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VENECUBA

AN ANALYSIS OF CUBAN INFLUENCE IN VENEZUELA AND ITS SUPPORT FOR THE
BOLÍVARIAN REVOLUTION

A Paper

Presented to

Dr. Jenista

Cedarville University

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By

James Cohrs

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Introduction

"I swear before you, I swear by the God of my fathers; by my forefathers themselves, by my honor and my country, that I shall never allow my hands to be idle or my soul to rest until I have broken the shackles which bind us to Spain!" (Roberts, 1949, p. 5). Standing on a hill in Rome, this was the oath pledged by Simón Bolívar, "El Libertador", as he began his quest to liberate the Spanish-American colonies from Spanish rule. He first began in his homeland of Venezuela, and after years of political struggle, war, and numerous defeats and setbacks, Latin America found itself free from Caracas to Bolivia largely as the result of this man's efforts (Price, 2009). Bolívar stated himself that he had dreams "to see America fashioned into the greatest nation in the world, greatest not so much by virtue of her area and wealth as by her freedom and glory", and that he longed to move his people "toward that great prosperity for which South America is destined" (Bolívar, 1951). Yet Bolívar's dream for South America never took shape, as his united country of Gran Colombia splintered quickly following his death. The decades that followed saw a Latin America plagued and hindered by the caudillos, corruption, poverty and inequality, and imperialism from abroad.

Yet despite its lack of realization, nearly two centuries later Bolívar's dream had not been forgotten. On December 17th, 1982, four young Venezuelan army officers, led by a young Venezuelan lieutenant named Hugo Chávez, would swear an oath to one another that mirrored that of Bolívar's. "I swear in the name of the God of my parents; I swear on my homeland that I won't give peace to my soul until I have seen broken the chains that oppress my people, by the order of the powerful. Popular election, free men and lands, horror to the oligarchy" (Jones, 2007, p. 80). With this oath began the Bolivarian Revolution, a movement with the stated goal of ending economic inequality, corruption, and the manipulation of the common Venezuelan by a

new kind of “Spain”; the rich and powerful. The revolution would come fully to fruition with the election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela in 1998. Under his leadership as president, Chávez and his allies wrote a new constitution, renaming the country as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in honor of the revolution’s hero and inspiration.

The Bolivarian Revolution completely reconfigured Venezuela’s foreign policy. “Prior to Chávez, Venezuela saw itself as a ‘good conscience’ partner, willing to offer advice to U.S. presidents on how to deal constructively with social-democratic forces in the region... Venezuela never entertained seriously the idea of perpetuating a policy of noncooperation with the United States” (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, p. 101). However, with the election of Chávez and then especially after the failed 2002 coup, Venezuelan foreign policy drastically changed. “Venezuela’s foreign policy today seeks to defend the Bolivarian revolution; promote a sovereign, autonomous leadership role for Venezuela in Latin America; oppose globalization and neoliberal economic policies; and work towards the emergence of a multipolar world with checks on U.S. hegemony” (Trinkunas, 2011, p. 17). Chávez and the other leaders of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) have deemed the imperialistic United States, the “evil empire”, as one of the perpetrators behind Venezuela’s problems. For Chavismo and the Bolivarian Revolution, the United States is the equivalent of Bolívar’s Spain.

Therefore, it is with this particular emphasis on soft-balancing the United States that Venezuela bases much of its foreign policy today. Venezuela under PSUV leadership has been willing to befriend any state that bucks the “international system”, which it considers largely established by the US. Venezuela has made friendships with state leaders like Robert Mugabe, Moammar Gadhafi, Alexander Lukashenko, and even with the regime in North Korea (Anderson, 2008; Clem, 2011; “Hugo Chávez: Memorable Moments,” 2013; Kozloff, 2011).

Chávez was the first head of state to visit Saddam Hussein after the Gulf War, against the wishes of the United States (“Defiant Chavez,” 2000). Venezuela continues to find a strong partner in Iran, as they both share animosity towards the United States as well as the desire to negotiate in OPEC to keep oil prices high. The Venezuelan government also now considers Russia a “strategic partner” and Chávez once considered Putin one of his “buenos amigos” (Anderson, 2008; Business Monitor International [BMI], 2014). Closer to home, Venezuela has focused on building friendships with like-minded states who are also willing to resist U.S. influence and the expansion of neoliberal economic policies in South America. Venezuela has developed close relationships with left-leaning governments that have come to power since the “Pink Tide”; such as Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Bolivia.

However, there is one foreign alliance that Venezuela maintains that eclipses all the others. This close relationship is found between Venezuela and Cuba. Venezuela’s relationship with Cuba is one of its greatest interferences in US foreign policy and by far its chief snub to United States hegemony. But this diplomatic alliance goes much deeper than simply soft-balancing the US. The relationship between the two governments provides one of the greatest contributions to the perpetration and defense of the Bolívarian Revolution. In fact, Chávez has said that he believes the two countries “could easily form a confederation of states” (Carroll, 2007). The relationship between these two countries has become so close that it is possible that the fates of the two regimes have even become linked to one another (Yáñez, 2007).

The grim reality is that seventeen years of “chavismo” in Venezuela has resulted in increased corruption, the depreciation of civil liberties, economic mismanagement, and the transformation of arguably one of Latin America’s fairest and longest standing democracies into a hybrid regime. Yet despite its track-record, throughout this time the Bolívarian Revolution

continues to carry on not just through political repression, but also with, at least until recently, widespread electoral support. This paper will examine Cuba's profound relationship with Venezuela and the island's strong influence on the Bolivarian Republic. It will ultimately strive to display how the Castro regime, through a number of means, has aided Hugo Chávez and his successor Nicolas Maduro in their maintenance of power in Venezuela.

Pre-Chávez Venezuela and Cuba

Before examining the Venezuelan-Cuban relationship today, it will be useful to first look at its development. Prior to Chávez, there was nothing particularly exceptional about the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship. In fact, the first decade of communist control in Cuba was marked by outright hostility between the two countries. "Since coming to power in 1959, Castro has been itching to export his revolution to Venezuela, a country he sees as a breadbasket of natural resources and a beachhead into South America" (Nelson, 2011). Castro's early attempts to gain sway in Venezuela involved supporting FALN, the leftist guerilla group formed in opposition to the democratically elected Venezuelan government (Ginter, 2013). Castro's attempt to spark revolution in Venezuela perhaps culminated with the failed beach landing at Machurucuto of a dozen Cuban and Cuban-trained Venezuelan guerillas. The guerillas, who were sent to help foment rebellion and train up more guerilla fighters, were intercepted by the Venezuelan army and were all either captured or killed (Ginter, 2013). Soon after, a shift in Cuban policy to be less aggressive in Latin America coupled with a new Venezuelan president less consumed by anti-communism would lead the countries to normalize relations in 1974, although relations between the two countries would continue to be "not terribly close or cordial" (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 106). The relationship between the two countries would remain largely in this state until Chávez came on the scene.

A Personal Relationship: Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro

The personal relationship between Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, the two founding leaders of each regime upon whose mandates and charismas much of each government has been built, can be considered largely responsible for the development of the relationship between the two countries. Throughout his life Chávez expressed his great admiration for Fidel Castro, who was much his senior, which began even in his youth (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). After being held in prison for two years following his unsuccessful coup attempt, one of the first things that Chávez did after being released in 1994 was take a flight to Havana to visit Castro (Anderson, 2008). Fidel greeted him as if he was a head of state, choosing to meet him with open arms at the airport tarmac (Bardach, 2012). The failed coup in 1992 no doubt drew Castro's attention, and he recognized Chávez's growing influence and potential to obtain power in Venezuela. Since that first meeting in 1994, Castro was always "eager to support his young Venezuelan pupil", and so began an important relationship which would even aid Chávez's eventual rise to the presidency in 1998 (Yáñez, 2005).

After winning the election in 1998, one of the first things Chávez did was return to Cuba. In the midst of fanfare and baseball games, Chávez gave a speech in which he famously proclaimed that Venezuela and Cuba were travelling in the same direction, towards "the same sea of happiness and of real social justice and peace" (Ginter, 2013). Appealing for the unity of the two peoples and their revolutions, Chávez announced the official beginning of the Cuba-Venezuela relationship. Over just the next five years, the two leaders would meet personally more than fifteen times and evidently "spoke on the phone every few days" (Nelson, 2011). Chávez's personal pilot during this time even recalls that "whenever Chavez was having a tough

time as president, he could expect a call from the palace telling him to get the plane ready for a trip to Havana” (Nelson, 2011).

No time was tougher for Hugo Chávez during these first years of his presidency than during the coup against him in 2002. In Fidel Castro’s own spoken autobiography, written by Ignacio Ramonet (2006), he recalls his dealings with Chávez during the night of the coup. According to Fidel, it was not until Chávez was holed up in Miraflores palace with just a few hundred loyal men that he was finally able to get in touch with him. When he did, Chávez informed Castro that he and his men were prepared to fight and die, but Castro states that he gave Chávez this advice: “Lay down the conditions for an honorable agreement and save the life of the men you have, which are the men who are most loyal to you. Don’t sacrifice them, or sacrifice yourself.” (Ramonet & Castro, 2006, p. 526). Castro recalls that he knew Chávez still had large support in Venezuela, even among members of the armed forces stationed elsewhere in the country. He knew that if Chávez could make it through the coup alive while not admitting defeat, his supporters would rally and restore him to power. “Don’t resign! Don’t resign! I kept telling him” (Ramonet & Castro, 2006, p.526). After some time, Chávez finally agreed to follow Castro’s advice. He goes on to detail how Chávez was taken prisoner after his surrender and the media began to disseminate the message that he had resigned. However, Castro recalls that Chávez was able to get the word out to his daughter, who in turn contacted Castro, telling him that he had not resigned, but instead was a “prisoner-president”. Fidel arranged for Chávez’s daughter to go live on Cuban television and tell the story, which was then broadcast throughout the hemisphere by CNN Spanish (Ramonet & Castro, 2006, p. 531). This was a pivotal factor in the rallying of those loyal to Chávez and would help to eventually restore him to power a day later.

This is not the only instance in which Chávez acted on advice given to him by Castro. Chávez, speaking about his relationship with Fidel, stated that he was unsure whether to call him “father” or “brother”, and disclosed that ““We are in constant discussion. He gives me ideas. Some of his ideas could be called advice”” (Guevara & Chávez, 2005, p. 88). Another example when Chávez evidently heeded Fidel Castro’s advice was during the escalation of tensions between Venezuela and Colombia over the Colombian military incursion into Ecuador during a raid against the FARC. The raid prompted Ecuador and Venezuela to denounce President Uribe’s actions as little less than an act of war, and the two countries mobilized troops along the Colombian border. Insults and accusations from the two sides continued over the next few days and fears of a war in Latin America spread quickly. Then, when the leaders of the countries finally met at a Rio Group summit in the Dominican Republic, Chávez, unlike President Correa of Ecuador, did not continue his rhetoric, but defused the situation, even appearing to be a peacemaker (Anderson, 2008). A senior Latin-American diplomat after the summit stated to Jon Anderson of the New Yorker that he had learned that Chávez lowered the tension with Uribe “because Fidel advised him to” (Anderson, 2008).

Speaking further about Fidel, Chávez states ““I am honored by Fidel’s friendship and each time I feel this in my soul I express it. I am grateful to him, not for me, but for my people. Fidel’s determination to cooperate with us is unprecedented. I don’t believe that a precedent of this kind exists between any other president and a people that is not their own people. Furthermore, this cooperation is permanent, solid, and on the increase”” (Guevara & Chávez, 2005, p. 94). So when Fidel Castro became ill and required surgery, Chávez obviously became very concerned. He visited Fidel multiple times throughout his recovery (Alfano, 2006). When these health issues would then eventually lead him to depart from politics and hand over

leadership to his brother Raúl, Teodoro Petkoff, a prominent politician and critic of Chávez, believed that it hurt Chávez. He stated that Fidel was one of the few people who were able to argue with Chávez, who otherwise had surrounded himself with yes-men (Anderson, 2008). Chávez, though friendly with Raúl, did not have the same adulation and devotion to him as he did with Fidel (Bridges & Llana, 2008). In a turn of events that most did not expect, while Fidel would go on to recover, Chávez would in turn find himself undergoing surgery against cancer. Fidel, like Chávez had for him, visited him frequently as he was treated in Cuba. Though initially beating it, his cancer would return and eventually claim his life. Fidel's pupil and revolutionary heir was thus taken from him, but despite Chávez's departure, the effects of the nearly twenty year personal relationship he and Castro had on their individual countries would continue to endure.

More than Personal: The Establishment of ALBA and its Growth

Though the personal relationship between Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro was particularly strong, it only served as a foundation for the relationship between the two countries that would develop into something much broader in scale. The depth of the interactions between these two countries would enter into a new level beginning with the development of The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). ALBA, which means dawn in Spanish, is the intergovernmental organization created by Cuba and Venezuela through which their agenda in the hemisphere is advanced and much of their bilateral support for one another is carried out.

Gary Prevost and Carlos Campos in their book *Cuban-Latin American Relations* identify two very different models of hemispheric integration present in the Americas. The first they

define as Neo-PanAmericanism, whose chief proponent is the United States. They define this view as a “contemporary economic manifestation of the classical Pan-American ideal of hemispheric cooperation which focused primarily on political and security issues” (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 102). The Neo-PanAmerican vision thus involves a “desire to convert the entire hemisphere to a neoliberal economic system”, which includes, “participation by and a leadership role for the United States” (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 102). The second and alternative model of integration they label as Neo-Bolívarianism. This model is largely founded upon Simón Bolívar’s vision of a politically unified Latin America that would be independent from the empire to the north. The goal of Neo-Bolívarianism is to achieve a level of integration in Latin America in which “its pooled economic power would to a great extent be sufficient to counterbalance that of the United States” (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 103). The leading proponents of this second vision are Cuba and Venezuela, and ALBA is “the keystone of this Neo-Bolivarian coalition” (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 103).

According to an article by Kevin Ginter (2013) in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, ALBA can trace its origin to Fidel Castro’s first two visits to Venezuela. Prevost and Campos (2011) describe his first visit in 2000, during which the two countries finalized what has become the cornerstone of the two nation’s economic relationship. In this agreement, Venezuela agreed to provide Cuba with 53,000 barrels of oil per day which would be sold to the island at extremely low rates (p. 109). What is more, the agreement also allowed at least part of the debt from the oil shipments to be repaid in kind through reciprocated goods and services. For Cuba, this has involved providing medical and educational services to Venezuela; a subject of much further examination later in this paper. When Castro then returned for his second visit in 2001, the focus of the meeting shifted from the two nation’s bilateral

relationship to “broader international concerns” (p. 109). Mainly, these concerns revolved around the United States proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas, which the two leaders believed was an imperialist plan of the United States that only sought to profit US businesses and reestablish US hegemony over South America. After the meeting the two leaders “became increasingly visible” in their campaign to promote greater Latin American cooperation and Neo-Bolívarianism (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 109).

On December 14th, 2004, Chávez’s and Castro’s Neo-Bolívarianism ideal became a tangible reality (Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 109). In Havana, the two leaders announced the declaration of ALBA and affirmed it as an international treaty between their two nations. Instead of being based on free trade, which ALBA was partially established to counter, ALBA was established as an “an integrative alliance based on cooperation and reciprocity” (Lamrani, 2012). Rather than trust the free-market, the December 14th agreement states that its main goals are to reduce poverty and promote growth and unity in Latin America by encouraging government negotiated trade deals “on the exchange of goods and services which best correspond to the social and economic necessities of both countries” (as cited in Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 136). The ALBA treaty encourages cooperation between member nations in areas such as healthcare, education, investment, finance, and culture (Sullivan, 2012). A few months later, at the first meeting for Cuba-Venezuela application of ALBA, the two delegations declared, “We fully agree that the ALBA will not become a reality with mercantilist ideas or the selfish interests of business profitability or national benefit to the detriment of other peoples. Only a broad Latin Americanist vision, which acknowledges the impossibility of our countries’ developing and being truly independent in an isolated manner, will be capable of achieving what Bolívar called

‘...to see the formation in the Americas of the Greatest nation in the world, not so much for its size and riches as for its freedom and glory,’” (“Final Declaration from,” 2005).

ALBA has expanded greatly since its founding. Bolivia joined the treaty shortly after its start in 2006. Nicaragua, Ecuador, and many of the smaller Caribbean nations have since followed (Sullivan, 2012). Numerous other states have also have joined as observers. Beyond just numerically, ALBA has grown in the depth of its cooperation between members as well. Inspired by ALBA, Venezuela developed its Petrocaribe program in which Venezuela supplies oil to a number of Caribbean and Central American countries at extremely preferential rates. It is estimated that the aid given through Petrocaribe has equaled or exceeded that given through the Marshall Plan (Corrales & Penfold, 2011, p. 104). The members of ALBA have developed a regional exchange currency called the Sucre, which allows members to circumvent the use of the dollar in international trade. In 2011, the amount of goods traded utilizing the Sucre as the currency of exchange equaled nearly \$173 million (Alvaro & Lewis, 2014). Politically, the group has continued to show a united front against “the empire”. Most recently the group denounced the United States executive order declaring Venezuela a threat to national security and the implementation of sanctions on Venezuelan officials (“Latin American leaders,” 2015).

The Cuban-Venezuelan Relationship Today

Today, the alliance between Cuba and Venezuela is so close that the two have been called “Venecuba” and “Cubazuela” (Ginter, 2013). Founded on a close relationship between Chávez and Fidel, then institutionalized by the ALBA treaty, the relationship between both of these countries has developed well beyond either. The alliance between the two has become an alliance perhaps unlike any other currently in existence. The relationship between the two

governments has developed to the point that observers Philip Brenner and Marguerite Jimenez believe that they are operating “in tandem” (as cited in Prevost & Campos, 2011, p. 133). How and to what extent are these two countries interdependent with one another?

In many ways, Venezuela is the lifeblood of the Cuban economy, and Cuba is certainly the more economically dependent one in the relationship. When the Soviet Union collapsed and aid to Cuba ended in the 1990’s, the Cuban economy entered rough times. The island was able to receive some trade and aid from the European Union, but it did not replace the support received by the USSR. Much of EU aid to Cuba was also conditioned around requiring the Cuban government to make political and social changes. But then, with the election of Chávez in Venezuela, Cuba found a partner that would offer much more significant aid to Cuba, and with much fewer “strings attached” (Corrales, 2006).

Today, bilateral trade between the two countries amounts to over 20% of Cuba’s GDP (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). Venezuela and Cuba’s “oil for doctors” deal, which has been used as the blueprint for trade within ALBA, has expanded dramatically since its beginning (Ginter, 2013). Venezuela now provides Cuba with over 100,000 barrels of oil per day (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). A portion of this oil provided from Venezuela, at well below world market rates, is used to allow Cuba “to satisfy its rather unusual, surplus-maximizing energy policy” (Corrales, 2006). Cuba receives more oil than it necessarily needs, so the government in turn exports some to obtain much needed hard currency. It is possible that this strategy allows Cuba to make \$1 billion a year (Yáñez, 2005). Between 2000 and 2011, the two countries have signed at least 370 joint investment projects (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). This has included the major project of refurbishing and restarting the Soviet-era Cienfuegos refinery in Cuba, with the entirety of the project being financed by Venezuela (Corrales, 2006). All in all, it is estimated

that Venezuelan oil and other preferential trade and finance measures provide the Cuban economy with the equivalent of about \$10 to \$12 billion worth of subsidies per year (Werlau, 2014). With an estimated total GDP somewhere around \$70 billion the huge significance of Venezuelan economic support is clear (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015).

When viewed solely from the economic perspective, Cuba certainly appears to be the dependent party in the relationship. With the recent plunge in oil prices and a budget crisis now facing Venezuela, economically speaking, cutting the overwhelmingly generous aid to Cuba seems like an obvious place to start. However, despite the economic numbers, Venezuela has its reasons to continue its relationship with the Castros. In fact, the Venezuelan government is perhaps just as dependent on the Cubans as they are on them. In many ways, the implementation of the Bolívarian Revolution would not even be possible without Cuban help and the very continuation and defense of the current United Socialist Party government in Venezuela rests largely on this relationship. The remainder of this paper will attempt to demonstrate the full extent of Cuba's profound influence in Venezuela, and discuss how Cuba's role in Venezuelan social programs and the military plays a large part in enabling the Bolívarian Revolution to continue.

Cuban Involvement in Venezuelan Healthcare

Barrio Adentro

One of the most prominent and visible aspects of the Venezuelan-Cuban relationship has been the oil for professionals deal between the two countries. Cuba has been exporting its professionals as "missionaries for the Cuban Revolution" for decades (Werlau, 2013). In the past these "missionaries" often included soldiers and guerilla fighters, but today, as Venezuela's ex-

ambassador to Cuba put it, “these are not soldiers in olive green... They're fighters in the social struggle” (Eaton, 2004). These new fighters are largely doctors and healthcare professionals, and these professionals today can be considered one of Cuba’s chief exports. The goal of these doctors sent abroad “is to earn hard currency and advance other financial goals of the regime while gaining influence, prestige, legitimacy, and sympathy abroad” (Werlau, 2013). Though Cuba has practiced this “medical diplomacy” for 50 years, Cuban medical cooperation and involvement in Venezuela is “by far the largest and most far-reaching program that Cuba has ever attempted” (Feinsilver, 2008).

In a case study done by the *Public Health* journal on Cuban healthcare providers in Venezuela, the researchers note that the first exchange of Cuban healthcare providers in Venezuela can be traced to the devastating mudslides in Vargas state in 1999. The mudslides, which killed thousands, affected the poor most critically, as poor residences and shantytowns were simply demolished by the floodwaters and mud (“Venezuela Mudslides,” 2015). Cuba, which has often sent its emergency health professionals to aid in disaster relief around the world, was eager to help its growing ally Venezuela during the crisis. The study notes that 454 Cuban doctors were deployed to the Vargas region to aid the treatment of those affected by the tragedy. After the crisis, Cuba continued stationing doctors in the country, including Venezuela on its list of many countries in which Cubans provided medical support. Then, after the first cooperation agreement was signed in 2000, which allowed Cuba to pay for a portion of Venezuelan oil with human services, the number of doctors being sent to the country increased even more (Westhoff, Rodriguez, Cousins, & McDermott, 2010).

Article 83 of the Venezuelan Constitution states: “Health is a fundamental social right and the responsibility of the State, which shall guarantee it as part of the right to life”

(*Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, 2006). Eager to fulfill this mandate, Steve Brouwer (2011), author of *Revolutionary Doctors*, writes that the Venezuelan government in 2002 was developing plans to bring free healthcare to every neighborhood in the country (p. 81). This plan would eventually be called Barrio Adentro, or in English meaning “inside the neighborhood”. According to Brouwer, the word “barrio” has a distinct meaning in Venezuela. For Venezuelans, “a barrio is a large district of smaller neighborhoods of poor and working-class people. Wealthy and upper-middle-class neighborhoods are not barrios” (Brouwer, 2011, p. 82). Brouwer quotes Luis Montiel Araujo, a physician with the Venezuelan ministry of health and social development, to describe the program: “Barrio Adentro was conceived as a way to bring medical services to the excluded... to put a physician in every community” (Brouwer, 2011, p. 81). When Hugo Chávez consolidated control over the state oil company PDVSA in 2003, he now had the funds to execute such a program.

As the name itself states, the goal of the program was to place doctors and physicians “in the neighborhoods”, making them a part of the neighborhoods themselves. Very much grassroots in its nature, the doctors that are part of the program live in the neighborhoods in which they serve, so that they might be available for 24 hour care and have an influence on those around them (Huish, 2013, p. 67). The *Public Health* case study notes that many Barrio Adentro clinics are actually run out of the homes of the doctors who move into the neighborhood to provide the services (Westhoff et al., 2010). The study describes the main goal of the program as preventative medicine, which the doctors accomplish through personal consultations and home visits to the approximately 250 families that are put under their care. The doctors also set up clubs that promote exercise, sports, and nutrition. They provide education on sanitation, clean water, immunization, and other aspects of healthy living (Westhoff et al., 2010).

Mike Ceaser (2004), in an article in the *Lancet* journal, quotes a Venezuelan from a poorer district in Caracas. She is a member of a recently organized health committee which had been established by the Barrio Adentro program in her neighborhood. She says, “When they first arrived here the community was very pleased” (Ceaser, 2004). She goes on, saying that before Barrio Adentro “when there were traffic jams, many patients arrived at the hospital already dead” (Ceaser, 2004). This was because of the large distance to the nearest medical facility. Now, she says, the Venezuelans in her neighborhood have seen a great change in their health practices. “People only used to see the doctor when there was a grave problem... Now, they can go for check-ups and can seek advice when they begin to feel symptoms rather than wait until they are seriously ill before seeking care” (Ceaser, 2004). Julio Montes, ex-ambassador to Cuba quoted earlier, also describes the radical change Barrio Adentro has brought to many, “People can't believe it when someone knocks on their door and asks how their health is... That's never happened in Venezuela” (Eaton, 2004). Those that have been touched by the program give it immense support, and for good reason. The *Public Health* case study estimates that in just the first 18 months of Barrio Adentro's operation, “16,400 lives were saved, over 800 births were attended, 161,800 vaccines were given, 13 million prescription medications were dispensed, and 22 million health education activities were provided” (Westhoff et al., 2010). Despite problems and critics, the Barrio Adentro program has been hugely successful at reaching the Venezuelan poor who make up a substantial portion of the population. Many of the poor, who have long felt disenfranchised and uncared for by previous governments, have no doubt been made into lifelong loyal supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution.

The implementation of the Barrio Adentro program would have been impossible without Cuban help. Brouwer (2011) writes in his book that when the program was first starting, the

Venezuelan government looked internally for physicians to staff the Barrio Adentro facilities, which were located in poor areas throughout the country. However, only a few dozen Venezuelans were willing to sign up for the program and move into the poor and sometimes remote locations required. This lack of internal support is what caused the government to eventually reach out to Cuba, and in April of 2003, fifty-four Cuban doctors arrived to begin working in a municipality in Caracas (p. 82). Robert Huish (2013), author of *Where No Doctor Has Gone Before: Cuba's Place in the Global Health Landscape*, writes that by the end of that same year, the number of Cuban professionals working as part of Barrio Adentro was at 10,000, making Cuba's healthcare involvement in Venezuela far greater than its involvement anywhere else in the world (p. 67). With the aid from these Cuban physicians, the Barrio Adentro program recorded approximately 76.8 million consultations in 2004. This was greater than the entire number of recorded consultations in the entire Venezuelan public health system between 1994 and 1998 (p. 68). The program then grew to be even larger with the signing of the cooperation agreement between Cuba and Venezuela in 2005. The Venezuelan government increased its services to the poor by launching Barrio Adentro II, which expanded beyond the thousands of comprehensive clinics to include the opening of some 600 rehabilitation clinics and 35 high technology centers which would offer free advanced services such as CDI's, Cat scans, and MRI scans (Feinsilver, 2008). The program has also since expanded to include free dental care. After this second cooperation agreement, the number of Cuban healthcare workers in Venezuela had risen to around 30,000, which is about one-fifth of Cuba's total amount of medical professionals (Corrales, 2006).

Data quoted in the *Public Health* case study showed that of the healthcare professionals providing care through the Barrio Adentro programs, 85% of the staff was still Cuban in 2010,

with that percentage even higher when counting just the doctors and not nurses and assistants (Westhoff et al., 2010). There is little reason to believe that this statistic has changed much since then, as there are continued reports and direct evidence of their presence and the use of Cuban doctors has become institutionalized (Werlau, 2013). While the *Public Health* case study estimated that the entire Barrio Adentro program costs around \$10 billion a year to implement, Caracas evidently pays Cuba approximately \$5.4 billion extra a year for the continued use of these Cuban professionals (Westhoff et al., 2010; Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). This is on top of the subsidies the Cuban government already receives through the oil deal. Part of this payment to Cuba goes towards airfare, room and board, and a professional stipend to the Cuban doctors (Yáñez, 2005). Also, the doctor's family back in Cuba continues to receive their small regular peso salary plus a monthly hard currency bonus of \$50 to \$120 (Werlau, 2013). Where the remainder of the money transferred to the Cuban government goes remains a secret, but doctors who defected in 2012 reported that Venezuela pays approximately \$5,000 a month for each professional, but each Cuban doctor only receives an estimated \$900 to \$1,740 a year (Werlau, 2013). If this is true, than the Cuban government keeps a sizable portion of the money it receives in payment for their services.

Cost inefficiency has been a complaint among those opposed to the Cuban involvement in the Venezuelan healthcare system, but it is not the only aspect of the Barrio Adentro program that opponents in the country have complained about. The Cuban doctors are not actually licensed to practice in Venezuela. Mike Ceaser (2004) details how the Venezuelan Medical Federation opposed the Cuban doctors' lack of proper accreditation and brought the issue to court. Douglas Leon Natera, president of the Federation, stated "We know that these gentlemen are Cubans, but we don't know whether they are doctors" (Ceaser, 2004). At the time of the

court case, as many as 9,000 Venezuelan doctors were unemployed, and the Federation argued that the jobs given to Cubans should instead go to Venezuelans. The court ruled in the Federation's favor, but the Venezuelan government ignored the order, pointing to the fact that there has been a lack of Venezuelan volunteers to work in the Barrio Adentro program. The government then eventually dissolved the court that had issued the ruling.

Certain Venezuelans are not the only ones dissatisfied with Barrio Adentro. A significant number of the Cuban doctors themselves, who come to work in Venezuela for a term of two years, choose to defect before the end of their terms (Ceaser, 2004). Maria Werlau states that most Cuban doctors choose to work abroad "in order to protect their job and career, save some money, have access to consumer goods to send home, and perhaps even find a viable route to escape" (Werlau, 2013). She goes on to quote one doctor who managed to defect who stated: "We are the highest qualified slave-labor force in the world" (Werlau, 2013). Reports from Cuban doctors working in Venezuela have stated that they are given enormous workloads up to four times the amount they would have been given in Cuba (Kraul, 2014). Werlau writes that Cuban doctors have reported being strictly monitored by Barrio Adentro officials who require the doctors to meet certain patient quotas. A diplomatic cable sent from the US embassy in Caracas in 2009 quotes a Cuban doctor "who was clearly anxious to return before his supervisor knew he was gone" who states, "They are always watching us, checking in with us at random times, asking what we are doing and calling us on our cell phones" (U.S. Department of State, 2009a). The same cable shares the report of a Cuban doctor who had been briefly detained during her attempted escape to Miami before she and her boyfriend were able to finally get out. The doctor reported that the Cuban police who detained them and threatened to deport them back to Cuba were also Barrio Adentro officials (U.S. Department of State, 2009a). Another cable sent

in December of 2006 stated that Cuban doctors seeking to escape to the United States reported that if they did not meet their quotas they also risked being sent back to Cuba (U.S. Department of State, 2006b). Doctors have even reported throwing away supplies so as to report using them on fictitious patients to meet these quotas (Werlau, 2013).

The strict monitoring and high workload are not the only problem faced by the Cubans working in Venezuela. Venezuela has an extraordinary high crime rate and many of the Barrio Adentro clinics are located in crime-infested areas. According to Werlau (2013), “sixty-eight Cuban doctors were killed in Venezuela between 2003 and 2010”. Chávez himself, who seemed to show little emotion over the countless Venezuelans who have been murdered by the rise in violent crime under his watch, publicly lamented the death of one of these doctors during a segment of one of his weekly *Aló Presidente* broadcasts, in which he called for their increased protection (U.S. Department of State, 2006a).

He had good reason to advocate for their well-being, for as it was mentioned earlier, Barrio Adentro provided an enormous political benefit for him. In fact, the political service the Cubans provide the Bolivarian Revolution evidently goes beyond just providing their health services. More doctors trying to flee the country reported to the US embassy in Caracas that there was a political component required of the Cuban doctors in Barrio Adentro. Many reported that they were required to do things such as go to government marches, monitor chavismo and opposition activities in their communities, and even tell patients that Barrio Adentro would “go away” if Chávez or the PSUV was not reelected (U.S. Department of State, 2006b).

As has already been alluded to, all of the above factors plus the chance at a greater life in the United States or elsewhere has resulted in hundreds of Cuban doctors defecting from the

program. This prompted the United States to implement the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program through which medical personnel conscripted to work abroad would be eligible to enter the United States and pursue citizenship. In 2014, an article in the International Business Times reported that 1,438 visas had been granted to Cuban professionals defecting from Venezuela in the last four years, with 700 of those occurring within the last year (Lee, 2014). Desertion has been a problem for the program since it began, even causing the two countries to form an agreement which enabled each country to arrest each other's citizens (Yáñez, 2005). The number of desertions however, seems to be on the rise in the recent year and a half, possibly fueled by the increasing political and economic crisis facing Venezuela.

Operation Miracle

Cuba's immense role in Venezuela's most prominent social program for the poor has already been established, but there is another way in which the Cubans have and continue to play an important role in supporting Chavismo through the avenue of healthcare. This has been done through the joint establishment of the Operation Miracle program. A news article by the BBC states that the idea for Operation Miracle came out of the "Yo sí puedo" adult literacy program that the Cubans were already carrying out in Venezuela. The Cuban teachers were encountering a problem while trying to teach adults to read: many could not see the books themselves (Voss, 2009). Under ALBA, the two governments created the program, which began in 2004, with the purpose of performing surgeries to treat Venezuelans with cataracts, glaucoma, and other eye ailments (Werlau, 2013). The procedures would be carried out by Cuban and Venezuelan specialists and the cost would largely be covered by the Venezuelan government (Gorry, 2008).

Connor Gorry (2008), in an article for *MEDICC review*, describes the initial program. Patients for the program were identified by Cuban specialists who traveled to some of the poorest regions in the country. “Once identified, patients were flown to Havana with a family member, received surgical treatment at the Ramón Pando Ferrer Ophthalmology Institute and accommodated at a hotel for the immediate recovery and follow-up period. In addition to the surgery and related medicines, all transportation, food and lodging for both the patient and their escort were free of charge. By the end of 2004, 14,000 Venezuelans had their sight restored in this first phase of the program” (Gorry, 2008). The program’s success led to its rapid expansion. In its first three years, over 100 flights from Venezuela to Cuba took place (Azicri, 2009). More countries approached Cuba and Venezuela to join the program; by 2008 one million patients had been treated and then by 2011 that number had doubled to two million (Lamrani, 2012). Today the program has a goal of treating six million patients by 2016 (Gorry, 2008). Like Barrio Adentro, Operation Miracle has increased Chávez’s and his successor’s popularity, and once again they have largely the Cubans to thank for it.

Hugo Chávez: A Patient of Cuba

One final aspect of Cuban involvement that is worthy of note in Venezuela’s healthcare relates directly to Hugo Chávez. In his article “Fidel’s Heir”, Jon Anderson (2008) reported that Chávez had three personal doctors who travelled with him everywhere. These personal doctors assigned to Chávez were not Venezuelan, but Cuban. Then, when Chávez became sick with cancer towards the end of his life, Chávez made a similar choice. Louise Ann Bardach (2012) describes that instead of choosing to be treated in his own country of Venezuela, which does have renowned cancer specialists, he decided instead to go to Cuba for treatment. “The deciding factor, it seems, was not superior medical care, but rather the guarantee of ironclad secrecy under

the direct supervision of Chávez's mentor and closest friend, Fidel Castro. In Cuba, the health and all personal details about the Maximum Leader have long been treated as state secrets” (Bardach, 2012). Bardach’s reasoning behind Chávez’s choice to go to Cuba for treatment instead of choosing to remain in Venezuela has become all the more important and startling with the recent defection of and allegations made by Leamsy Salazar.

Leamsy Salazar was the former head of security for Hugo Chávez and then for President of the National Assembly Diosdado Cabello (Vyas & Forero, 2015). Only a few months ago, Salazar chose to defect to the United States, bringing evidence of drug-trafficking against Cabello to the US drug enforcement agency (“Bodyguard Outs,” 2015). While these revelations of a leading government official involved in this level of corruption are certainly disturbing, Salazar has made a claim even more radical. Salazar has also reportedly told US officials that Hugo Chávez died on December 30th, 2012 at 7:32 pm, over two months prior to the Venezuelan government’s announcement on March 5th, 2013 (“Hugo Chavez ‘died’,” 2015). Though there is no proof of any kind and the Venezuelan government has never released any significant details about his death, if what Leamsy claims is true, the fraud committed by the Venezuelan government, likely with some Cuban direction, would be huge. Havana became the makeshift capital during Chávez’s treatment. During this time many government officials were flown there and affairs were conducted from Chávez’s side in Cuba (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). According to the government, Chávez was officially sworn in to his fourth presidential term in private on his hospital sickbed on January 10th, 2013 (Tegel, 2015). According to Leamsy, this would have been nearly two weeks after Chávez had already died. If what Leamsy Salazar says is true, then a major question is who was ruling under Chávez’s name in his stead for two months? With much

of the government in Cuba during this time, how involved were the Castros? Until there is any real concrete evidence, this is nothing besides speculation.

Potential Weaning of the Healthcare System Off of the Cubans

Returning to the Cuban involvement in Venezuela's healthcare system, it has been noted that the Cubans are immensely involved through Barrio Adentro, Operation Miracle, and through the treatment of Hugo Chávez himself. It is worthwhile to note at this point however, that the Venezuelan government is making an effort to train its own medical professionals to someday replace the Cubans. In fact, the cooperation agreement between the two countries included an agreement made by Cuba to train 40,000 Venezuelan doctors, and ALBA provides 2,000 Venezuelans with medical scholarships to study in Cuba each year (Girvan, 2012, p. 251). However, according to Huish (2013), most Venezuelans are no longer going to Cuba to study anymore, but are being trained under the very doctors working in the Barrio Adentro program. If this is the case, then it appears that the Venezuelan government is indeed trying to train a force of doctors willing and able to replicate the Barrio Adentro program. This will be vital if in the future the Cuban aid is cut off. However, it does stand to question why after over ten years of implementation, the high presence of Cubans in the program remains. Perhaps the Venezuelan government has not provided the correct incentives to entice Venezuelans to replace the Cuban workers. Or perhaps, as we will examine later in this paper, the Venezuelan government has other reasons for keeping the Cuban presence around that lie further below the surface.

Cuban Involvement in Venezuelan Education and Other Social Programs

The "oil for professionals" deal between the Cuban and Venezuelan governments does not limit Cuba to sending only doctors in return for the oil provided by the Bolivarian Republic.

Though Cuba's largest social export to Venezuela are its doctors, Cuba has provided Venezuela with professionals from many other fields including education, sports, agriculture, and art (Corrales, 2006). This paper has already demonstrated the importance of Cuban involvement in Mission Barrio Adentro and Operation Miracle. It will continue in the following section with a discussion on Cuba's aid in other social programs and areas in Venezuela.

Cuban Involvement in Venezuelan Sports

Julio Montes, previous Venezuelan ambassador to Cuba, was quoted saying that at one point there were 1,200 Cuban sports advisors sent from the island to work in the country (Eaton, 2004). A news article put out by the news agency of Cuba gave some detail as to what these advisors typically do. Some of the Cuban advisors train Venezuelan athletes "with the objective of improving their performance at international competitions" ("Cuban Sports," n.d.). Another article in the New York Times discusses how Cuban sports trainers are even responsible to train the Venezuelan Olympians (Romero, 2010). The article by the Cuban news agency goes on to discuss other sports advisers who implement physical education programs and encourage and bring recreational activities to remote regions in the country ("Cuban Sports," n.d.).

Venezuelan Tourist Program to Cuba

Two different diplomatic cables sent from the US embassy in Caracas in 2007 and 2009 discuss a tourist agreement between Cuba and Venezuela. According to the cables, the two governments agreed that the Venezuelan government would annually provide 100,000 poor Venezuelans with all-expense paid vacations to Cuba (U.S. Department of State, 2009b). The program began in 2007 and transportation was to be provided by the Cuban state run airline service (U.S. Department of State, 2007). This program, besides providing another service to the

poor, is likely established by the two governments in an effort to enhance even further ties between the two nations' peoples.

Mission Robinson

During the same year that Cuban doctors started arriving to begin implementation of Barrio Adentro, Cuban teachers also began arriving to assist Venezuela in a campaign to eliminate illiteracy (Henken, Celaya, & Castellanos, 2013, p. 447). This campaign, which was designed around the Cuban created "Yo, Sí Puedo" program, was dubbed Operation Robinson in honor of Simón Bolívar's tutor (Uzcategui, 2010). Jen Steele (2008) from Colombia University details that the Yo, Sí Puedo program was developed by a Cuban professor shortly after Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba in 1959. The program was implemented to wipe out illiteracy on the island, and it did so efficiently. She goes on to write about why Chávez chose to adopt the program in Venezuela: "Chávez aimed to rapidly equalize Venezuelan socioeconomic status and viewed the principles and approaches of Yo, Sí Puedo to be the best means for reaching this goal... With country-specific modifications, Chávez turned the program into *Misión Robinson* (Robinson Mission) while maintaining both the core methodological principles of Yo, Sí Puedo as well as the philosophy that the program would empower people to recapture their rights and thus transform the nation into one of greater equality" (Steele, 2008).

In actuality, President Chávez had already tried to spread the Bolivarian Revolution's impact through the realm of education in a much more significant way before Mission Robinson. Denise Coleman (2015), writer of CountryWatch's review on Venezuela, describes the Venezuelan government's attempt to implement a plan called the National Education Project during the first years of Chávez's presidency. "The project, also known as PEN, included

measures such as new teacher trainings, flexible curriculums, a deconstruction of the school system's bureaucratic administration, and new facilities” (Coleman, 2015). However, opposition to the plan spread fairly quickly after the project came to be seen as “a fairly blatant manifestation of the government's agenda to indoctrinate youth in a way similar to that implemented in Cuba's education system” (Coleman, 2015). A public outcry led by teachers unions, private schools, and the Catholic church eventually caused the government to significantly scale back the project. The government would not find this kind of hostility to its enactment of Mission Robinson a few years later.

With the help of 74 Cuban advisors, Mission Robinson began its implementation in Venezuela in 2003 (Uzcategui, 2010). Only two years later, 1.5 million Venezuelans had learned to read, write, and count, and UNESCO had declared that illiteracy had been effectively eradicated in Venezuela (Lamrani, 2012). The program’s great success led Venezuela to develop further educational missions. Mission Robinson II was designed to bring graduates of the originally Robinson program up to a sixth grade education level, and missions Sucre and Ribas have given thousands of Venezuelans the ability to pursue higher education (Lamrani, 2012).

The Cuban News Agency reported in December of 2014 that Héctor Rodríguez, Minister of Education in Venezuela, “sent a huge hug to the Cuban teachers” in honor of the celebration of Educator day in Cuba. The news article goes on to state that Rodríguez said “Cuba's advice has been decisive, with its experiences, strengths and weaknesses”. The article stated that throughout the years, thousands of Cuban educators have worked in Venezuela, with more than 450 currently located in the country (“Venezuela Education,” 2014). Cuba continues to play an important role in educational programs in the country today.

Chávez's implementation of Barrio Adentro, Operation Miracle, Mission Robinson, and the other educational and social programs discussed above have all been largely successful in serving and empowering the lower class. It is also impossible to ignore how these programs also benefited Chávez politically while he was alive and continue to benefit the PSUV party today. Chavismo's overt populist strategy has allowed it to build its very identity around empowering the poor, and this has made it very hard for the opposition in Venezuela to criticize the government without appearing insensitive and receiving significant blow-back from those the government has made into its loyal supporters. However, as all of the information above has indicated, the Venezuelan government largely has the Cubans to thank for this success. Without them, their successful implementation of all of the social programs which have bought them such large support would have been severely inhibited. Without Cuban help, it is questionable whether or not Chávez would have maintained the sufficient popular support necessary to remain in the presidency.

Cuban Involvement in Venezuelan Security, Intelligence Services, and the Military

The Cuban role in the various social programs of the Bolivarian Revolution has been established as being of extreme importance to the ruling government, but there is another aspect of the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship that has had an equally profound, if not greater impact on the country. After 50 years of continuous rule, the communist Cuban government has particularly mastered how to do one thing: stay in power. Perhaps the greatest element of the Cuban-Venezuelan relationship has been Cuban involvement in the Venezuelan military, security, and intelligence services. Before we begin an examination, it is important to note that the coordination between the two countries' militaries is purposefully discrete, and therefore the full extent of intelligence and military cooperation between the two countries is unable to be

determined. However, the presence of Cuban influence on the Venezuelan military is of no question, and will be examined in detail in the pages that follow.

The Direct Presence of Cuban Military Advisors

The first aspect of Cuban influence on the Venezuelan military, security, and intelligence services is the presence of Cuban military and intelligence officers located within Venezuela itself. As Cuba has sent medical, educational, and sports professionals to Venezuela to assist in the implementation of the Bolivarian missions, so Cuba has less publicly deployed its military advisors within the Bolivarian Republic. Estimates of the exact number of Cuban advisors actually present within the country have varied overtime. A Brookings report estimated hundreds to thousands, stating that alone there are around 400 that provide direct support to the Presidential Guard (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). General Antonio Rivero of Venezuela recently appeared in New York City this last January after hiding for eleven months following the issue of a warrant for his arrest by President Maduro (Torrens, 2015). The general stated in a recent interview that Cuba has “20,000 men ready for combat in Venezuela” who could act in defense of the Bolivarian Revolution and Chavismo (Delgado, 2015).

Kevin Ginter (2013) in the *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* writes that, according to a former Venezuelan intelligence officer, Cuba first attempted to infiltrate DISIP, or the Venezuelan intelligence service, in 1999. However, the Cubans would not be granted access until 2003, which was the year following the attempted coup against Chávez in 2002. DISIP has since been renamed SEBIN (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia) and the Cuban presence has since “changed Venezuelans’ conceptions of intelligence and counter-intelligence” (Ginter, 2013). The Cuban presence has since expanded beyond the intelligence

service. Cuban presence is now profound, with not just advisors reportedly imbedded throughout the army within military units, but also throughout the government in places such as the ministry of the interior and justice, immigration services, and even within the central bank and the state-run telecommunications and grocery chains (Ginter, 2013; Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014; U.S. Department of State, 2006c).

According to Eugenio Yáñez (2007) of the University of Miami, the Cuban government has even established its own Independent Counterintelligence Unit (ICU) which operates within the Venezuelan military intelligence apparatus but remains independent from it, “under the absolute control of the Cubans” (Yáñez, 2007). He goes on to describe the unit as a “Big Brother” which watches senior Venezuelan officers as potential threats and advises on whom to promote. There have also been multiple unconfirmed reports that the “Black Wasps”, or Cuban Special Forces, have been operating within Venezuela and are being used to control the recent growth of unrest and opposition protests (Burnett & Neuman, 2014).

There are even questions and speculation over whether the doctors provided by Cuba for the Barrio Adentro program are undercover Cuban military as well. This has been the accusation of many critics of the government, who have accused the doctors of being spies, communist indoctrinators, and guerilla trainers (Ceaser, 2004). Maria Werlau writes, “hundreds of members of Cuba’s armed forces and paramilitary groups have allegedly been trained in technical medical specializations to serve abroad” (Werlau, 2013). If the accusations and what Werlau states are true, then perhaps this is also among the reasons for the apparent lack of resolve among Venezuelan government officials to replace the Cuban doctors with Venezuelans.

The level of importance Cuba has placed on this intelligence relationship with Venezuela can be seen by the number of high level military generals who have visited the island, including Abelardo Colomé Ibarra (“Furry”), Julio Casas Regueiro, Carlos Fernández Gondín, Eduardo Delgado, and rear admiral Julio César Gandarilla (Yáñez, 2007). As Ginter (2013) details, even Ramiro Valdés, the founder of the Cuban Intelligence Service, has travelled to Venezuela. In 2010, during a drought which led to an energy crisis in the country, Valdés arrived to provide “consulting” services to help Venezuelan engineers get the full power grid back online. However, Cuba is not known for its energy sector, which faces frequent shortages and has been for fifty years. An article in CNN quoted Enzo Betancourt, president of Venezuela’s Association of Engineers: ““For us engineers in Venezuela, it makes no sense... There are plenty of qualified engineers in the country with the experience to fix the electricity shortfalls. Furthermore, Venezuelan engineers are already familiar with the electric system and equipment in the country”” (Castillo, 2010). The article went on to label what Valdés is responsible for: making sure average Cubans do not have access to the internet. A cable from the US embassy in Caracas speculated that Valdés had arrived in order to help the Venezuelan government learn how to censor new internet technology such as Twitter (U.S. Department of State, 2010).

The intelligence cooperation with Venezuela is so strong that even back in 2006 a diplomatic cable sent from the US Embassy in Caracas stated that they had received reports indicating that Cuban-Venezuelan intelligence ties are so advanced “that the two countries' agencies appear to be competing with each other for the BRV's attention” (U.S. Department of State, 2006d). Cuban intelligence officers allegedly have direct access to Chavez and frequently provide him with intelligence reports which are “unvetted by Venezuelan officers” (U.S. Department of State, 2006d).

This unprecedented relationship and overwhelming access to the country provided by the Venezuelan government to the Cubans has led to the rise of a number of voices of dissent, many from within the military itself. General Rivero, who was mentioned earlier, is one of the most prominent. Originally a Chávez ally, Rivero resigned from his position in 2010 to denounce the thousands of Cubans which he stated were infiltrating every aspect of the government. “We are at the mercy of meddling in areas of national security... Cuba wants Chavez to remain in power because he gives them oil” (Romero, 2010). Only days after Rivero’s comments and public resignation, Chávez responded by announcing a 40% pay increase for all military ranks in order to shore up loyalty against a “growing discontent and tension within the armed forces” (Rittinger & Cleary, 2013).

General Rivero has not been the only officer to protest the Cuban meddling. General Ángel Vivas, who also resigned for reasons similar to Rivero, founded the Anti-Castro-Communist Venezuelan Resistance, which demands that the Cubans in government be kicked out of Venezuela. Vivas recently made headlines after Maduro accused him of inciting violence by aiding protestors during the March protests of last year. A warrant issued by Maduro for his arrest led to an armed standoff between Vivas and security officers who came to arrest him at his home. The security officers were eventually driven away by protestors who gathered to Vivas’ aid (Martín, 2015a). Even General Raúl Isaiás Baduel, who was Venezuelan Defense Minister from 2004-2007 and one of the original three officers who had helped Chávez spearhead his attempted coup in 1992 has spoken against the Cuban involvement. He was imprisoned in 2007 for opposing Chávez on a number of items, and in 2010 he joined a number of other former Chávez supporters to denounce a number of things about the Chávez government, including the Cuban infiltration (Daremlum, 2010).

The opposition to the “Cubanization” of Venezuela has not been reserved to only the military. In 2010, it is widely believed that Venezuelan Vice President Ramón Carrizales and his wife Yubirí Ortega who was then environmental minister, resigned in protest to the increasing Cuban presence (Darembaum, 2010). Henrique Capriles, one of the leading figures of the opposition, has frequently denounced the Cuban presence. As Jose Cardenas (2013) describes in his Washington Times article, when Capriles narrowly lost the election to Nicolas Maduro following Chávez’s death, Capriles claimed electoral fraud and travelled to other countries around Latin America to protest the results. As a response, President Maduro accused Capriles of treason by not accepting what he has claimed as legitimate results. Capriles quickly fired back by sending out a message from his twitter account which stated, “Treason is allowing the Cuban government to infiltrate our armed forces and their officers give orders to ours,” and “The great traitor is Maduro! Every day he gives away our national resources to his bosses, the Castro brothers” (Cardenas, 2013).

In spite of the hostility it has created, the Venezuelan government has not tried to deny the presence of Cubans in the military. In fact, Chávez acknowledged plainly that the Cubans were present in the military to offer “moderate help” (Romero, 2010). Pedro Carreño, who was a former interior minister under Chávez, wrote a column in the Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional and stated, “The revolutionary government of Cuba applies a concept of national defense with a prolonged and successful track record... Not having military exchanges with Cuba could be grounds for treason of the homeland” (as cited in Romero, 2010). While we have certainly established the level of infiltration the Cubans have within Venezuela, their purpose for being there remains undiscussed. It seems evident through both its words and actions that the

Venezuelan government certainly finds the Cuban advisors to be an important asset, but what purpose do they serve?

The 2002 coup which briefly threw Chávez out of power ultimately made Chávez stronger by revealing to him where he was vulnerable. After the 2002 coup revealed his weaknesses, Chávez looked to his friends in Cuba, who after learning from the KGB and having 55 years of practice, have one of the intelligence services most capable at monitoring and controlling dissent. Since arriving, the Cuban advisors have helped the Venezuelan government find and repress opposition within the country. According to Werlau (2014), former members of Venezuelan Intelligence as well as people with direct access to the military stated that during the unrest last year it was Cubans, including twenty high-ranking officers, who helped directly coordinate the repression of the protestors. The Cuban military presence in Venezuela has certainly played a role in weakening the opposition and keeping control of the country in government hands, but over the past decade the Cubans have been used for much more than simply harassing opponents. Unlike the Castros who built up every aspect of their current regime themselves, Chávez inherited the armed forces from his predecessors. Since the 2002 coup, Chávez and his political allies, along with his help from the Cuban advisors who are less likely to be affected by anti-regime sentiments, have slowly transformed the armed forces into an organization which is fiercely loyal to the current Venezuelan government. This Cuban inspired transformation, which will now be examined, might come to be the only thing that allows the Bolívarian Revolution to continue into the future.

Growth and Politicization of the Armed Forces under Chávez

One of the first things to note when examining the Venezuelan military since Chávez came to the presidency has been its growth in strength. Eric Rittinger and Matthew Cleary (2013) in their journal article “Confronting Coup Risk in the Latin American Left” argue that regimes which attempt to implement radical changes away from democratic norms are more susceptible to coups, and therefore make an effort to “coup proof”. One of the ways in which the writers believe regimes can coup proof is by increasing military spending, and Chávez is cited as one of their key examples. According to the authors, defense spending from 2005-2009 was 70% greater than the time from 2000-2004, though the authors note that spending actually ticked upwards starting after the coup in 2002. In 2006, Chávez said that more weaponry and soldiers were needed in order to protect Venezuela from threats, including a foreign invasion from the United States (Coleman, 2015, p. 28). Business Monitor International (2014) reported that Venezuela had, to date, imported \$11 billion worth of Russian weapons making it one of the largest foreign arms importers among developing countries. \$4 billion of that was lent in one sum by Russia to Venezuela to assist in purchasing a variety of military hardware such as Su-30 multipurpose fighter jets, Kilo-class submarines, Mi-24 and Mi-35 attack helicopters, anti-air defense systems, as well as tanks, armored personnel carriers, and firearms (Rittinger & Cleary, 2013). As Javier Corrales points out, the Cuban advisors, with decades of experience on Russian military equipment, have likely served as sources of technical advice (Corrales, 2006).

While the military’s wartime capability has increased, there has been another change that has occurred within the Venezuelan military that makes it far more dangerous. The Bolívarian Revolution’s transformation of society has included the politicization of the armed forces to the point where they have become, in the words of a Chávez ally, “the most highly organized

structure supporting the revolutionary project’” (as cited in Coletta, 2010). This full transformation of the military has been a process, almost certainly with assistance from the Cubans, which began as soon as Chávez entered the presidency but really accelerated shortly after the coup in 2002.

Harold Trinkunas in his book *Crafting Civilian Control of the Military in Venezuela* writes that from the very beginning of his first term, Chávez believed that in order to effectively address the national crisis he needed “to take advantage of the human and technical resources provided by the armed forces” (Trinkunas, 2005, p. 214) He explicitly called upon the armed forces to join with him in support of his revolutionary project. Chavez, in response to those who argued that the military should stay out of the realm of politics, stated that the military should not be apolitical, because you cannot confuse “politics with politicking” (Buttó, 2013). Chávez stated that military officers “cannot be” politicians but that they “should be” politicians, and therefore should feel and think as them (Buttó, 2013).

This use of the armed forces to carry out domestic political activities otherwise unrelated to national security was made possible by the new Venezuelan Constitution in 1999. Article 328, although it forbids the military from directly choosing a political orientation, establishes the National Armed Forces as an organization which, among other things, should have an “active participation in national development” (*Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, 2006). This has allowed Chávez and his government to use the military to implement its public policies. One of the most prominent ways he utilized the military from the start was through his Plan Bolívar 2000, which involved “infrastructure refurbishment, construction, health care for the poor, combating illiteracy and unemployment, and food distribution”, all carried out under the direction of military officers (Trinkunas, 2005, p. 215). Though aspects of this initial social

program have been replaced by other missions about which we have already discussed, Plan Bolívar 2000 set a precedent for the expansion of the military's jurisdictional boundaries into the realm of domestic public policy and politics.

The attack on Chávez in 2002, which we have already noted alerted him to his vulnerabilities, also gave him the reason he needed to enact even more bold changes which he desired to implement as he worked to “counter” the threat posed by the United States (Yáñez, 2005). Outwardly, Chávez changed the military cosmetically, giving them a new uniform which is similar to Cuba's in appearance (Yáñez, 2005). Describing the old uniforms, Chávez stated that the “ideological deviation and submissive spirit that existed within the country's top commands led the army to gradually begin using a uniform that was not theirs”, and went on to describe the old uniform as part of an “imperialist past” (Yáñez, 2005). He also changed the name of the army, renaming it the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (Romero, 2010), and even gave the military a new motto inspired by the Cuban one, which translates as “Fatherland, Socialism, or Death”. Chávez stated that those unwilling to recite the motto should not be in the military (Buttó, 2013).

The coup against Chávez also allowed him to make a number of changes to the Venezuelan military inwardly as well. As Rittinger and Cleary (2013) write, he started directly after the coup by removing over a hundred officers who were found guilty of treason, and replaced all of them with Chávez loyalists. Since then, any officer who has been deemed a threat has been quickly removed. The armed forces as a whole has multiple units with overlapping missions and also experiences frequent rotations of leadership to prevent collaboration and coordination among those who might conspire together against the government. The underlying objective of all of these measures, according to Hernán Yáñez (2005), was the transformation of

the armed forces “‘a la Cuba’ as an unconditional instrument at the service of the Chavez project. In fact, Fidel Castro himself was named the “godfather” of those graduating from the Venezuelan Army’s Military Command in 2005, who travelled to the island to be decorated by Castro after their graduation (Yáñez, 2005).

Over ten years of these efforts by Chávez to transform the military seemed to have resulted in his desired goal. With over 720 positions in the government held by military officers in 2013, Chávez was right when he called his government “a military one”, which he also acknowledged himself the President as the commander-in-chief (Buttó, 2013). That reality becomes increasingly frightening as the system of checks and balances limiting the President’s power continues to deteriorate. Buttó (2013) writes that throughout his life Chavez referred to the military as Bolívarian, revolutionary, anti-imperialist, socialist, and chavista. His transformation of the military seems complete as it now identifies itself with these same names after the Venezuelan Military High Command ordered their inclusion as part of a daily military salute which began in April 2012. Previous defense minister Carlos Mata Figueroa warned that the military is very committed to the changes of the revolution and will stand by its commander-in- chief (Fletcher & Wallis, 2011). General Rangel Silva, another previous defense minister, even went so far as to state that the military would not accept any government that was not loyal to Chavez (Corrales & Romero, 2013, p. 133). In the words of an opposition politician, Chávez successfully “‘converted the Armed Forces into his own political party’” (Coletta, 2010).

Miriam Kornblith, in her article “Chavismo after Chávez?” writes, “during the April 2002 coup against Chávez, most of the officer corps refused to obey the president’s orders to use force against anti-regime demonstrators who staged huge protests in Caracas. After more than a decade of revolutionary indoctrination and Cubanization, it is unclear whether the military would again

ignore such a presidential order” (Kornblith, 2013). Though critics have decried it as unconstitutional, a recent internal ruling made by the ministry of defense this past January allows for the “use of force, with a firearm or any other potentially lethal weapon” to be used as an option of last resort to “prevent disorder, support the legitimately constituted authority, and counter all aggression, immediately confronting it with the necessary measures” (Martín, 2015b). The situation in the country since Chávez’s death has deteriorated and economic mismanagement has resulted in an increasingly embattled President Maduro. The President’s situation, plus this recent internal ruling, coupled with statements like those made by General Silva, make Kornblith’s scenario seem all the more likely. In fact, two further Cuban-inspired creations of the Venezuelan government are ready to, or even have already carried this out. The next two sections will examine the establishment of the Bolívarian militia and the creation of the Bolívarian Circles, which today can be better known as the *colectivos*.

The Bolívarian Militias

According to the Brookings report, the Venezuelan armed forces revised their military doctrine while under Chávez from a U.S. model of defense to a Cuban one, which is a doctrine based on creating a prolonged popular war during the case of an invasion of the country. A key element of this model involves incorporating the civilian population into resistance forces in the event of an invasion (Piccone & Trinkunas, 2014). To do this, Chávez created a national militia, which today numbers approximately 800,000 volunteers willing to defend the Revolution (Werlau, 2014). Mirrored off of the Cuban Territorial Troop Militias, Patrick Duddy, former US ambassador to Venezuela writes that the militias are “organized outside the formal military chain of command and drawn from the social and economic strata in which Chavez’s support is strongest” (Duddy, 2012). Created as a fusion between the armed forces and the people, the

militias serve as a popular force that can rise up in defense of country, or more specifically, the Bolivarian Revolution.

This leads to the other purpose of the militias, which is to protect the government from future military coups and to counter the opposition (Buttó, 2013). Though Chávez and Maduro have largely politicized the armed forces, the militias serve as yet another safeguard against the possibility of a military coup. The militias, over whom the President has direct control, are established outside of the realm of the rest of the armed forces and therefore serve as an alternate armed group which can counter balance the regular military (“Venezuela's Pro-Government,” 2014). Though their combat effectiveness might be questioned, Chávez has frequently reminded the other military branches of the growing power of the militias (Romero, 2010). Regardless of their actual military strength, Chávez and Maduro have used them for the huge base of support for political projects and public displays of strength which they provide. At one particular parade while he was alive, Chávez told the militia members to “sweep away the bourgeoisie” if he ever was assassinated. These militias serve as yet another means by which the PSUV is able to maintain control of Venezuela (Romero, 2010).

The Colectivos

Early in 2001, President Chávez tasked then chief of staff Diosdado Cabello and head of the Directorate of Police Intelligence Services Miguel Rodriguez Torres with the creation of community-level organizations which could be responsible for identifying local concerns for the presidency and generate widespread support for the Revolution (“Venezuela's Pro-Government,” 2014). These organizations, or Bolivarian Circles as they would first be known, were to help implement the new Constitution and the missions of the Revolution by providing a direct link to

the masses through which the government could provide ideological and political training (Ginter, 2013). Overtime these Circles, or the colectivos as they have become called today, have also developed into paramilitary organizations who have appointed themselves the guardians of the Revolution and its policies.

Daniel Wallis provides some greater insight into what activities the groups are involved in. The organizations are in many ways two-faced. The groups often point to their “bookshops, study groups, summer camps for children, and coffee mornings for pensioners” as evidence of their goodwill and genuine service to their communities (Wallis, 2014). What the groups do not as readily acknowledge is that “they are a key part of government's electoral ‘machinery’”, as they are able to instill support for government programs and draw up supporters to sway close electoral races (Wallis, 2014). However, the groups’ critics hail them as “poll station thugs who intimidate opponents” (Wallis, 2014). In some cases they even go beyond intimidation.

According to a Stratfor Analysis report, though the Socialist government in Venezuela has never publicly ordered the colectivos to attack political opponents, the groups have routinely emerged during periods of political confrontation (“Venezuela's Pro-Government,” 2014). The colectivos most closely linked to violence are La Piedrita, Montaraz, Simon Bolivar, Los Tupamaros, Alexis Vive and the Carapaica movement (“Venezuela's Pro-Government,” 2014). There have been instances linking these groups to killing, vandalism, and other crimes, and according to an ex-SEBIN member, security forces are often ordered to allow them free reign (Werlau, 2014). Brian Nelson (2009) in his book *The Silence and the Scorpion: the Coup against Chávez and the Making of Modern Venezuela* describes in great detail the coup of 2002. During his description, the use of the colectivos is mentioned throughout and their role in the violence that played out in the streets during this time is recognized. Likewise, media reports have

connected them with the most recent violence in the 2014 protests as well. Throughout their existence, they have been accused of sending death threats to journalists, assaulting opposition TV stations, and even tear-gassing the Vatican envoy's residence in Caracas after Chávez accused the Catholic church of meddling in the country's politics (Wallis, 2014). These groups are clearly more than simple community service organizations.

As do much of the socialist government in Venezuela, the *colectivos* bear the marks of Cuban involvement and inspiration. Many analysts have noted their similarity to both the "neighborhood watch committees", formerly known as Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, and to the Cuban Rapid Response Brigades (Cardenas, 2013; Werlau, 2014). Also according to Werlau, Cuba even actively recruits for the Tupamaro *colectivo*. Recruits are sent to Cuba for training in Communism and how to contain the opposition. She also mentioned that in 2013, a government funded program to rehabilitate criminals was announced which involved sending them to Cuba. Though once again we find ourselves in the realm of speculation, what sort of rehabilitation services does Cuba have to offer that Venezuela does not?

After the latest unrest and with a crippling murder rate, especially in the capital, there is the potential that President Maduro is losing control of the *colectivos*. As stated in the stratfor report "Venezuela's Pro-Government Activists Play a Role in Protest Violence" (2014), many of the *colectivo* groups, which are armed, are likely involved in criminal activity. It is believed that Maduro is trying to disarm the *colectivo* groups which are known to be involved in criminal activities. A recent move to disarm one of the *colectivos*, the March 5 group which actively participated in disrupting protests last year, resulted in the death of five of its members and led to a dispute between the group and the government. The group demanded that General Miguel Rodriguez Torres, who as was stated earlier was one of the creators of the *colectivos*, be

removed from his position. If not, the group threatened to break ties and protest the government. In a move that shows the importance of maintaining the loyalty of these groups to the Venezuelan government, Maduro acquiesced to their demands (“Venezuela’s Pro-Government,” 2014). The colectivos, along with the militias, are an important part of the defense of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Conclusion

The direct presence of Cuban military advisors, as well as the transformation of the Venezuelan armed forces under Chávez and Maduro with Cuban help, has allowed for the creation of a military which will protect the ideals of the Bolivarian Revolution. Conveniently, protection of the revolution also means protection of the PSUV government by association as well. While this can be clearly understood as Venezuela’s motivation to allow such unprecedented Cuban access to its military and government, what has been the driving force motivating the Cubans?

As has been established, the subsidized oil which Venezuela provides Cuba has become a vital part of keeping the Cuban economy afloat. When business leader Pedro Carmona briefly became president after the 2002 coup, one of the first things he did during his brief two-day presidency was ignore the 2000 agreement and cancel the oil shipments to the island (Azicri, 2009). Luckily for Cuba, Chávez was able to come back to power quickly and restore the shipments. While Chávez certainly had his reasons to look to Cuba for greater security help after the coup, it is possible that this brief oil scare is what caused Cuba to so readily commit to such a tight military relationship as well. Not wanting to lose their vital supply of Venezuelan oil,

Cuban military cooperation and consultation in Venezuela has helped to safeguard their interests. Eugenio Yáñez stipulates: “If it were strategically indispensable for the survival of the succeeding government, Cuban mechanisms in Venezuela could support or even establish a new Bolivarian Savior” (Yáñez, 2005).

John Magdaleno (2011) in his article “Public Opinion and Venezuelan Foreign Policy” discusses the opinion of average Venezuelans on the Castro regime and their relationship with Venezuela. In 2005, a DatAnalysis survey asked the public about their general position regarding the Castro government of Cuba. Over 50% of those surveyed were critical of the Cuban government, while 16% responded that they were supportive (p. 56). In 2007, they asked a different question: “What is your position with regard to Venezuela taking Fidel Castro’s Cuban regime as an example?” 83.7% of those surveyed stood against this position (p. 54). According to these results, the close relationship with the Cuban government is not politically beneficial to the PSUV government in and of itself. Yet this relationship has continued unabated since its start.

This paper has examined how Cuba’s immense role in Venezuela has benefited the Venezuelan government. Though perhaps not directly popular as stated above, the bilateral relationship has helped Chávez and Maduro in a number of ways. Through its involvement in Barrio Adentro, Operation Miracle, Mission Robinson, and other social programs, Cuba has played an important role in carrying out the promises of the Bolivarian Revolution and building up the popularity of the socialist government in Venezuela. Meanwhile, through its involvement in the armed forces and intelligence services, Cuba has helped the Venezuelan government to prevent further coups, stifle dissent, and shore up a military force dedicated to protect a

government loyal to the principles of Chavismo. All of these benefits have played a huge part in the government's success.

For these reasons above, the author of this paper argues that the Cuban government is largely responsible for the longevity of PSUV control of the government in Venezuela, and the survival of the Maduro administration in the future will largely continue to depend on this Cuban support. With the downturn in oil prices over the past year, the petro-state has found itself strapped for cash while facing enormous economic problems. The protests which shook the country last year are a reflection of increasing support for the opposition and the growing political divide that separates the country. While President Maduro's government could certainly use all of the extra income it could get, halting the extremely preferential oil shipments to Cuba could result in the loss of Cuban support and a disruption of the Venezuelan social missions: two key items on a shrinking list of things that are maintaining his support. This has placed President Maduro in a sticky situation, out of which he has yet to work himself.

Furthermore, this analysis has raised a question regarding the state of Venezuela in the future. Though the next presidential election is not scheduled until 2019, what would occur if an opposition candidate was to win the election? Under current conditions, it is hard to foresee the overtly politicized military, let alone Cuba, supporting a transition of power to a government not firmly behind the ideals of the revolution. For this reason, the author asserts that democracy in Venezuela has broken down not just because of a deterioration of the system of checks and balances or the alleged electoral fraud, but also because it appears that current Venezuelan society will not be conducive to a peaceful transition of power. Unless the current government decides to change its policies, more violence, greater than what was witnessed last February and March, can unfortunately be expected. If and when this violence does take place, like many other

aspects of the Venezuelan government, Cuban inspiration and involvement will be at least partially to blame.

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