit support from its neighbors for the FARC, the country’s largest armed insurgency, was proved true.** “The idea that using weapons to topple a democratic government has not been censured,” Mr. Santos said in an interview, “is not only stupid — it is frankly frightening.” Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos said in an interview that officials had obtained more than 16,000 files from three computers belonging to Luis Édgar Devia Silva, a commander known by his nom de guerre, Raul Reyes, who was killed in the raid. Two other hard drives were also captured, he

said. **“Everything has been accessed and everything is being validated by Interpol,”** Mr. Santos said, adding that he expected the work on the validation to be completed by the end of April. **“It is a great deal of information that is extremely valuable and important.”** **One file recovered from Mr. Devia’s computers, dated a week earlier on Jan. 18, 2007, and described efforts by the FARC’s secretariat to secure Mr. Chávez’s assistance for buying arms and obtaining a \$250 million loan, “to be paid when we take power.”** The FARC, a Marxist-inspired insurgency that has persisted for four decades, finances itself largely through cocaine trafficking and kidnappings for ransom. But other files from the computers suggested that Colombia’s counterinsurgency effort, financed in large part by \$600 million a year in aid from Washington, was making those activities less lucrative for the FARC, forcing it to consider options like selling Venezuelan gasoline at a profit in Colombia. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/30/world/americas/30colombia.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin



FARC’s Raul Reyes. Source: El Tiempo.



Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa. Source: Infolatam.

[Colombia OKs French Mission to Meet With Hostages Held by FARC – VOA News.](#)

Colombian President Alvaro Uribe says he has agreed to a French request to let an international mission try to meet with hostages held by leftist rebels, including French-Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt. President Uribe said Tuesday the humanitarian mission would try to check on the health of the captives who have been in the custody of the rebel Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. He said that once the military knows the coordinates of any meeting between the rebels and the mission, military operations in the zone will be suspended. The Colombian leader said the mission would include the International Committee of the Red Cross. Mr. Uribe made his remarks after speaking by phone with his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy. Earlier, the French leader made a televised appeal for the FARC to free Betancourt, who has been held since 2002. He said Betancourt, who is said to be ill with hepatitis B and a skin condition caused by insect bites, is in danger of dying. Mr. Sarkozy has said he will personally go to Colombia to get Betancourt if she is released. The FARC is holding at least 700 people in secret jungle camps for ransom or political leverage. Three Americans are among them.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-04-01-voa54.cfm>

[Colombia says it found uranium linked to FARC – The Miami Herald.](#)

The seizure of up to 66 pounds of low-grade uranium linked to the FARC rebels adds weight to the evidence found in a captured rebel laptop that the guerrillas were interested in buying and selling the material, according to the Colombian Defense Ministry. But the 30 kilos of uranium found Wednesday in plastic bags dug up about three feet from a road in southern Bogotá was “impoverished,” the ministry said, and in that state could not have been used to make a radioactive bomb. Authorities were waiting for further analysis to determine how dangerous the material found really is, armed forces commander Freddy Padilla

said at a press conference late Wednesday. The Colombian government has used details of an alleged deal, to buy up to 50 kilos of uranium at \$2.5 million a kilo, found in emails on Reyes' computer to prove the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, was planning to enter the international terrorism trade from its sanctuary set up in the jungle about one mile from the Colombia-Ecuador border. **According to the informants, "it's the material the FARC was negotiating that appears in Reyes' seized computer," Padilla said. "The seizure is of great benefit, because it prevents the FARC from counting on this kind of material" which it has wanted since 2005, he said.**

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/story/471631.html>

Bogotá rules out Chávez's role in mission to help Betancourt – *El Universal*.

The Colombian government said it was not considering the possibility that Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez plays a major role in a humanitarian mission France is sending to the jungle in southeast Colombia to provide assistance to Ingrid Betancourt and other hostages held by the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC). Chávez's role "has not been considered. This (mission) has been dealt with directly by the presidents of France (Nicolas Sarkozy) and Colombia (Álvaro Uribe)," replied the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace Luis Carlos Restrepo about the mission Paris sent to Colombia to provide health assistance to the hostages. Restrepo said he contacted French authorities "to move forward in the operational phase." However, he added "both governments undertook to keep confidentiality." Restrepo added that the mission, which was kicked off officially on Wednesday, as announced by the French Presidency, comprises "a team of highly-skilled professionals who are carrying cutting-edge equipment." Restrepo asked the FARC to allow the mission to operate, and reminded that Uribe's government has not terminated the mediation of a Swiss delegate and a French delegate to contact the guerrilla group.



Ingrid Betancourt. Source: El Pais.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/02/en_pol_art_bogota-rules-out-cha_02A1484959.shtml

Betancourt mission arrives in Colombia – *Infobae*.

The international humanitarian mission sent to help Ingrid Betancourt has arrived in Colombia. The mission left Paris on Wednesday with medical equipment to treat the French-Colombian politician. She has been held hostage by the FARC rebel movement for six years is seriously ill and is reported to be on hunger strike. The mission was launched by France with the support of Spain and Switzerland. It remains to be seen whether the mission will get to see Ms Betancourt as the FARC rebels have not given any assurances that such a meeting can take place. French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Ms Betancourt's son, Lorenzo Delloye, have both appealed to the rebels to release her to save her life.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/372788-100891-0-La-misión-humanitaria-llegó-Colombia>

FARC rules out unilateral release of Betancourt – *El Universal*.

Rodrigo Granda, known as the "Foreign Minister" of the rebel Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) Thursday branded as "inadmissible the request to release former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt" as a new signal the Colombian government deems a prerequisite to release FARC troops from jail and kick off a likely

humanitarian swap. “It is not admissible to ask us for more signals of peace. After so many incontrovertible demonstrations of our political willingness to find a solution to the conflict, they have responded with infamy and maleficence,” said Granda in a letter he wrote jointly with guerrilla commander Jesús Santrich, news agency Agencia de Noticias Nueva Colombia (Anncol) quoted. The communiqué entitled “Raúl Reyes, the path of life despite death” seemingly refers to the recent offer President Álvaro Uribe made. He conditioned the release of FARC troops and a likely humanitarian swap to a new unilateral hostage release specifically that of Betancourt, Venezuelan official news agency ABN reported. In their letter, both Santrich and Granda warned that “only following a swap of prisoners the people who are held in our camps will be released.” The communiqué came concomitantly with a medical mission sponsored by the governments of France and Colombia, which is intended to provide assistance to Betancourt, even though the FARC has not confirmed its participation in the operation.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/03/en_int_art_farc-rules-out-unila_03A1489599.shtml

FARC-related news agency brands Sarkozy as “naïve” – El Universal.

News agency Anncol, closely linked to the FARC, branded as naïve French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who on Thursday sent a medical mission to Colombia to provide assistance to Ingrid Betancourt. “Even for a unilateral hostage release you need the parties to agree upon some sort of mechanism, to ensure security at least. It is strange that President Nicolas Sarkozy is so naïve and that the International Committee of the Red Cross is accompanying him in such a dangerous adventure,” Anncol said in a document published on the Internet. A plane carrying the medical mission sent by Sarkozy arrived early Thursday in Bogotá, as part of a plan to provide assistance to the French-Colombian politician, who is facing a serious health condition as well as other hostages held by the FARC, AFP reported. Anncol also stressed that France’s proposal should be distrusted. People should not forget “that France is a capitalist country, with a rightwing president, and is a member of NATO, and that we do not know how sincere it is. We have to remember that countries have interests rather than friends.”

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/03/en_int_art_farc-related-news-ag_03A1489039.shtml

Bolivian Political Dialogue Uncertain – Prensa Latina.

Uncertainty clouds the political dialogue promoted by the Bolivian government and the Catholic Church to act as mediator but has still not defined an agenda or date. Sources of the Bolivian Episcopal Conference pointed out that to overcome the crisis between the government that promotes changes of the Constitution and four opposition prefects who call for autonomy it is necessary that both parts make their positions more flexible. The uncertain climate on renewal of talks has been underway for over a month on an **autonomy consultation organized by the eastern region of Santa Cruz**, foreseen for next month although both the government and National Electoral Court deny its legal validity. The autonomy status promoted by Santa Cruz grants a regional government independent management of the agrarian policy and natural resources that is considered a flagrant violation of the Constitution. The press reported a worsening of the situation after a recent decree by the Executive putting a six month stop on exports of cooking oil to halt inflation, the purpose of which is to reduce prices and guarantee supply. **The measure provoked protests in the cargo transportation sector whose union leaders confirmed a blocking of highways and 48-hour stoppage of the main commercial routes that link Bolivia with Chile, Peru, Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.** The situation is also tense in the eastern municipality of Camiri, energy capital of Bolivia where a government commission is listening to demands of the leaders of the region.

[http://www.plenglish.com/article.asp?ID=%7BF5C8523D-FE2D-4B4E-BA01-7B5D9D4C634D%7D\)&language=EN](http://www.plenglish.com/article.asp?ID=%7BF5C8523D-FE2D-4B4E-BA01-7B5D9D4C634D%7D)&language=EN)

[Venezuela: IAPA rejects judicial harassment against reporters and media – El Universal.](#)

With President Hugo Chávez missing and with a “condemnation against the violations” his government has perpetrated against “reporters’ human rights,” the Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) Sunday in Caracas ended its half-yearly meeting. In the resolutions regarding Venezuela, the group comprising the editors and owners of newspapers in the American continent also **condemned “the constant intimidating threats and outrages against independent newspapers, radio stations and television channels” in Venezuela by Chávez’s government.** According to the IAPA, the Venezuelan ruler is disregarding the results of last December 2 referendum -whereby Venezuelans rejected his proposed changes to the Constitution. However, the group claimed, **Chávez now intends to impose regulations curtailing civil rights and freedom of expression and information “by ruling through presidential decrees.”** The IAPA highlighted “the government harassment against the independent media and the use of both the Judiciary and the discretionary allocation of foreign exchange to perpetrate intimidating and aggressive actions against reporters and institutions playing a role in plural communications serving the people.”

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/31/en_pol_art_iapa-rejects-judicia_31A1474359.shtml

[Troubled fuel supply in Colombia-Venezuela border – El Universal.](#)

Some 18 fuel stations located in the eight Zulia state municipalities bordering with Colombia last Monday marked the first month since they were closed by the Ministry of Energy and Petroleum (Menpet) in a move to restrict fuel and diesel supply to the area. **In the meantime, supply to another Venezuelan state bordering with Colombia, Táchira, has started to decline,** as supply to Junín Municipality was cut 20 percent. Ramón Montiel, chair of the Association of Gas Stations in Zulia state, put daily losses at USD 466.29 per gas station. Total losses over the last month amount to some USD 260,188, excluding losses in convenience stores and other establishments closed in gas stations.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/02/en_eco_art_troubled-fuel-supply_02A1483879.shtml

[Washington concerned about Venezuela’s arms purchases – El Universal.](#)

The United States administration is concerned about the large amount of weapons Venezuela has purchased recently, said in Santiago the Deputy Commander of the US Southern Command, General Glenn F. Spears. **“We are seriously concerned about this large amount of purchases and the kind of purchases Venezuela is making,”** Spears said in a news conference. According to the US official, who is in Chile attending the International Air and Space Fair, “Venezuela has gone far beyond what the defense forces are,” Efe quoted. “I would ask what is the threat against their sovereignty they are envisaging, what makes them require this kind of purchases, and why do they need a reinforced military capacity,” he stressed. Spears said he personally did not understand what was the threat laying behind Venezuela’s arms purchases, adding that in his view they seemed “a purely defensive formula for this nation.”

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/01/en_pol_art_washington-concerned_01A1480679.shtml

[Pdvsas’s production costs up 21.7 percent in 2007 – El Universal.](#)

Oil production costs per barrel -one of the most accurate indicators to measure how much money did Venezuelan oil state-run firm Pdvsas spend only in oil production-related activities- soared 13.6 percent in 2007, totaling USD 4.93. **This is the highest oil production cost per barrel over the last five years, and the performance matches growing oil production costs worldwide.** According to Pdvsas financial statements, the consolidated operational expenses climbed from USD 14.77 billion in 2006 to 14.95 billion in 2007. Exploration costs went up from USD 100 million to USD 154 million in the same period. Excluding the operational agreements, last year Pdvsas’s production costs totaled USD 4.88 per

barrel -21.7% higher than USD 4.01 per barrel in 2006. Consequently, while production costs in the extinct operational agreements (now turned into joint ventures) are higher than those in the parent company, in 2007 Pdvsa's production costs grew more than those in the joint ventures. In the 2007 Report Pdvsa submitted to the National Assembly earlier this year, the corporation's financial statements confirmed that in 2007 the firm's daily crude oil production dropped 100,000 barrels, thus averaging 3.15 million bpd.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/04/02/en_eco_art_pdvsas-production-c_02A1482959.shtml

[Pdvsa's debt compromises 28.5 percent of assets – El Universal.](#)

The sharpening indebtedness of Venezuelan state-run oil firm Pdvsa over the last 12 months has drastically changed the company's accounts to the extent that its debt to net worth ratio at the end of 2007 was 28.5% the highest in the last decade. Pdvsa's consolidated debt totaled U\$16 billion in 2007, comprising U\$13.12 billion in long-term debt and USD 2.87 billion in current debt. Most of the long-term debt -USD 11.84 billion- was contracted by the holding in Venezuela, where it issued USD 7.5 billion in debt bonds in April last year.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/31/en_eco_art_pdvsas-debt-comprom_31A1475001.shtml

[Letters suggest FARC gave money to Correa – Infobae.](#)

The FARC reportedly contributed with up to \$100,000 to the campaign of Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa. The popular magazine *Semana* said documents discovered on the laptop computer of slain Colombian rebel leader Raul Reyes showed his Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, donated the money ahead of Correa's 2006 election. The files, which Venezuela and Ecuador have dismissed as fakes, were filled with revolutionary jargon, passages in numerical code, missives about U.S. policy in Latin America and even brief personal reflections. The files are expected to haunt relations between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela for some time. For instance, one file, dated Nov. 21, 2006, describes a supposed FARC donation to the presidential campaign of Correa in Ecuador.



President Rafael Correa. Source: Infobae.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/372195-100884-0-Denuncian-que-Correa-fue-financiado-dinero-FARC-ilegar-al-poder>

[Ecuador Illegalizes Foreign Bases – Prensa Latina.](#)

The Constituent Assembly's decision to constitutionally prohibit foreign military bases in Ecuador indicates Wednesday a firm rejection of US forces. **Assembly members agreed Tuesday night in a majority vote that the future legislation invalidate all possibility of having foreign military facilities in the country.** "The position has been understood and we ratify the lack of interest to renew in 2009 the 1999 controversial accord to use the southeastern Manta military base by US military forces," states the text. "Ecuador is a peaceful territory. It does not allow the establishment of foreign military bases or foreign facilities with military purposes. We cannot give national military bases to foreign forces, and we close any actions destined to extend beyond next year the presence of Pentagon troops in this nation." The

constituent majority also rejected an opposition minority proposal, to request deployment of foreign peacekeeping forces in Ecuador.

<http://www.plenglish.com/article.asp?ID={4AA69B94-57EF-4E1E-AA76-74675D90171C}&language=EN>

Ecuador admits Colombia airspace violation – Infobae.

Ecuador admitted violating Colombian territory when one of its helicopters entered Colombian airspace during the weekend, Colombian military officials said. Foreign Ministry officials in Ecuador said they regretted the incident and apologized for “accidentally entering Colombian airspace,” El Tiempo newspaper reported online Monday. The Ecuadorian helicopter was intercepted by two Colombian aircraft before returning to its own airspace. Relations between Ecuador and Colombia have been tense since March 1, when Colombian forces entered Ecuador without permission to kill rebel commander Raul Reyes and more than two dozen members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/372378-100891-0-Ecuador-admite-que-violó-territorio-colombiano>

Argentine farmers suspend strike – IHT.

Argentine farmers on Wednesday suspended a 21-day national strike over export taxes that had stripped store shelves of produce and meat. The announcement gave President Cristina Fernandez at least a temporary reprieve in what has been the biggest crisis of her 4-month-old administration. **But farmers warned they would renew the strike in a month if the government does not make serious concessions on the increase in soybean taxes from 35 percent to as much as 45 percent, and on new duties for other farm exports.** Both measures are aimed at curbing inflation. “We have decided to allow the products to reach markets and the highway blockades are being lifted,” said Eduardo Buzzi, a hard-line leader of the Argentine Agrarian Federation. **For three weeks, the farmers blocked farm goods from reaching Argentine cities, causing severe shortages of beef and produce. Unmoved goods rotted and supermarket shelves were bare in many regions.** Fernandez repeatedly urged the farmers to remove the blockades in almost daily rallies held in the capital, Buenos Aires, before thousands of union truckers and political backers. She offered concessions, including transport subsidies for distant farmers, new credits for dairy farmers and tax rebates for small soybean farmers — but the strikers had refused to back down.



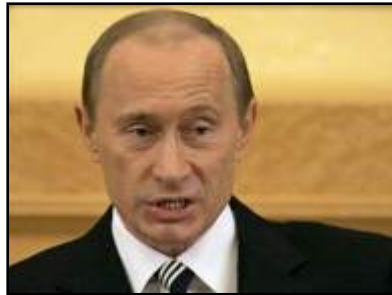
Cristina Fernández de Kirchner. Source: Infobae.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/04/02/america/LA-GEN-Argentina-Farmbelt-Rebellion.php>

Putin: Politic Dialogue and Cooperation with Cuba – Prensa Latina.

Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed the high degree of confidence that characterizes the political dialogue with Cuba and the dynamics of the economic-commercial, cultural and humanitarian ties. A letter addressed to the President of the

Council of State and the Council of Ministers of Cuba Raul Castro, on the eve of the celebration of the eighth session of Intergovernmental Commission in Havana, is disclosed by news official sources here. Putin, who hands over power to successor President-elect Dmitry Medvedev on May 7, expressed that with satisfaction he can state the increasing confidence in the political dialogue between Moscow and Havana and a greater dynamism in the links of bilateral cooperation. He expressed being convinced that not all possibilities are used to a large extent, and proposed to foster exchange in the areas of high technologies and innovation. He mentioned areas like biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, in which Cuba has obtained several achievements, Russian President stressed. He added that in that sense a significant paper must be carried out by Russian-Cuban intergovernmental commission for the economic-commercial and scientist-technique collaboration in the search and accomplishment of new projects.



Vladimir Putin. Source: Prensa Latina.

<http://www.plenglish.com/article.asp?ID={EEA0350E-78F8-460F-B519-92BFE0F04469}&language=EN>

Cuban President Meets Russian Minister – *Prensa Latina*.

Cuban Council of State and Ministers President Raul Castro met Russian Federation Transportation Minister Igor Evguienevich Levitin. Evguienevich Levitin presides over his country's delegation to the Eighth Cuban-Russian Inter-governmental Commission for economic, trade and scientific-technical collaboration taking place in this capital. The Cuban president talked of the historic ties of friendship between both peoples, the successful course of bilateral relations and the confidence to strengthen links. The co-president of the Russia-Cuba Inter-governmental Commission, bearer of a friendly message by President Vladimir Putin, analyzed initial results and expectations of his visit to Havana that, in addition of the Commission sessions, includes meetings with other leaders and visits sites of economic and scientific interest. The island's Governmental Minister and Cuban-Russian Inter-governmental Commission co-president Ricardo Cabrisas and Cuban ambassador in Moscow Jorge Marti Martinez also attended the meeting. Russian Federation ambassador to Cuba Andrey Victorovich Dmitriev, and Alexander Alexeievich Andreiev, international collaboration director at that country's Transportation Ministry accompanied the visitor.

<http://www.plenglish.com/article.asp?ID={C62D7910-9D23-4384-9545-C59E7BABD9E9}&language=EN>

Former Mexican President Fox: "Chávez is putting money in the FARC" – *El Universal*.

Former Mexican President Vicente Fox said that "there are important and clear signals" that Hugo Chávez "is putting money from Venezuelan oil" in the Colombian guerrilla FARC. In an interview with La Nación newspaper in Argentina, where last week Fox took part in a meeting of former Ibero-American conservative rulers, he warned that "democracy in Latin America is threatened by populism and demagoguery." "I think the signals that Chávez is putting money from Venezuelan oil -the money that belongs to Venezuelans in this (the FARC) are more than important and clear," he replied when asked if he believed that the Venezuelan ruler was funding the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces. According to Fox, Chávez "is supporting electoral campaigns, sponsoring

eye surgeries (...) All of this with a view to win those countries in order to continue to encourage the axis with which he aspires to become the heir (of Cuban leader) Fidel Castro, and become the 21st-century Fidel Castro.”



Former Mexican President Vicente Fox. Source: Clarin.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/31/en_pol_art_former-president-fox_31A1475559.shtml

Brazil: Lula’s administration most popular since 1990 – *El Diario Exterior*.

A recent survey has showed that the **Brazilian government led by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has won unprecedented public support to become the most popular administration since the survey was first carried out in 1990.** In a poll conducted by the Institute Datafolha and released Monday, Lula's government was credited as “excellent or good” by 55 percent of those interviewed, which surpassed all the previous administrations since the government of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), Brazil's first democratically-elected president after the end of the country's military rule. The latest survey also saw a 5-percent increase in the government's approval rate from the previous figure of 50 percent, from a survey conducted in November 2007.



Inacio Lula da Silva. Source: Petroleum World.

<http://www.eldiarioexterior.com/noticia.asp?idarticulo=19613>

Chávez signs energy agreements in Brazil – *El Universal*.

President Hugo Chávez Thursday announced from Brazil that a partnership agreement between **Petróleos de Venezuela (Pdvs)** and **Petrobras** was signed. “We signed a contract under which Pdvs -with a 40 percent stake- became a partner of Petrobras to build the great bi-national oil refinery (Abreu e Lima). And we have made some progress in reviewing the conditions for Petrobras inclusion in the Orinoco oil belt,” said Chávez. Meanwhile, **Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula Da Silva said that rather than an agreement, the contract was a “message to the world,”** because “even though we are poor, we have pride and are aware of our sovereignty.” Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva Thursday said his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chávez was the “great peacemaker” in the conflict that erupted following a Colombian military attack against a camp of the rebel Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in Ecuadorian

territory on March 1st. “Who was the great peacemaker in the Colombia-Ecuador conflict? It was precisely President Chávez. Therefore, I would like to congratulate the former guerrilla man now turned into a pacifier,” said Lula da Silva during a news conference he offered together with Chávez in Recife, Brazil. “During several days, headlines all over the world made reference to the war between Colombia and Venezuela, and the great peacemaker in the conflict between Colombia and Ecuador was President Chávez himself,” said Lula.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/28/en_ing_art_chavez-signs-energy_28A1468519.shtml

Brazilian military joins battle against dengue epidemic – CNN.

Soldiers and firefighters have joined the fight against dengue, a sometimes deadly mosquito-borne disease that has infected at least 55,000 people in Brazil this year. “We have to go into this fight as if we are going into combat in order to minimize the population’s suffering,” said Maj. Roberto Tury, a field hospital commander. The disease has killed 67 people this year in Brazil’s Rio de Janeiro state, the state’s Ministry of Health reported, and 58 other deaths are under investigation. Almost half of those who died were children under the age of 13, the ministry said. Dengue, or dengue fever, is common in Brazil and other tropical countries. Yet this outbreak is one of the worst in the region in recent memory, with an average of 1.4 new cases a minute, authorities said. Brazilian authorities call it an epidemic. The Health Ministry said 21 people died from the more severe form of dengue, dengue hemorrhagic fever, or DHF. Dengue hemorrhagic fever causes internal and external bleeding and is almost always fatal if untreated. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, however, said that with treatment, fatalities from DHF can be less than 1 percent of those infected. Fourteen deaths were from dengue shock syndrome -- a form of DHF, but with signs of circulatory failure or shock -- and 32 were caused by the more common form of the disease, the health ministry said. About 400 patients a day streamed into a military field hospital, and blood tests showed that 65 percent of them had dengue. Soldiers carried patients on stretchers while other patients stepped off buses.

http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/conditions/04/04/brazil.dengue/index.html?eref=rss_topstories

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