



## ABOUT THE REPORT

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

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FEATURE

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## Venezuela's Tarek El - Aissami

**By Nicole M. Ferrand\***

Since our inception two years ago, we have been following the growing relationship between Venezuela's Hugo Chavez and Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Although most of the information available in the media states that this relationship started in 2005, it actually began as soon as Chavez started his mandate in 1999. In fact, on November 19, 2007, the Iranian reformist newspaper, E'temad-e-Melli, published an article claiming that **relations between Tehran and Caracas began with the formation of the (Iranian) Reformist government when former President Muhammed Khatami visited Venezuela during his time in office.** They became so close that in 2005 Chavez presented the Iranian leader with the highest decoration, the Order of the Liberator, as a symbol of their strong ties.<sup>1</sup> The Venezuelan President then encouraged Bolivia's Evo Morales, Ecuador's Rafael Correa and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega to develop ties with Iranian President Ahmadinejad which they did. All four of these countries now have strong ties to Iran and have signed treaties in diverse areas of the economy. In exchange, **Iran has received many benefits including a strong presence in the Hemisphere as well as support from**

<sup>1</sup> Unholy alliance between Caracas and Tehran. January 13, 2008. Al Arabiya News.

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**Venezuela, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Ecuador against UN sanctions.** Although insiders claim that Iran had no interest in developing relationships with Caracas, per se, Khatami's regime was under international pressure to make new alliances among non-aligned countries. In the Middle East, **Tehran had strong ties with Syria and Qatar, but it did not have any base from where they could actually threaten the United States and that is when Caracas became of interest.**<sup>2</sup> After learning of Chavez's leadership in the Hemisphere, Tehran planned a strategy to establish itself in nations under the Venezuelan leader's influence.

Manuchehr Honarmand was a witness to the developing Iranian-Venezuelan relationship. Mr. Honarmand is a Dutch citizen who used to write columns for the opposition daily Kayhan International, based in London. An Iranian dissident journalist, Honarmand decided to go to the US to expand the newspaper's distribution. In December 2002 he visited South America for tourism and while in transit at the Caracas airport, waiting for a connecting flight, he was approached by two Iranians who asked him to provide information about himself. They were soon joined by two Venezuelan policemen.<sup>3</sup>

After learning who he was, they handcuffed him and brought him to an office behind the transit area where he was beaten and forced to sign papers in Spanish, which he did not understand. A few hours later, Honarmand was thrown into a cell where he was told that he had been charged with drug trafficking.

Furthermore, he was refused contact with the Dutch Embassy. A Venezuelan National Guard report stated that his "drug - filled suitcase" was found in a Copa Airlines flight even though Honarmand had been traveling on KLM.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Honarmand's luggage, money and papers were stolen and his Dutch passport was confiscated by the Venezuelan police. While he was in jail, he was able to contact **Houshang Vaziri**, his editor in chief, who promised to help but soon disappeared and was later found dead in Paris. Honarmand was freed in 2005, thanks to the Dutch government's pressures. During his time in Caracas he spoke with discontented insiders of Chavez's regime who informed him about the **presence of Iranian officials in**

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Iran-Venezuela Connection. February 14, 2008. Memri.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**every sector of the economy and that they occupied high positions in the National Guard and the police.** They also told Honarmand that **Iranian officials are actually proselytizing in the poorest sectors of Venezuelan society** to attract followers.<sup>5</sup> However, what has many insiders worried is the possibility of radicals holding government positions. The recent designation of **Tarek El – Aissami** as Minister of Interior and Justice of Venezuela has raised concerns because of his connections with extremist groups.



Venezuelan Interior Minister, Tarek El Aissami. Source: Radio Mundial.

Mr. El – Aissami is a Venezuelan national of Syrian descent who, before becoming Minister of Interior and Justice, occupied the position of Deputy Interior Minister for Public Security. **His father, Carlos Aissami, is the head of the Venezuelan branch of the Iraqi Baath political party.** Before the invasion of Iraq, he held a press conference in which he described himself as a Taliban and called Osama Bin Laden, “the great Mujahedeen, Sheik Osama bin Laden.” Tarek’s great-uncle Shibli el-Aissami was a prominent ideologist and assistant to the party’s secretary general in Baghdad during the Saddam Hussein regime.<sup>6</sup>

It was discovered that in 2003 El Aissami was appointed, along with another radical student leader from the University of the Andes in the city of Mérida, Hugo Cabezas, to **head the country’s passport and naturalization service, the Onidex** (Identification and Immigration Office). The choice came as a surprise precisely because of their ties with guerrilla movements at Universidad de Los Andes (ULA). Evidence has surfaced that during this time both men **illegally issued Venezuelan passports and identity documents to members of Hezbollah and Hamas.** Mr. Cabezas is now the government candidate for governor of the Andean state of Trujillo in elections due to be held on November 23, 2008 and is a founding member of Utopia, an armed group that has connections with the Bolivarian Liberation Front.<sup>7</sup>

While a student leader at ULA, Aissami had political control of the university residences (dorms), which were used to hide stolen vehicles and

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Al Arabiya – Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jihad in Venezuela. November 29, 2003. Jihad Watch.

conduct drug deals and had managed to get members of the guerillas into the dorms. According to reports, of the 1,122 people living in one of the University's residences, only 387 were active students and more than 600 had nothing to do with the university.<sup>8</sup>

Venezuelan investigative journalist, Patricia Poleo, who escaped Venezuela and currently lives in Miami says that Mr. Aissami together with others affiliated with Hezbollah, such as Lebanon-born Gahzi Nasserddine, currently the Business Liaison at the Venezuelan embassy in Damascus, and his brother, Ghasan Atef Salameh Nasserddi, are in charge of **recruiting young Venezuelan Arabs** affiliated with the 'Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela' or PSUV (Chavez's Socialist Party), **to be sent to South Lebanon for combat training in Hezbollah camps** preparing them for 'asymmetrical war' against the United States. Once back in Venezuela, they are greeted by radical members of the Venezuelan Socialist Party affiliated with UNEFA (the university run by the Armed Forces) and the Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela (Venezuelan Bolivarian University) and continue with their training in firearms, explosives and munitions. The training camps are located in the states of Monagas, Miranda, el Páramo, Falcon, Yaracuy, Yumare, and Trujillo and the districts of Maturin, Los Teques, El Jari, Churuguara and Sierra de San Luis. These groups and individuals are supervised by the Hezbollah Organization in Venezuela, along with al-Qaeda Iraqis currently living in the country and by the Palestinian Democratic Front, headed by Salid Ahmed Rahman, whose office is located in Caracas's Central Park.<sup>9</sup>

**Since Chavez assumed the Presidency, Hezbollah, Hamas and al-Qaeda have used Venezuela as their bridge to other Latin American countries.** There is information that a group of Iraqi activists belonging to al-Qaeda are currently in Caracas. Their names are: Mohammed Adnan Yasin, Falah Amin Taha and Muhi Alwan Mohammed Al Qaisi. They all arrived in Caracas with temporary visas granted and approved by the heads of Onidex (Cabezas and Aissami) and are believed to be very dangerous. They oversee the activities of these terrorist organizations in the tri – border region, and in Nicaragua and Argentina.<sup>10</sup>

Other Hezbollah members in Venezuela with these same visas are: explosives expert Lebanese Abdul Ghani Suleiman Wanked, Hassan Nasrallah's right-hand man.; Rada Ramel Assad, born in Barranquilla, Colombia and Abouchanab Daichoum Dani who is the organizer of the group.<sup>11</sup>

We have to be very careful about what is going on in Venezuela. Independent media outlets have warned that the Chávez regime was issuing ID documents to Islamic radicals, enabling them to operate and move freely to other

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<sup>8</sup> Memri – Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> [Hezbollah and Al Qaeda in Venezuela](#). June 12, 2008 The Jungle Hut.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid,

countries. It is extremely worrisome and dangerous to appoint a radical such as Aissami as the official in charge of issuing identity cards and passports but this serves the goals of the Iranian and Venezuelan presidents in their joint efforts to radicalize the region and build terrorist networks.

Other articles written by the staff of The America's Report that can be referenced to in relation with this story are: "[The Iranian threat already in the US' backyard](#)", February 14, 2008 by Nicole M. Ferrand; "[Latin America's radical grassroots](#)", by Luis Fleischman and Nicole M. Ferrand from March 27, 2007; "[The Radical Grassroots in Latin America II](#)", by Luis Fleischman and Nicole M. Ferrand from April 11, 2007; "[The Latin American Radical Grassroots III](#)", by Luis Fleischman and Nicole M. Ferrand).

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## **NEWS STORIES**

### **ARGENTINA:**

[Argentine farmers set for six-day strike – AFP.](#)

**Farmers in Argentina -- one of the world's top suppliers of wheat, corn, beef and soybeans -- will start a six-day strike on Friday to protest the government's agricultural policy, farm leaders announced Tuesday.** "The government ignored our demands again. We cannot ignore the worsening situation for farmers due to rising costs linked to oil prices and the global financial crisis," said Hugo Biolcatti, one of the main farm leaders and head of the Argentine Rural Society. Announcing the strike plans at a news conference that brought together the four largest farmer's organizations, Biolcatti also identified the country's ongoing drought -- the worst in a century, according to government officials -- as a cause for concern. The farm leaders said they are striking because the government has not addressed their demands for lower export taxes.

<http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5iO1S5uy1Sji1ykBgZXTUqVqf9ZGw>

### **ARGENTINIAN – VENEZUELAN SUITCASE SCANDAL:**

[Another \\$4.2M was on plane to Argentina – AP.](#)

**A businessman who prosecutors say flew to Argentina with a suitcase full of Venezuelan government cash testified Tuesday he was told a second suitcase holding \$4.2 million was aboard the plane.** Prosecutors also presented evidence suggesting money was frequently sent from Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's government to Argentine officials. Under questioning, Antonini also said that after the first suitcase was seized from him at the airport in Buenos Aires, he met with Diego Uzcátegui, then an executive in Argentina for the state oil company Petróleos de Venezuela SA. He said Uzcátegui asked him: "Well Alex, what about the rest of the



money? There was another suitcase with \$4.2 million." Antonini, a dual U.S.-Venezuelan citizen, was testifying against Franklin Duran, a Venezuelan businessmen who is one of five people accused of acting illegally as Venezuelan government agents in a scheme to conceal the source of the confiscated cash. Three others have pleaded guilty and are cooperating with prosecutors; one is at large and is thought to be in Venezuela.  
[http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5i9Awbdmy2MbrUsgADdyW9zP\\_g6oQD93CQM1G0](http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5i9Awbdmy2MbrUsgADdyW9zP_g6oQD93CQM1G0)

### **Antonini claims that he was pressed in Argentina – El Universal.**

The main defendant in the case of a presumed shipment of election funds from Venezuela to Argentina, **Guido Antonini, said on a Miami court, that when the cash was found by Customs in Buenos Aires, he was advised to say that the money belonged to him; otherwise, he would get into trouble.** Antonini said that after the seizure of a suitcase stuffed with USD 800,000, a woman showed up in the Customs office. She promised to solve the problem and asked him to sign a record, where he should declare the cash as its own, AFP reported. "I told her that the money was not mine. She told me: 'Shut up; I was sent here to solve this issue,'" Antonini told the jury. The woman was María Cristina Galli, a presumed official at the Buenos Aires airport. Antonini said that an employee completed the attestation signed by him. The event was to be recorded as an offense. The Argentinean state would seize 50 percent of the money and the other 50 percent would be returned to its alleged owner. As promised, "I would be able to remain with these USD 400,000" said Antonini. In this way, both the Venezuelan and the Argentinean governments would be held harmless from the sending of these funds.



Antonini testified for the third time in Miami. Source: El Universal.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/25/en\\_pol\\_esp\\_antonini-claims-that\\_25A2016965.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/25/en_pol_esp_antonini-claims-that_25A2016965.shtml)

### **Key witness ready to testify in suitcase money scandal – MercoPress.**

María del Luján Telpuk, the former Buenos Aires airport security police officer who last year (August 2007) caught US-Venezuelan businessman Guido Antonini Wilson attempting to smuggle into Argentina a suitcase with 800,000 dollars, said that she was "afraid" and ratified that she was willing to have a face-to-face confrontation with Antonini. Ms Telpuk arrived Sunday in Miami to testify in the trial against Venezuelan lawyer Franklin Durán, accused of acting as an illegal foreign government agent in the US. According to Telpuk, before she opened the suitcase, Antonini said it contained "books," then "some bits of paper," and finally, "60,000 dollars".

<http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=14690&formato=HTML>

### **Asset freeze sought for 2 jailed Venezuelans – AP.**

Venezuelan attorney general said Monday she is seeking to freeze the assets of two Venezuelans jailed in the U.S. in a case involving the seizure of a cash-filled suitcase. Attorney General Luisa Ortega Diaz said her office has asked a Venezuelan court to seize property and accounts belonging to Moisés Maionica and Carlos Kauffman. The two are wanted in Venezuela for alleged corruption. They also have been accused in Miami of acting illegally as Venezuelan agents in an alleged scheme to cover up the source of US\$800,000 seized in a suitcase in Argentina last year.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jRv8M1StILnSq08bZPA04ncXyqgwD93GKPC83>

## **BOLIVIA:**

### **Venezuelan aid reaches \$214 million – IHT.**

Bolivia says that its leftist ally Venezuela has pledged US\$214 million for public works projects across the country since 2006. The Bolivian Foreign Ministry said late Tuesday that Venezuela is financing nearly 2,300 projects with 330 municipal governments around the country. So far US\$132 million has been spent toward building new schools, clinics, soccer fields and other projects. Only 18 percent of the projects have been completed. The funds are distributed under a program named for President Evo Morales: "Bolivia changes, Evo gets it done." Morales often delivers the checks to local governments in person. The pledged Venezuelan aid rivals U.S. support for Bolivia, which has recently run about US\$125 million a year.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/10/01/news/LT-Bolivia-Venezuela-Aid.php>

### **Iran to set up TV station in Bolivia – Mathaba News.**

A senior Iranian diplomat has said that Iran plans to set up a TV station in Bolivia. Hojjatollah Soltani added that negotiations to conclude an agreement by the two sides' news institutes are underway. He further said that currently, exchanging experiences and news with Bolivia's media is at the center of attention. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who seeks to further develop ties with Latin American states announced in his recent visit to Bolivia that Iran intended to invest one billion dollars in the country.

<http://mathaba.net/news/?x=607676>

### **Russia looking to boost Bolivia ties – AP.**

Bolivia's plan to purchase five Russian civil defense helicopters is a "first step" in deepening ties between the two countries as Russia looks to expand its role across Latin America, Russia's top diplomat in Bolivia said Tuesday. Ambassador Leonid Golubev told The Associated Press that he would like to see Russia's ties to Bolivia one day "approach the level" of its growing partnership with Venezuela, which will host the Russian navy for military exercises in the Caribbean later this year. "We want to show the United States that Latin America is not their backyard," Golubev said. "We also have interests in various spheres, including military ones." The ambassador expressed "great satisfaction" at the recent rise of Bolivian President Evo Morales and other "socialist-oriented" governments across Latin America.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5gasP927cxnt2vKELHk4Jcc00mySAD93HD8700>

## **BRAZIL:**

**Brazil: ethanol rapidly turning gasoline alternative fuel** – *MercoPress*.

**Gasoline is rapidly becoming Brazil's alternative fuel as ethanol consumption zooms according to the latest reports from the country's Ministry of Agriculture. The tendency is strongly supported by consumers' demand and Brazil's auto industry.** Most is due to the fact that ethanol's cheaper: gasoline goes for around 1.31 US dollars a liter, compared with about 57 US cents for a liter of ethanol (Brazil is one of the world's leaders in production and technology). **Gasoline-powered cars will still have the edge on ethanol vehicles, with 50.9% of the market in 2011, because older cars will still be on the road. After that, ethanol-powered vehicles will dominate, the report says.**

<http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=14607&formato=HTML>

## **COLOMBIA:**

**Colombian congressman requests Caracas mayor to be declared "persona non grata"** – *El Universal*.

**A Conservative parliamentarian said on Tuesday that he will ask the Colombian Congress to declare "persona non grata" the mayor of a Caracas municipality, Freddy Bernal, for his participation in a recent tribute to Manuel Marulanda, the late founder and top leader of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas.** "Bernal organized and funded the tribute to Marulanda," said Santiago Castro, the Colombian legislator. According to him, the Caracas mayor "made a statement justifying a crime" and "mocked of hundred of victims" killed by the guerrilla leader, Efe reported. Castro, who holds a seat for the Conservative Party in the Colombian House of Representatives, mentioned the events that took place last Friday in Caracas' 23 de Enero neighborhood on the occasion of the sixth month of the death of "Manuel Marulanda Vélez" or "Tirofijo."

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/30/en\\_pol\\_art\\_colombian-congressma\\_30A2031523.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/30/en_pol_art_colombian-congressma_30A2031523.shtml)

**US freezes assets of FARC representatives in the region** – *MercoPress*.

The United States Treasury Department on Tuesday froze the US assets of eight members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which it has deemed a narco-terrorist organization. **The US Treasury's action, termed a "designation,"** also prohibited US citizens from conducting business with FARC. "Today's designation exposes eight 'International Commission members' of the FARC," said Adam Szubin, director of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. "Through their service to the FARC as international representatives and negotiators, these persons provide material support to a narco-terrorist organization." The eight in Tuesday's designation represent FARC in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, Mexico and Canada, the Treasury Department alleged. "As representatives of the FARC and members of its International Commission, these individuals work abroad to obtain recruits, support and protection for FARC acts of terrorism" the department said in a written statement. "Some are also themselves violent criminals."

<http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=14712&formato=HTML>



## **ECUADOR:**

### **Correa and the left win referendum** – *Christian Science Monitor*.

The overwhelming approval by Ecuadorians of a new Constitution that gives leftist President Rafael Correa a tighter grip on the economy puts the country firmly on a socialist track similar to Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. "Today Ecuador decided to found a new country," Mr. Correa said Sunday after nearly 70 percent of Ecuadorians voted for the new charter. "The old power structures have been defeated." With the passage of the new Constitution, Ecuador became the first country after Venezuela in the region to institutionalize its leftward shift, says Larry Birns, director of the Council of Hemispheric Affairs in Washington. "This is a lurch to the left on the part of Correa," he says. The Constitution passed by Ecuadorians, however, is very similar to the Venezuelan charter passed in 1999; one year after Chávez took office, launching his self-styled Bolivarian Revolution.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/0930/p01s08-woam.html>

### **Correa May Cancel Payment of Some "Illegitimate" Debt** – *Inside Costa Rica*.

The day after the new constitution promoted by his government won 63% support in a referendum, according to the preliminary returns, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa said Monday that he may cancel payment of some loans, but that the country would not default on its foreign debt. A committee set up by the Ecuadorian government to audit the country's public debt has concluded that the loans contracted by the state between 1976 and 2006 benefited the financial sector and transnational corporations, often to the detriment of the country's interests. The results contained in the committee's final report will be taken into account in the centre-left government's efforts to restructure Ecuador's 13.5-billion dollar public debt. According to the report, the committee, CAIC, uncovered documents which demonstrate that public debt contracted by previous administrations from multilateral lending institutions, foreign banks and developed countries was plagued by irregularities and possible corruption, and was often based on unfair terms, aspects that made it "illegitimate."

[http://insidecostarica.com/special\\_reports/2008-09/ecuador\\_correa.htm](http://insidecostarica.com/special_reports/2008-09/ecuador_correa.htm)

## **MEXICO:**

### **18 Bodies Found in Tijuana** – *New York Times*.

The police discovered a dozen partly clothed bodies on Monday morning, most of which had been bound and tortured, dumped next to an elementary school in Tijuana. Four other bodies were found in another part of the city soon afterward, which, together with two other victims found Sunday night, brought the death toll to 18. Investigators are trying to determine whether the killings were connected and were tied to drug cartels. Reuters reported that warning messages left with some of the bodies indicated that the killings could have been a response to the arrest over the weekend of a man accused of being an assassin working for the Arellano Félix cartel, Tijuana's main drug gang.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/world/americas/30briefs-18BODIESFOUN\\_BRF.html?ref=world](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/world/americas/30briefs-18BODIESFOUN_BRF.html?ref=world)

## URUGUAY:

### **Uruguay's former guerrilla leader, the king maker** – *MercoPress*.

Uruguay's most voted and popular leader, former guerrilla and currently Senator Jose Mujica admitted he would be a presidential candidate if he counts with the support from other groups of the ruling coalition. "It's not up to me; it also depends on the rest of our political force, which I don't know what they want. I always had a clear mind that if I was to get involved in this race it would not be with the support of my grouping, but rather with other groupings, if not it would be senseless", said Mujica in reference to the Communist Party, Socialist Party and the Vertiente Artiguista which make up a significant percentage of the Uruguayan ruling coalition Broad Front in office since March 2005. The fact Senator Mujica has admitted he would like to be the presidential candidate in October 2009 elections has jolted the Uruguayan political scenario since President Tabare Vazquez all along has openly said that the ideal ticket would be former Economy Minister Danilo Astori and Mujica for vice president.

<http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=14640&formato=HTML>

## VENEZUELA:

### **NEWS FLASH: FARC: prepared to defend Chávez's government** – *El Universal*.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) said that, if necessary, they will be the first "in the front line" to defend the revolutionary project of Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez and the fight he leads against the United States. In a statement issued on Wednesday on the website of the Bolivarian Press Agency (ABP), the Eastern bloc of FARC, the most powerful front of the rebel group, urged Venezuelans to "prepare for an anti-imperialist fight", Efe reported. After reiterating their gratitude for the tribute pay on September 24 by the Bolivarian Continental Coordinator (CCB) to the late FARC's historic leader Pedro Antonio Marín, aka "Manuel Marulanda" or "Tirofijo," the guerrilla leaders acknowledged that the deaths of several of its leaders have undermined the foundations of the FARC.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/10/01/en\\_pol\\_art\\_farc-claims-to-be-pr\\_01A2034647.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/10/01/en_pol_art_farc-claims-to-be-pr_01A2034647.shtml)

### **Former workers shut down again Coca-Cola facilities** – *El Universal*.

The operations of the local unit of Mexico's FEMSA, the largest Coca-Cola bottler in Latin America, were blocked on Wednesday by groups of former employees who request the payment of labor liabilities, the company reported. Rodrigo Anzola, head of Venezuela's Coca-Cola FEMSA legal department, denounced that three parliamentarians roused the demonstrators, despite the fact that all the legal bodies have dismissed the legality of their claims. "From the early hours of Wednesday the activities of the 28 distribution centers, of our four plants and our bottlers all over the country have been shut down," said Anzola after describing the action as irrational and illegal. The bottling company contends that the people involved were never part of the staff of the company. For its part, workers are requiring to be treated as former employees. Thus, they expect severance payments, as provided by law.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/10/01/en\\_eco\\_esp\\_former-workers-shut\\_01A2034407.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/10/01/en_eco_esp_former-workers-shut_01A2034407.shtml)

### **Venezuela-Russia ties deepen – AP.**

Venezuela and Russia are strengthening their strategic alliance with new plans to cooperate on oil production, weapons and even wireless technology, the governments said as two visiting Russian Tu-160 bombers left for home on Thursday. Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, traveling to Moscow at the invitation of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, is planning new oil projects with Russian companies and joint military exercises with Russian warplanes and ships in the Caribbean by December. Venezuela also is in talks to buy Russian air defense systems and armored vehicles, and has expressed interest in the new Su-35 fighter, due off assembly lines in 2010, said Sergei Chemezov, general director of the Russian state holding company Rostekhnologii, according to Russia's Interfax news agency. The allies have sealed more than US\$4 billion in defense deals since 2005. Venezuela has bought Sukhoi fighter planes, Mi-17 helicopters, and 100,000 Kalashnikov assault rifles, most of which have already been delivered. Chemezov spoke to reporters in Caracas on Wednesday while accompanying Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin, who stressed that while energy cooperation is paramount, the military relationship also is strengthening.

<http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5j7DAfgieUqDDczqO5ENknwwjAqSQD939FLLO0>

### **Venezuela signs Chinese oil deal – BBC.**

President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has signed a series of energy co-operation deals with China. He said oil exports from Venezuela to China could rise threefold by 2012, to one million barrels a day. Venezuela, one of the world's largest oil producers, is seeking new markets to reduce its dependency on exports to the United States. Mr. Chavez has now continued to Russia, for his third visit to Moscow within three months. After holding talks with his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao, the Venezuelan president told journalists in Beijing that China was a super-giant, which needed more energy, and that Venezuela was committed to help provide it. Other plans include joint projects to build three oil refineries in the country capable of processing Venezuela's heavy crude oil.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7634871.stm>

### **Nuclear powered “Peter the Great” en route to Venezuela – MercoPress.**

A fleet of Russian warships is heading to Venezuelan waters for joint naval war games in November, the biggest since the end of the Cold War. The fleet left its base at Severomorsk in the Arctic and is headed by a nuclear powered cruiser. The fleet is made up of “the nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser Pyotr Veliky (Peter the Great), the anti-submarine warship Admiral Chebanenko and other accompanying ships” said Russian Navy spokesman Igor Dygalo. They will have to travel 15,000 nautical miles to reach destination. Last week, two Russian bombers arrived in Venezuela to begin its training flights with their Venezuelan counterparts. Chavez has called for increased cooperation with Russia and added Latin America needs to establish a strong relationship with Moscow to reduce the US influence in the region. The naval exercises are seen as a challenge to Washington whose relations with Moscow and Caracas has been strained. Caracas and Moscow have signed arms contracts, and are looking to extend bilateral co-operation on energy. The war game will “train the deployment of the Russian Armed Forces, combat missions of troops to localize and fight armed conflicts, terrorist activity, natural disasters and man-made catastrophes in order to provide

strategic deterrence and security for the Russia-Belarus Union State,” said Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov.



The Pyotr Velikiy (Peter the Great). Source: MercoPress.

<http://www.mercopress.com/vernoticia.do?id=14610&formato=HTML>

### **Interior Minister: DEA is an accomplice of drug trafficking cartels – *El Universal, Venezuela.***

According to Tarek El Aissami, Venezuela's Minister of Interior and Justice, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) "is an accomplice of and is engaged with the main international drug cartels." El Aissami compared the work of Venezuela's National Anti-drug Office (ONA) with the activities of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) upon leaving a meeting with transportation leaders. "They (the DEA) know the names of the US drug-traffickers but the US authorities have not implemented any effective measures against these mafias in their territory." The minister explained that Venezuela is making "huge" efforts to arrest the leaders of drug cartels as well as drugs distribution and use. El-Aissami wondered why the United States had not made similar efforts.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/29/en\\_pol\\_esp\\_venezuelas-interior\\_29A2027363.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/29/en_pol_esp_venezuelas-interior_29A2027363.shtml)

### **Iran, Venezuela determined to expand ties – *Tehran Times.***

President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in a telephone conversation with his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez on Sunday morning called for expansion of cooperation between the two countries in various fields. During the telephone conversation, the Iranian president wished the success, development and prosperity of the Venezuelan revolutionary government and its people who are among the harbingers of campaign against imperialism in South America. "Fortunately, the morale of imperialism has weakened in the world and this calls for collective cooperation of countries such as Iran and Venezuela to create conditions for development coupled with strength," he said. Chavez, for his part, expressed satisfaction with the success of both nations and their governments in global developments and expressed the hope that with the support of high ranking officials of both countries the two countries will witness the upgrading of ties in all fields.

[http://www.tehrantimes.com/index\\_View.asp?code=178430](http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=178430)

### **Venezuela's Chavez in China to Sign New Deals – *VOA News.***

Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez is in China to sign agreements on economic cooperation. As Daniel Schearf reports from Beijing, China has released few details on the deals so far. President Chavez arrived in Beijing Tuesday for a three-day visit. Before arriving, Mr. Chavez said it was likely the two countries would agree to replenish a \$6 billion joint development fund. China and Venezuela also are working out plans to

construct oil tankers and at least one oil refinery in China. About four percent of China's imported oil comes from Venezuela. The Venezuelan leader wants to increase exports to China, in part to lower his country's dependence on the U.S. market. Venezuela sells about 60% of its oil to the United States. But Mr. Chavez opposes the U.S. and often is very confrontational with U.S. officials. Tensions now are high between the two governments after Mr. Chavez expelled the U.S. ambassador and flaunted military ties with Russia, including military exercises in the sea off Venezuela. Mr. Chavez stopped in Cuba, an ally, on his way to China.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-09-23-voa15.cfm>

**Venezuela among the most corrupt countries in Latam – *El Universal*.**

Haiti, Venezuela and Ecuador showed the worst scores of perceived corruption in Latin America whereas the highest scores corresponded to Chile and Uruguay, according to Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perception Index Report. The Transparency International CPI measures the perceived levels of public-sector corruption in a given country and is a composite index, drawing on different expert and business surveys.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/23/en\\_pol\\_art\\_venezuela-among-the\\_23A2008805.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/23/en_pol_art_venezuela-among-the_23A2008805.shtml)

**Beijing denies negotiating military cooperation with Caracas – *El Universal*.**

The Chinese government denied any negotiation on a military cooperation treaty with Venezuela, as announced by the Venezuelan head of state. "I am not sure what kind of cooperation (President Chávez) mentioned. From the Chinese side, I can confirm once again that during this visit by Chávez, the two sides did not talk about cooperation in military areas," said the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Liu Jianchao.

[http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/25/en\\_pol\\_art\\_beijing-denies-negot\\_25A2016243.shtml](http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/09/25/en_pol_art_beijing-denies-negot_25A2016243.shtml)

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