



RESOLUTION & REALITY: H.RES. 1049

Some people accuse Venezuela of links to terrorism. They're wrong.

On March 13, 2008, a small group of conservative Republicans introduced a resolution calling for Venezuela to be designated a state sponsor of terrorism. The resolution, H.Res. 1049, asks that the State Department place Venezuela on a list of countries that provide support to terrorist organizations, a designation that would impose a number of sanctions on Venezuela and U.S. companies that do business there. The list currently includes Cuba, Iran, Syria, North Korea, and Sudan. On May 15, 2006, the Bush administration removed Libya from the list.

Though various critics of President Hugo Chávez have accused Venezuela of supporting terrorist groups, no credible or verifiable evidence has ever been presented to substantiate those claims. Any move to place Venezuela on a list of state sponsors of terror would be plainly political, would further de-legitimize the U.S.'s war on terror, negatively impact its relations with the hemisphere, and damage its economy. Below we detail some of the claims made by the resolution and the reality of those accusations.

RESOLUTION: "Whereas reports indicate that ties between high-level Venezuelan officials and the FARC date back to August 1999, when letters signed by high-level aides of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez revealed that the Venezuelan Government had offered fuel, money, and other support to the FARC..."

REALITY: No proof has ever been shown to back this accusation. In testimony before the U.S. Senate on the Annual Threat Assessment of the Intelligence Community on February 27, 2008, Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell made no mention of such allegations in his discussion of Venezuela. At the same hearing, General Michael Maples, head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, made clear that Venezuelan weapons do not go to Colombia or rebel groups. According to a report of the hearing: "Maples then interjected, saying U.S. officials had not seen any distribution of rifles to Colombia. 'We have seen them go into armories,' he said."¹

RESOLUTION: "Whereas, in January 2008, President Chávez praised the FARC as 'a real army' and 'an insurgent force with a political project,' and called upon

foreign governments to cease referring to the FARC as a terrorist organization..."

REALITY: President Chávez's request was taken out of historical and political context. After decades of violence in Colombia – most of which has spilled over the 1,400-mile-long border shared by Venezuela and Colombia – President Chávez and many leaders in the region are convinced that a military solution to the Colombian conflict is not possible. Therefore, President Chávez has called for a politically negotiated solution like those seen in Central America and in Ireland, where labels such as "terrorist" were set aside for the purposes of negotiating a peaceful resolution.

President Chávez explained his perspective in the Rio Summit: "Colombia has decided, and we

respect that decision, to label these guerrilla groups terrorists. We do not label them as such. Only the United States, the European Union and Colombia use that label. Therefore when they rub in our faces the assertion that 'You do not fight against terrorism' we can only ask ourselves: 'What are you talking about?' For us...we consider them insurgent forces, guerrilla forces. We believe we have to recognize this first so that we can find a path towards peace, just like it happened in Central America, more recently in Guatemala." President Chávez has stated clearly that his main goal is helping achieve peace in Colombia, a position recognized by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on March 27, 2008, when he stated: "For a number of days all the press talked about was the war between Colombia and Venezuela, but the great pacifier of the conflict between Colombia and Ecuador was actually President Chávez."²

It is important to note that Venezuela has a long history of participating in complex peace negotiations. In the 1980s and 90s, Venezuela was a founding member of the Contadora Group, which helped negotiate peaceful resolutions to conflicts raging in Central America. More recently, Venezuela has participated with Cuba in peace negotiation efforts between the Colombian government and the Army of National Liberation (ELN), a move that was welcomed by the U.S. State Department even though they also classify the rebel group as "terrorist."

¹ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/americas/story/436595.html>

² http://www.eluniversal.com/2008/03/27/colcd_ava_chavez-alerta-sobre_27A1463799.shtml



This perspective is hardly limited to President Chávez, though. In early March 2008, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice indicated that the U.S. would be open to Egypt negotiating with Hamas, a group designated as “terrorist,” to help resolve the conflict between Palestine and Israel.³ In relation to Colombia, many officials from different governments have met with members of Colombia’s armed groups in hopes of initiating peace negotiations. In 1999, a well-respected and senior State Department official in the Clinton administration, Philip Chicola (who currently serves as Deputy Chief of Mission in the U.S. Embassy in Brazil), met with a leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Costa Rica, and more recently officials from a number of European governments, including France, maintained contact with the FARC in hopes of negotiating the release of hostages.⁴

In April 2008 French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that when France took the presidency of the European Union in July 2008, it would support the FARC’s removal from the list of terrorist organizations.⁵

RESOLUTION: “Whereas seized documents from a Colombia-led raid against the FARC on March 1, 2008, suggest evidence of \$300,000,000 in payments to the FARC from the Venezuelan Government, high-level contacts by the FARC with officials from Ecuador and Venezuela, and efforts by the FARC to obtain 50 kilograms of uranium...Whereas these documents reportedly reveal agreements between the Venezuelan Government and the FARC to release hostages in exchange for the promotion of FARC by President Chavez as a legitimate army and insurgency, rather than as a terrorist organization...”

REALITY: At the Summit of the Rio Group on March 7, President Chávez emphatically stated that any claims of financial or logistical support to the FARC were plainly false.

First, no explanation has been given as to how the laptops containing the documents that make the claims survived what was an intense bombing by Colombian forces.

Second, the documents have not been found to be accurate or even authentic. Independent analysts have found a number of discrepancies in the documents that would cast doubt on their credibility. First, the amount “\$300 million” is never explicitly stated, much less is it stated alongside the name of President Chávez or any Venezuelan government official. As an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on March 27 notes, “There has

been no independent analysis of the laptops or their contents, and some analysts have cautioned that information described as being taken from them could be part of a government-sponsored disinformation program to discredit Ecuador and Venezuela. Those allegations were strengthened somewhat when it was revealed this month that a photo from Reyes’ laptop leaked to *El Tiempo* newspaper that alleged to show Reyes with Ecuadorean Interior Minister Gustavo Larrea did not actually picture Larrea.”⁶ Furthermore, according to an ABC report, even U.S. intelligence analysts have expressed “extreme skepticism” over the claim made in one of the documents that the FARC was seeking to purchase uranium.⁷ (There is a curious similarity here with the accusation that Iraq tried to purchase uranium for Niger, a claim that served as a principal justification for the invasion.)

Third, if the documents indicate anything, it’s that President Chávez entered into contact with leaders of the FARC *only* during the process of humanitarian negotiation that took place late last year – a process that President Alvaro Uribe himself had agreed to. (So far, six hostages held by the FARC have been released to Venezuela.) This process of humanitarian exchange mediated by President Chávez has been supported by the family members of three American defense contractors held by the FARC since 2003.

Finally, as Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) Jose Miguel Insulza made clear in an interview to the newspaper *El Comercio* in Ecuador, “Interpol will only says if those computers had the information before March 1st and if this has not been manipulated...What the Interpol cannot assure is that the information in those computers is true.” He added, “Just because Reyes [the rebel leader killed in the raid] says ‘We gave money to him’ does not mean that it’s true. On this issue I’d ask that people not lose their heads as has happened in recent days. I’ve seen many documents produced in the heat of the moment and many of them haven’t corresponded with reality.”⁸

RESOLUTION: “Whereas, since 2001, in each Annual Country Report on Terrorism, the Department of State has cited the ability of the FARC and the Colombian National Liberation Army to use the Venezuelan border area for cross-border incursions and regard Venezuelan territory near the border as a safe haven...”

³ <http://africa.reuters.com/wire/news/usnNo5641458.html>
⁴ <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20080304/index.htm>
⁵ <http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/Sarkozy-s-plan-to-free-Ingrid,2979>

⁶ <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-dirtybomb27mar27,1,5981373.story>
⁷ “U.S. Skeptical of Colombian ‘Dirty Bomb’ Claims,” ABC News. <http://www.abcnews.go.com/Blotter/story?id=4395397&page=1>

⁸ “Para nosotros la soberanía territorial es sagrada: Insulza.” *El Comercio*. Marzo 20, 2008. http://www.eluniversal.com/2008/03/05/pol_ava_batallones-militares_05A1409039.shtml



REALITY: Venezuela and Colombia share a 1,400-mile-long border, most of which follows inhospitable terrain and is difficult to guard. Historically the Colombian conflict has spilled across the border, leading to increases in Colombian refugees in Venezuela, cross-border violence, crime, and drug trafficking. Surely the U.S. would be sympathetic to the difficulties associated with guarding a long border in difficult terrain.

During different administrations the Venezuelan government has expressed concern over the safety of its border with Colombia, and steps have been taken to secure certain areas. The UN High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) has even recognized Venezuela's positive achievements in dealing with Colombian refugees. It is false and misleading, though, for the U.S. State Department to claim that Venezuela is knowingly allowing Colombian armed groups to use its territory for any purposes. As Jesús Gregorio González González, the Chief of the Operational Strategy Command of Venezuela's armed forces stated on March 5, 2008: "Whoever sets foot on Venezuelan territory while bearing arms and without any intention that's not peaceful will be considered an enemy of Venezuela's armed forces."⁹

RESOLUTION: "Whereas, on September 15, 2005, President George W. Bush decertified Venezuela regarding counter-narcotics cooperation because Venezuela had 'failed demonstrably' to stem the flow of hundreds of tons of cocaine and other illegal narcotics..."

REALITY: Venezuela has kept a very strong policy regarding counter-narcotics cooperation and works with Colombia, Europe and many other countries – 50 in all – including the United States.

But while the U.S.-funded Plan Colombia has put pressure on drug producers in Colombia, production of illegal drugs has not gone down – the means and routes of trafficking have simply shifted. Independent analysts call this the balloon effect – if you squeeze on one side, another side will rise. The fact that illegal drugs have come through Venezuela does not implicate the Venezuelan government, it merely means that traffickers have started using the country as a means to ship drugs, as they did with other countries on prior occasions. With Venezuelan efforts to stop the trafficking of drugs, the route may once again shift, though drug production in Colombia and demand in the U.S. will remain virtually unchanged. Much of the current circumstances Venezuela finds itself in are more the product of the failure of Plan

Colombia to stem the production of cocaine than the efforts of Venezuela to stop its trafficking.

Venezuela has maintained an important level of seizures of drugs in the country (in 2004 was 47 tons; in 2005 the total was 85 tons; in 2006 66 tons; in 2007 63; and by March 31, 2008 the seizures were at 8.47 tons). Moreover, in 2006 the National Anti-Narcotics Office (ONA in Spanish) started the installation of 10 radars from China which will allow an increase in the surveillance and control of the Venezuelan territory and coasts.¹⁰ The program, set to cost \$260 million, has already seen the installation of three radars, with seven more expected by October 2008.¹¹ And in one of its most aggressive actions against drug trafficking in 2008, the Venezuelan armed forces have destroyed 157 clandestine landing strips used for drug flights.

In 2006 the Venezuelan security forces captured and extradited six chiefs of known drug cartels, destroyed 39 illegal landing strips, and confiscated 13 ranches, a clinic, a milk factory, 32 planes and five luxuries properties of a drug-trafficker in Caracas and the countryside.¹² On March 8, 2008 Venezuelan authorities arrested a suspected drug lord and arms smuggler with paramilitary links wanted in the U.S.¹³

In an interview with a Colombian radio station in May 2007, Thomas Adler, the DEA Director for Venezuela, stated: "The collaboration and the information, the sharing of information between officials has improved since last year. It has improved since the day I arrived in November [2006]. Thankfully there is a new drug czar, Nestor Reverol, the new president of the ONA, with whom we have great collaboration."¹⁴

RESOLUTION: "Whereas terrorist groups in Colombia have been found to be in possession of weapons belonging to official Venezuelan stocks and facilities..."

REALITY: There is simply no evidence that Venezuela's is officially sanctioning or participating in any weapons trafficking to any rebel group in Colombia or elsewhere. As General Michael Maples of the DIA noted in a hearing before the U.S. Senate on February 27, 2008, "We have seen them [Venezuelan weapons] go into armories."

¹⁰ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKN2845599620080329?pa geNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>

¹¹ "Venezuela Steps Up Efforts to Thwart Cocaine Traffic," *Washington Post*, April 7, 2008. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/04/06/AR2008040602158_2.html

¹² "Venezuela Instalará Radares para Combatir Narcotráfico," *El Universal*. Diciembre 15, 2006.

¹³ "Authorities arrest suspected drug lord." *Washington Times*. March 8, 2008.

¹⁴ Number 3: <http://www.wradio.com.co/entrevistas.asp#>

⁹ "Batallones militares han sido desplazados a la frontera en un 90% dice Alto Mando Militar." *El Universal*. Marzo 5, 2008.



Accusing Venezuela of giving guns to Colombian rebel groups because the guns may have come through Venezuela is akin to accusing the U.S. of giving guns to Mexican criminal groups because the majority of their guns come from the U.S. As the *Christian Science Monitor* reported in July 2007, more than 90 percent of the guns confiscated yearly in Mexico originate in the U.S. Moreover, approximately 40 percent of the total trafficked weapons are linked to drug trafficking organizations. The report, which was cited by Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) in a congressional hearing, also said that there are “allegations that heavy duty weaponry has been stolen from the Department of Defense facilities and National Guard armories and trafficked into Mexico.”¹⁵ However, it would irresponsible to affirm that the government of the U.S. is participating or allowing the trafficking

RESOLUTION: “Whereas President Chávez has established strong relationships with Iran, Cuba, Syria, and North Korea, all state sponsors of terrorism...”

REALITY: It is important to note that Iran, Cuba, Syria, and North Korea have been designated state sponsors of terror *by the U.S.*, and such a designation has no implication or effect on the ability of other sovereign countries to establish relations with them. In fact, many countries of the world – including allies of the U.S. – have open relations with countries like Cuba and Iran, and this is not criticized by the Bush administration. This is also an odd accusation given that the Bush administration itself has been consistently negotiating with North Korea, going so far as to allow the New York Philharmonic to travel to the country earlier this year.

RESOLUTION: “Whereas according to the Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2008, Venezuela has greatly increased its cooperation with Iran and expressed a willingness to cooperate with that country on nuclear energy...”

REALITY: Not surprisingly, the resolution cherry-picks exactly what the Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence actually says. The report states: “Venezuela and Iran have made the most progress on the economic and energy fronts, negotiating agreements in such areas as agriculture, automobile and tractor manufacture, petrochemicals, and oil exploration in Venezuela’s Orinoco region. Venezuela and Iran also have discussed cooperation on nuclear energy, but we are

not aware of any significant developments as a result of these discussions.”

It is important to note that Venezuela and Iran have shared close and strategic relations since the 1950s, when both countries participated as founding members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Moreover, the relations described in the report are fully consistent with the relations that sovereign nations can share. Finally, it is worth stating that though no significant developments on nuclear energy have been produced, every country has the sovereign right to develop nuclear energy for *peaceful* purposes. Venezuela has been extremely clear on this point, stating that it would support any country using nuclear energy for peaceful purposes while objecting to any country using nuclear energy for the creation of weapons.

Venezuela has signed and ratified 10 anti-terrorism agreements and conventions, eight within the UN framework and two within the OAS framework

Finally, as Representative Jose Serrano stressed in reference to a resolution introduced in 2007 criticizing the links between Iran and Latin America: “These are some of the same folks that told us there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. How many of us have forgotten those words, ‘weapons of mass

destruction’? They also told us that Iraq was tied to al Qaeda. They also told us that Iraq helped al Qaeda in the 9/11 attacks. Even the White House has now admitted that most of that, if not all, was not true. So, I can’t understand this desire to lump this together with Iran, present bad information, if not outright lies, and begin to move us towards a confrontation with Latin America at the same time we have confrontation with Iran.”¹⁶

RESOLUTION: “Whereas Venezuela reportedly has large deposits of uranium ore in the Guiana Shield region...”

REALITY: Many countries have uranium deposits, and it is well known that uranium in its natural form is relatively useless for military purposes.

As a report presented before the UN Security Council certified regarding the deposits of uranium in Venezuela, “Venezuela has been working on the subject in conjunction with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and, in 2004, two teams of experts visited the country as part of the International Nuclear Security Advisory Service of the Agency’s Department of Nuclear Safety and Security. These experts drew up reports containing recommendations for the country. Some of

¹⁵ “U.S. Obligations under the Merida Initiative” Opening Statement Chairman Eliot L. Engel House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere. February 7, 2008. <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/engelo20708.htm>

¹⁶ TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA (House of Representatives -November 05, 2007) <http://www.congress.org/congressorg/webreturn/?url=http://www.house.gov%2Fserrano>



these recommendations are already being implemented...”¹⁷

RESOLUTION: “Whereas, in May 2006, the Department of State determined, pursuant to section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act, that Venezuela was not cooperating fully with United States antiterrorism efforts...”

REALITY: President Chávez has emphatically condemned any kind of terrorism. In fact, after 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S, President Chávez expressed “profound grief” over the “cowardly, murderous” attacks and “offered help in the form of oil supplies, rescue teams and blood products. He even added his voice to calls for an international pact to fight terrorism in the aftermath of the bloody assault on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.”¹⁸ Moreover, Venezuela has signed and ratified 10 anti-terrorism agreements and conventions (eight within the UN framework and two within the OAS framework), two of them during the government of President Chavez.

Of course, Venezuela has made clear that if the war on terror is to be fought effectively, it has to be fought consistently and without political motivations. On this point it is also notable that while the U.S. State Department has claimed the Venezuela hasn't cooperated in the war on terrorism, it is the Bush administration that has allowed Luis Posada Carriles, a dangerous terrorist wanted in Venezuela for the 1976 bombing of a civilian airliner that killed 73 people, to avoid prosecution and live freely in South Florida. Almost three years have passed since Venezuela requested Posada's extradition (he is a Venezuelan national), and neither the State Department nor the Department of Justice have responded as they are required to do by the Extradition Treaty signed between the United States and Venezuela in 1922.

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If you have any questions on this or any other issue, please contact the Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela at (202) 342-2214.

¹⁷ UN Security Council/ Committee 1540/ Country Report/ Venezuela/2004.

[http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/AC.44/2004/\(02\)/77](http://www.un.org/Docs/journal/asp/ws.asp?m=S/AC.44/2004/(02)/77)

¹⁸ “Western Hemisphere Leaders Condemn Terrorist Attacks in United States”. GlobalSecurity.org. September 13, 2001.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2001/09/mil-010913-usia03.htm>