

[Skip to comments.](#)

Terror Close to Home In Venezuela, a volatile leader befriends Mideast, Colombia and Cuba

[U.S. News and World Report](#) ^ | October 6, 2003 | Linda Robinson

Posted on **10/2/2003, 2:26:25 AM** by [Cincinnatus' Wife](#)

The oil-rich but politically unstable nation of Venezuela is emerging as a potential hub of terrorism in the Western Hemisphere, providing assistance to Islamic radicals from the Middle East and other terrorists, say senior U.S. military and intelligence officials. Bush administration aides see this as an unpredictably dangerous mix and are gathering more information about the intentions of a country that sits 1,000 miles south of Florida.

One thing that's clear is that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez is fast becoming America's newest nemesis, U.S. officials say. He has forged close ties with Cuba's Fidel Castro and has befriended some of America's other notorious enemies, traveling to Saddam's Iraq and Qadhafi's Libya. Now, after surviving an attempted coup and a nationwide petition demanding his recall, Chavez is flirting with terrorism, and Washington is watching with increasing alarm.

"We are not disinterested spectators," says Roger Noriega, the new assistant secretary of state for Latin America. "Any actions that undermine democratic order or threaten the security and well-being of the region are of legitimate concern to all of Venezuela's neighbors." U.S. officials are monitoring three sets of developments:

Middle Eastern terrorist groups are operating support cells in Venezuela and other locations in the Andean region. A two-month review by U.S. News, including interviews with dozens of U.S. and Latin American sources, confirms the terrorist activity. In particular, the magazine has learned that thousands of Venezuelan identity documents are being distributed to foreigners from Middle Eastern nations, including Syria, Pakistan, Egypt, and Lebanon.

Venezuela is supporting armed opposition groups from neighboring Colombia; these groups are on the official U.S. list of terrorist organizations and are also tied to drug trafficking. Maps obtained by U.S. News, as well as eyewitness accounts, pinpoint the location of training camps used by Colombian rebels, a top rebel leader, and Venezuelan armed groups.

Cubans are working inside Venezuela's paramilitary and intelligence apparatus. The coordination between Cuba and Venezuela is the latest sign that Venezuelan President Chavez is modeling his government on Castro's Cuba.

The Venezuelan government denies supporting Middle Eastern terrorist groups and says that no Cubans are operating inside its intelligence agencies. Venezuela has long denied providing aid to the Colombian guerrilla groups.

Venezuela is providing support--including identity documents--that could prove useful to radical Islamic groups, say U.S. officials. U.S. News has learned that Chavez's government has issued thousands of cedula, the equivalent of Social Security cards, to people from places such as Cuba, Colombia, and Middle Eastern nations that play host to foreign terrorist organizations. An American official with firsthand knowledge of the ID scheme has seen computer spreadsheets with names of people organized by nationality. "The list easily totaled several thousand," the official says. "Colombians were the largest group; there were more than a thousand of them. It also included many from Middle Eastern `countries of interest' like Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Lebanon." The official adds: "It was shocking to see how extensive the list was." U.S. officials believe that the Venezuelan government is issuing the documents to people who should not be getting them and that some of these cedulas were subsequently used to obtain Venezuelan passports and even American visas, which could allow the holder to elude immigration checks and enter the United States. U.S. officials say that the cedulas are also being used by Colombian subversives and by some Venezuelan officials to travel surreptitiously.

The suspicious links between Venezuela and Islamic radicalism are multiplying. American law enforcement and

intelligence officials are exploring whether there is an al Qaeda connection--specifically, they want to know if a Venezuelan of Arab descent named Hakim Mamad al Diab Fatah had ties to any of the September 11 hijackers. The United States deported Diab Fatah to Venezuela for immigration violations in March 2002. A U.S. intelligence official says that Diab Fatah is still a "person of interest" and that his family in Venezuela is "a well-known clan associated with extremist and illicit activity" in northern Venezuela. But when U.S. officials sought Diab Fatah for further questioning, they were told by Venezuelan officials that he was not in the country. Diab Fatah may also be tied to the Caracas mosque of Sheik Ibrahim bin Abdul Aziz, which has caught investigators' attention. One of the mosque's officials, also a Venezuelan of Arab descent, was recently arrested in London for carrying a grenade on a Caracas-London flight.

Sympathy. Latin America's Arab communities are also becoming centers for terrorist sympathizers. A Venezuelan analyst who recently visited Margarita Island, a free zone on the north coast of Venezuela run largely by Arab merchants from Lebanon and Iran, described the Venezuelan-Arab Friendship Association as a "fortress" with armed guards outside. A U.S. official says the association has been long known as a location of illicit activities. In addition, support "cells" for the groups Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamiyya al Gammat are active on Margarita, according to Gen. James Hill, the head of the U.S. Southern Command. In a speech last month, Hill said: "These groups generate funds through money laundering, drug trafficking, or arms deals and make millions of dollars every year via their multiple illicit activities. These logistic cells reach back to the Middle East."

Venezuela's support for terrorist organizations isn't limited to those based in Lebanon or Egypt. Colombia's complaints that Venezuela is actively aiding two Colombian armed groups on the U.S. State Department's terrorist list--the FARC and the ELN--have been met by heated Venezuelan denials. But U.S. News has obtained detailed information demonstrating that camps used by the Colombian rebels exist inside Venezuela; maps actually pinpoint the location of the camps, and firsthand reports describe visits by Venezuelan officials. The armed Colombian groups, though they have waged no attacks on U.S. soil, are among the most active terrorist groups in the world, and several of their leaders have been indicted in the United States for the killings and kidnappings of Americans and for drug trafficking.

The FARC's principal camp in Venezuela is in the Perija mountains near an Indian village called Resumidero, according to maps and testimony from FARC deserters. The Resumidero base is home to one of the FARC's top leaders, Ivan Marquez, and can accommodate 700 people. Marquez commands 1,000 fighters and, according to one deserter's account, oversees the training of hundreds more would-be guerrillas. A clandestine FARC radio station is located about 30 miles away, on the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Resumidero, which has 100 huts and three houses for Marquez and other leaders, is two days' walk from another camp called Asamblea, near the city of Machiques, which is about 35 miles inside Venezuelan territory. That camp, which has 25 houses and even Internet access, is used to train still more more fighters.

U.S. News has also obtained documents that offer firsthand accounts--from people inside the camps--that illustrate the extent of Venezuela's backing of the Colombian rebels. According to debriefings of former rebels, some 60 Venezuelan soldiers, plus two Venezuelan officers, provide training to the FARC rebels at the Resumidero camp. Visitors to the camp have included Venezuelan civilians and Europeans. A 31-year-old FARC deserter who spent seven months at FARC camps inside Venezuela, says he witnessed Venezuelan officers arrive by helicopter. He says his unit twice ambushed the Colombian Army and then fled to sanctuary in Venezuela. He also asserts that "abundant ammunition"--a cache in April included 2,500 rounds of 7.62mm and .223-caliber ammunition for automatic rifles--has been shipped across the border to Colombia. Another guerrilla who turned herself in last July says she saw FARC leaders heading for a camp called Rio Verde in Venezuela. And a former guerrilla, a 32-year-old man, says he fled from battle to a camp called Sastreria in Venezuela.

Drug money helps fuel the fighting. Another FARC source told U.S. News that he witnessed a FARC logistics chief trade 8 kilograms of cocaine and cash for guns from a Venezuelan colonel, who arranged the shipments from Venezuelan Army stocks. Colombian officials have documented many such guns-for-drugs trades; they also confirm the existence of training camps--and even spots where hostages are held--along Venezuela's frontier from the flatlands of Arauca northward to the mountains of Perija. Adds a U.S. official: "It's no secret the level of cooperation that the Venezuelan government is giving to the Colombian groups, from the shipment of arms in, to the shipment of drugs out, to the movement of people in and out of Colombia." During an August visit to the region, the chairman of the

Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Richard Myers, went so far as to suggest that Venezuela's support for terrorists in Colombia was like Syria's support for terrorists in Iraq. "It is simply not helpful when countries don't fully support the antiterrorist fight."

The Chavez government's support of the Colombian guerrillas is no act of charity. After he was elected in 1998, Chavez vowed to bring about a "Bolivarian revolution" in Venezuela; the movement is named for Simon Bolivar, the 19th-century hero who defeated the Spanish in South America. But Chavez's popularity has plummeted, and Venezuela's economy is troubled. In April 2002, he survived a military coup--one that the United States prematurely applauded. Chavez has since purged the military.

The armed Colombian groups are helping Chavez create a force loyal to his regime. The FARC and ELN were "instrumental" in the formation and training of a 200-man Venezuelan armed group called the Frente Bolivariano de Liberacion that operates in western Venezuela, according to U.S. officials. The FARC has also provided training to the so-called Bolivarian Circles, an urban organization that Chavez set up to defend and promote his revolution.

Senior U.S. officials are concerned about the growing Cuban presence inside Venezuela. All told, some 5,000 Cubans have traveled to the country; in particular, many are turning up inside Venezuela's intelligence and paramilitary apparatus. Says one U.S. official: "The Cubans are deeply embedded in Venezuela's intelligence agency." Castro and Chavez are so close, they are said to talk by phone every day. Cubans also form part of Chavez's personal bodyguard detail. There is ample evidence, officials say, that "Cuba provides military training to pro-Chavez organizations" that have been set up to safeguard Chavez from coup attempts like the one he survived last year. None of this surprises U.S. officials who have been watching Chavez. "He decided to follow the Cuban model long ago," says one, citing speeches he made in 1994 and 1998. Chavez is sending some 53,000 barrels of oil monthly to help Castro's cash-strapped Cuba. And large numbers of Venezuelan military personnel have also been sent to Cuba for training.

Given all that is happening in Chavez's Venezuela, some American officials regret that terrorism is seen chiefly as a Middle East problem and that the United States is not looking to protect its southern flank. "I'm concerned that counterterrorism issues are not being aggressively pursued in this hemisphere," one U.S. intelligence official said. "We don't even have flyovers" of Venezuela. Another intelligence official complains that terror suspects being held at Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. base in Cuba, are not being interrogated about connections to Latin American. The bottom line, when it comes to terrorism so close to U.S. shores, says the official: "We don't even know what we don't know."

Clarification: The FARC's principal camp in Venezuela is in the Perija mountains near an Indian village called Resumidero, according to maps and testimony from FARC deserters (location: Latitude: N 10° 29'56"; Longitude W72° 44'56")

TOPICS: [Business/Economy](#); [Crime/Corruption](#); [Culture/Society](#); [Foreign Affairs](#); [Front Page News](#); [Government](#); [News/Current Events](#); [Politics/Elections](#); [War on Terror](#)

KEYWORDS: [communism](#); [farc](#); [hugochavez](#); [latinamerica](#); [terrorism](#); [turass](#); [venezuela](#)

[Chavez Wants Normal U.S. Ties, Denies 'Terror' Links](#) By Pascal Fletcher [Full Text] CARACAS, Venezuela (Reuters) - Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez said on Wednesday he wanted normal relations with the United States and urged Washington not to believe a U.S. magazine report accusing his government of supporting Colombian and Islamic "terrorists."

In recent weeks, Chavez has angrily rejected what he called meddling from senior U.S. officials who have expressed support for a possible referendum on his rule in Venezuela, which is a major supplier of crude oil to the U.S. market.

Chavez on Wednesday dismissed a story by U.S. News & World Report, which cited unnamed U.S. military and intelligence officials saying his government was helping Colombian rebels and Islamic radicals viewed as "terrorists" by Washington.

"This is sewage, it's disgusting," Chavez told foreign correspondents at a news conference in Caracas. He said "extreme right-wing sectors" in the United States were behind the accusations.

The U.S. news magazine said agents from communist Cuba were working inside Venezuela's intelligence service and added Chavez's government was "flirting with terrorism."

"Let's hope the circles of power in the United States don't keep on repeating this rubbish and lies," Chavez said. "We want normal relations with the United States, relations based on mutual respect."

Since he was elected in 1998, the leftist Chavez has angered Washington by strengthening ties with anti-U.S. states like Cuba and Libya. He also condemned the U.S. military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Last week Chavez accused the United States of harboring Venezuelan "terrorists" plotting to kill him.

'PRETEXT FOR ASSASSINATION'

Chavez said the aim of the allegations cited by U.S. News & World report was to create a pretext for his enemies to topple him, through assassination, another coup or an invasion.

"The suggestion is here that Chavez is a terrorist and should be aggressively pursued," he said.

He said the CIA used similar arguments to back a 1973 coup against Chile's socialist President Salvador Allende. Chavez also accused the CIA of fabricating reports that Iraq's former president, Saddam Hussein, had weapons of mass destruction.

The Venezuelan leader has often rejected allegations by critics that his government sympathizes with, and actively supports, Marxist guerrillas from neighboring Colombia.

Colombian officials and military officers have accused Caracas of allowing the rebels to use Venezuelan territory.

Chavez has also denied any links between his self-styled "revolutionary" government and radical Middle East groups, which some U.S. military officials say have support cells on the Venezuelan island of Margarita.

Chavez, who survived a brief coup last year, is resisting a campaign by domestic foes to try and vote him out of office.

Venezuela's electoral authorities on Wednesday accepted a formal notice from the opposition that they would collect signatures to request a referendum which could be held in late February 2004.

As the possibility of a referendum against him grows, the Venezuelan leader has stepped up his attacks against the United States, accusing the CIA of taking part in the April, 2002 coup that briefly toppled him. Washington denies this. [End]



Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez points to journalist during a press conference in Caracas, October 1, 2003. Hugo Chavez said on Wednesday that oil cartel OPEC needed to raise its target oil price band from its current \$22-28 a barrel range. OPEC had discussed raising the preferred price band to between \$25 to \$32 a barrel. REUTERS/Jorge Silva

[Hugo Chavez - Venezuela](#)

1 posted on 10/2/2003, 2:26:25 AM by Cincinnatus' Wife

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: All

There's A Better Way To Beat The Media Clymers (And You Don't Have To Skate)!



[Donate Here By Secure Server](#)

Or mail checks to
FreeRepublic , LLC
PO BOX 9771
FRESNO, CA 93794

or you can use

PayPal at Jimrob@psnw.com

STOP BY AND BUMP THE FUNDRAISER THREAD-
It is in the breaking news sidebar!

2 posted on 10/2/2003, 2:27:07 AM by **Support Free Republic** (Your support keeps Free Republic going strong!)

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: Cincinnatus' Wife

Terrorism primer & background info:

[-Time to kick the tires & light the fires, folks- terrorism gathers across the World...--](#)

[-All Terror, All the Time-- FR's links to NBC Warfare, Terror, and More...--](#)

[-Jihad! Across the World....--](#)

[-IRAQ- some links to terror--](#)

[-The Web of Terror--](#)

[Nuclear, Biological, & Chemical Warfare- Survival Skills, Pt. II](#)

[-Terror Tips--](#)

[-The Fire Down South...\(Latin America--\)--](#)

[Castro, the Carribean, and Terrorism](#)

3 posted on **10/2/2003, 2:29:20 AM** by **backhoe** (Just an old Keyboard Cowboy, ridin' the trackball into the Sunset...)
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **backhoe**

I was just going to ping you!

4 posted on **10/2/2003, 2:30:07 AM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 3](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Tailgunner Joe; Libertarianize the GOP**

Bump!

5 posted on **10/2/2003, 2:31:34 AM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 4](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

My kind regards to you.

6 posted on **10/2/2003, 2:38:53 AM** by **backhoe** (Just an old Keyboard Cowboy, ridin' the trackball into the Sunset...)
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 4](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **backhoe**

And my kind regards to you.

7 posted on **10/2/2003, 2:51:42 AM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 6](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

bump

8 posted on **10/2/2003, 3:52:58 AM** by **RippleFire**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

"The suggestion is here that Chavez is a terrorist and should be aggressively pursued," he said.

First true thing he has said in his entire career. And I still wish he'd stop talking about himself in the third person.

Excellent, detailed articles. Thanks for posting!

I think one of the stupidest things we ever did was not to lend our complete support to the coup attempt. This would all be a thing of the past by now, if we had.

9 posted on **10/2/2003, 4:28:13 AM** by **livius**
[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

Good morning, CW.

Thank you for the interesting but depressing post.

Chavez would have made Che Guevara proud.

I have never understood why the U.S. has always been weak on/not interested in Latin America. As an example, we still have Castro sitting in Cuba after 40 years.

You should see all the mideastern types we now have in Panama. Supposedly a lot of them have "business interests" in the Panamanian Free Zone. You can't throw a rock in the port city of Colon without hitting one of them in the head.

10 posted on **10/2/2003, 4:29:30 AM** by **Gatún(CraigIsaMangoTreeLawyer)**

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **livius**

I think one of the stupidest things we ever did was not to lend our complete support to the coup attempt. This would all be a thing of the past by now, if we had.

Chavez has only become more of a threat to the region. As a sponsor of terrorists he needs to be dealt with ASAP. Our national security demands it.

11 posted on **10/2/2003, 4:34:22 AM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 9](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Gatún(CraigIsaMangoTreeLawyer)**

I have never understood why the U.S. has always been weak on/not interested in Latin America. As an example, we still have Castro sitting in Cuba after 40 years.

Well, it shows. How different things would look if we had. Other wars and other places have taken our time and our treasure. But with some foresight, I imagine the tragic human flight out of these countries would have been unnecessary. Now we are paying a bigger price.

12 posted on **10/2/2003, 4:39:57 AM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 10](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

bump

13 posted on **10/2/2003, 4:59:14 AM** by **Libertarianize the GOP** (Ideas have consequences)

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 5](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

Good article; thanks!

But your headline lumps our friend & ally democratic Colombia in with Communist Cuba and Islamist terrorists. Couldn't you change that to Colombian Narco-Terrorists, or something more accurate?

14 posted on **10/2/2003, 8:57:40 AM** by **Revenge Of Daffy-Duck** ({ Viva Bush! Viva Double-U! })

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 1](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Revenge Of Daffy-Duck**

I agree. It's FARC not Colombia.

15 posted on **10/2/2003, 12:35:48 PM** by **Cincinatus' Wife**

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 14](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: **Cincinatus' Wife**

bttt

16 posted on 10/2/2003, 1:14:51 PM by Tailgunner Joe

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 15](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: Cincinnatus' Wife

The forces of darkness are gathering in Latin America. They include not only Cuba and Chavez, but Lula in Brazil, FARC in Columbia, and the outlaw border region between Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina. Looks like Panama (with Chinese control of the Canal) and a large influx of ME types is joining in. I'm sure I've left some out.

17 posted on 10/2/2003, 1:21:15 PM by ZeitgeistSurfer

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 12](#) | [View Replies](#)]

To: Tailgunner Joe; Revenge Of Daffy-Duck; piasa; Gatún(CraigIsaMangoTreeLawyer); livius; RippleFire; ..

[Not In Our Name and the World Wide Terrorism Web: The "Peace" Movement's Trojan Horse.](#)***In the run-up to this war, Not In Our Name became one of the major "peace" organizers and coalitions in the United States. Not In Our Name has spared no cost purchasing ads in newspapers around the world to publish its anti-American Statement of Conscience. Its signatories include scores of Hate America bigwigs, like Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, Michael Parenti, Gloria Steinem and Barbara Kingsolver. Hollywood icons (and many more has-beens) like Danny Glover, Jessica Lange, Tyne Daly, Martin Sheen and Ed Harris have also signed or endorsed the statement. NION organizes marches and other protest activities in its support.

However, Not In Our Name is deeper than the latest academic babblers and limosune liberals. NION professes peace, yet it is involved - directly as well as indirectly - with terrorist organizations and anti-American propaganda campaigns headed by fanatical Communist and Muslim groups. NION has cemented alliances with bona fide radical organizations like the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the Revolutionary Communist Party.

Not In Our Name: What is IFCO?

Not In Our Name (NION) requests donations on its website, yet on this site donors are asked to make checks payable to NION/IFCO. IFCO is the acronym for the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization. NION states that the " Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO)... is our fiscal sponsor." Fiscal sponsorship by IFCO means Not In Our Name receives donations that are tax deductible because of IFCO's 501c(3) (charitable, federal tax-exempt) status. IFCO charges a fee for this service.***

18 posted on 10/3/2003, 2:06:33 AM by Cincinnatus' Wife

[[Post Reply](#) | [Private Reply](#) | [To 16](#) | [View Replies](#)]

Disclaimer: Opinions posted on Free Republic are those of the individual posters and do not necessarily represent the opinion of Free Republic or its management. All materials posted herein are protected by copyright law and the exemption for fair use of copyrighted works.

[Free Republic](#)
[Browse](#) · [Search](#)

[News/Activism](#)
[Topics](#) · [Post Article](#)

FreeRepublic, LLC, PO BOX 9771, FRESNO, CA 93794

FreeRepublic.com is powered by software copyright 2000-2008 John Robinson