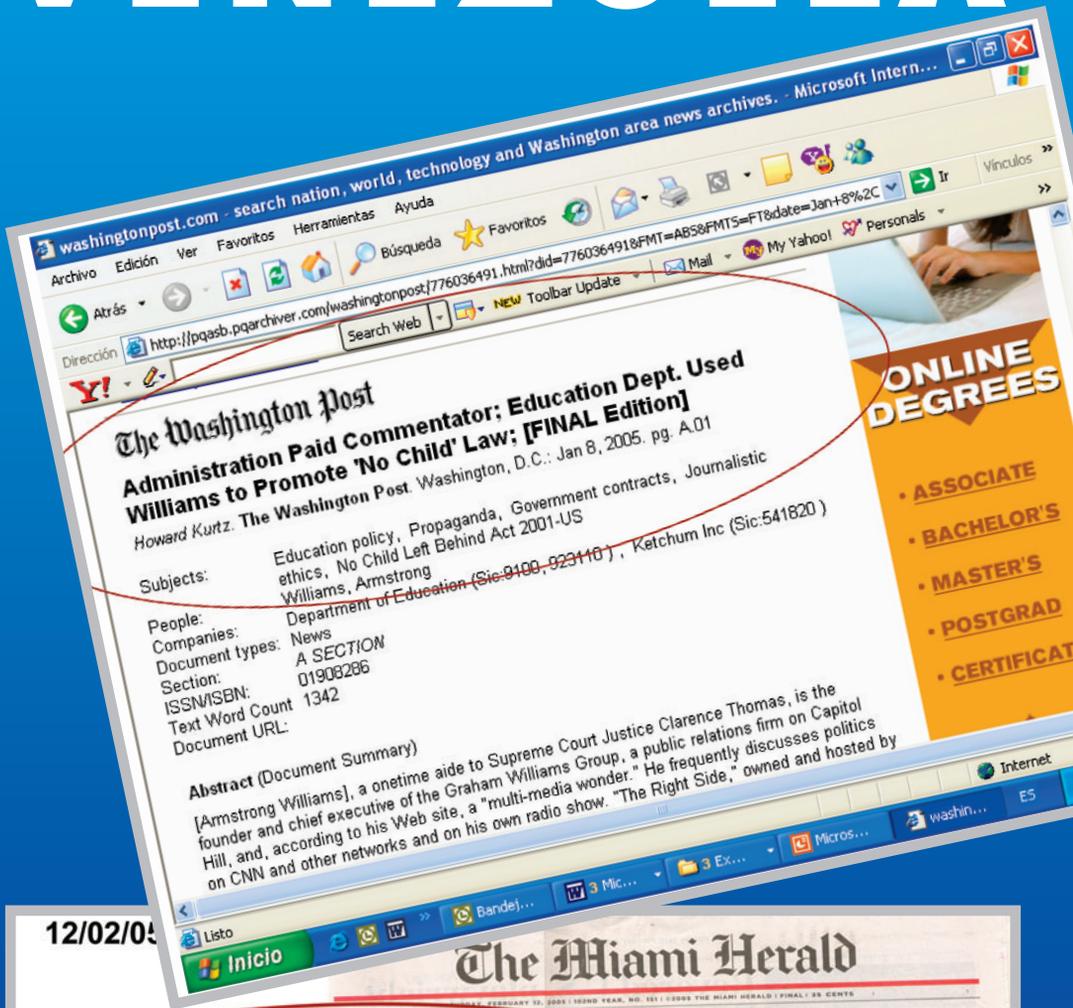


# THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST VENEZUELA



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May 2004

# THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST VENEZUELA

12/02/05

The Miami Herald

## VENEZUELA Chávez arming for war against U.S.

**"MILITARY DOCTRINE, FROM IA**  
Chávez has called President Bush "the devil and worse," and "regularly blames Washington for a coup attempt against him. Critics brand him a would-be dictator," but Chávez has won two elections and friends.

**ARMED FORCES**  
Venezuela's military officially has 80,000 to 120,000 in recent years, although foreign experts estimate current strength at 100,000.

interview. "But, unfortunately, President Chávez has sabotaged our efforts." For his part, Chávez has been trying to extricate Venezuela from the U.S. economic sphere of influence by forging ties with China and Argentina and hinting that he may sell Venezuela's U.S. gasoline and refining business, Citgo. But it is Venezuela's attempt to procure arms and create militias that has made the government jumpy.

López said asymmetrical war would involve "the participation of the whole population, adapting ourselves to the political [situation] of the country." Chávez recently said the new popular defense units would comprise 10 to 500 members each and would fall outside the normal military hierarchy and directly under the president's command, in effect creating Chávez's own, private revolutionary army. They are to be organized "in

VENEZUELA  
**Chávez arming to fight attack by U.S.**



**The Washington Post**  
**Administration Paid Commentator: Education Dept. Used Williams to Promote 'No Child' Law: [FINAL Edition]**  
Howard Kurtz. The Washington Post. Washington, D. C.: Jan 8, 2005. pg. A.01

Subjects: Education policy, Propaganda, Government contracts, Journalistic ethics, No Child Left Behind Act 2001-US  
People: Williams, Armstrong  
Companies: Department of Education (Sic:9100, 923110) , Ketchum Inc (Sic:541820)  
Document types: News  
Section: A SECTION  
ISSN/ISBN: 01908266  
Text Word Count 1342  
Document URL:

**Abstract (Document Summary)**  
[Armstrong Williams], a onetime aide to Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, is the founder and chief executive of the Graham Williams Group, a public relations firm on Capitol Hill, and, according to his Web site, a "multi-media wonder." He frequently discusses politics on CNN and other networks and on his own radio show. "The Right Side," owned and hosted by

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Venezuela is currently under attack. Bombs are not being dropped from airplanes but rather from media outlets, wrapped in paper and ink. These assaults travel through radio-electric waves and remote Internet servers and onto TV screens. Organized by the mainstream media, this battle aims to set the stage for a new kind of confrontation.

Ever since the election of George W. Bush, Venezuela has been the target of a growing misinformation campaign. This foreign policy strategy appears to be synchronized with coverage by various publications and media outlets, which spread misleading and biased news on a daily basis, shaping negative opinions about Venezuela's democracy in the US.

Some of these tactics have been brought to light by research by the Venezuelan Ministry of Communication and Information.

## **THE CAMPAIGN TO ISOLATE VENEZUELA**

Within the last few months, we have seen the systematic publication of inconsistent and false information about Venezuela in several US media outlets. The frequency of publication and the clear bias of the information signal a coordinated campaign to shape and strengthen negative perceptions of Venezuela, President Hugo Chávez, and his administration.

Different media outlets use mutually reinforcing talking points to falsely present the idea that President Chavez's government is a threat to its neighbors and to the US. The aim is to isolate the Venezuelan government through the repetition of false statements, stereotypes, and the exploitation of fear within American public opinion.

The three most common negative storylines put forward in the US press are supported by arguments that have never been substantiated. Many of the most frequent allegations have long been discredited by independent analysts.

### **Storyline A**

a) President Chavez supports international terrorism.

Frequent arguments:

- a.1) Chávez supports guerrilla groups and other "terrorist organizations" in the region.
- a.2) Chávez harbors Colombian guerrillas.
- a.3) Venezuela is not tough enough on terrorism.

## **Storyline B**

b) Chavez poses an imminent threat to democracy in the Western Hemisphere.

Frequent arguments:

- b.1) Chávez has begun an arms race, which is a threat to its neighbors and the region.
- b.2) The newly acquired weapons could end up in terrorists' hands.
- b.3) Chávez “intervenes” in other countries' internal affairs and destabilizes democracy in Latin America.

## **Storyline C**

c) The Chavez Administration is rapidly moving towards autocracy.

- c.1) The Venezuelan government does not respect human rights and imprisons political opponents.
- c.2) Venezuela does not adhere to standards of democracy.
- c.3) Being democratically elected is not enough to be considered a democratic government.
- c.4) Chávez has concentrated power across all institutions; he does not respect private property and he attacks freedom of expression through legislation.

*Period analyzed:* January to February 2005

## **Media outlets analyzed:**

*The Wall Street Journal*

*The Washington Times*

*The Washington Post*

*The Miami Herald*

*Los Angeles Times*

*The South Florida Sun Sentinel*

*CNN*

*Fox News*

*Financial Times*

*Dow Jones Newswires*

## STRATEGIES USED TO SHAPE READERS' OPINIONS ON VENEZUELA

**De-contextualization:** This strategy consists of using declarations, quotes, or facts without providing their original context. This is a common mechanism when referring to President Chávez's statements. For instance, many statements made by President Chavez on Venezuela's land reform are used by the media to imply that this initiative is being carried out arbitrarily, when in fact there are clearly defined rules for the reallocation of land.

**Anonymity:** Comments or explanations are often presented by anonymous sources, usually purported to be high-ranking military, State Department, or US administration officials. In this way, biased statements, arguments, and opinions can be transmitted to the general public.

**Presentation of Opinions as Facts:** Opinions and value judgments are introduced and presented as facts. For example, in a recent report by *The Miami Herald*, the reporter presented as fact that "Washington has been trying for years to avoid a confrontation with Chávez..." However, this is an opinion attributed to US Under-Secretary of Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega, not a fact (Chávez Arming to Fight Attack by US, *The Miami Herald*, February 12, 2005.)

**Falsification of Facts:** Presenting false information or data in news stories, or modifying the sequence of events to distort the perception regarding the facts, is another widely used tactic. One example is the alleged acquisition of Russian MiG fighter jets by the Venezuelan government, a myth frequently perpetuated in articles, even though such a purchase never took place.

**Disproportionate Use of Sources:** Basing stories exclusively on sources that are opposed to the Venezuelan government is common practice, and illustrates the overtly biased nature of news.

**False Description of Sources:** Sources that are vocally opposed to the government are often presented as "neutral" or "objective." Ex-officials who are currently active members of the opposition have been quoted as if they still held their governmental posts. Political party activists are often described as belonging to "civil society," while sources that openly support the government are referred to using terms such as "*Chavista* groups," "Chávez-backed governor," etc.

**Drawing Negative Links:** Information about Venezuela has been arbitrarily linked to unrelated events, such as the situations in Iraq or Afghanistan. In some stories, paragraphs related to Osama bin Laden or Colombian guerrillas immediately follow paragraphs about Chávez. This establishes a non-existent associa-

tion. Likewise, some web pages visually associate violent news with news about Venezuela by presenting them in the same space.

**Spreading a Political Agenda through a Multiplier Effect:** Negative storylines are elaborated and quickly disseminated to the opposition media in Venezuela. Examples include op-eds extremely critical of the government, published by American newspapers, which are instantly translated and distributed in Venezuela by the opposition media.

**Defamatory Depictions:** Using figures of speech that enhance or degrade a person or group according to their political position towards the Venezuelan government is common practice. Individuals or groups that support the government are presented as violent, aggressive, and intolerant. On the other hand, the individuals or groups that oppose the government are presented as pacifist, civic-minded victims of violence, or persecution.

**Emphasizing the Negative:** When there is news or a statement that negatively affects Venezuela, the media tends to amplify it. However, when something positive occurs, such as Venezuela's cooperation with Colombia in drug interdiction initiatives, the media tends to ignore the story.

**Reiteration (the Goebbels effect):** The repetition of false statements over and over again until accepted as truth is a technique the media employs widely. This repetition of misinformation aims to shape a certain opinion ("Venezuela headed toward a dictatorship," "Chávez supports Colombian guerrillas," etc.), reflecting the bias of the news outlets.

**Information Imbalance:** Versions of events or opinions that run counter to that of the government are widely disseminated in order to overshadow or obscure alternative perspectives.

**Statistical Manipulation:** The media may use non-official figures, or manipulate official data to back up their claims. Statistics are often cited without specifying their source. During the recent flooding in Vargas state, for example, original reports of casualties and damage were exaggerated by opposition sources that were never identified.

**Sensationalism:** News is presented in a sensationalistic manner. For example, the decision to modernize the weapons used by the Venezuelan armed forces is described as an "arms race," "arms for the Colombian guerrillas," "exporting violence," or "preparation for war with the US."

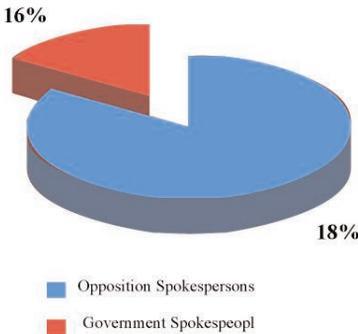
# PRIMARY SOURCES OF MISINFORMATION

According to an investigation published by the American media watchdog organization FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting), *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Chicago Tribune* and *The Christian Science Monitor* quote pro-opposition spokespeople just over five times more often than spokespeople supporting the Venezuelan government. The report studied the publication of non-institutional sources—related with neither government nor opposition—for 30 consecutive months (from April 12, 2002 to October 12, 2004).

The report mentions, for instance, that Michael Shifter, a vociferous critic of Venezuela’s President, is quoted 44 times within this period of time as opposed to 35 pro-government quotes. In other words, one source alone (Mr. Shifter) totaled 20.1 percent of all the quotes made in these newspapers about Venezuela during almost a two and a half year period, as opposed to a total of 16 percent from pro-government sources during the same period.

Interestingly, the number of anti-government sources cited totals thirteen compared to just six pro-government sources.

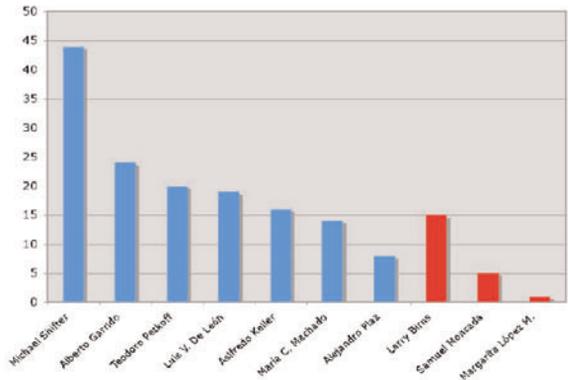
**Quotes in US Media**  
April 2002 - October 2004



**Media outlets studied:**

- Chicago Tribune
- Christian Science Monitor
- The Angeles Times
- The Miami Herald
- The New York Times
- The Washington Post

**Exposition of Spokespeople**



**LACK OF BALANCE**

Total pro-government quotes= 32  
 Total pro-opposition quotes= 184  
 • Spokespeople against (13)  
 • Spokespersons in favor (6)  
 One critical spokesperson Michael Shifter is quoted 44 times. All spokespeople in favor of the government total 35 quotes.

# THE US GOVERNMENT AND THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA: A HISTORIC PERSPECTIVE ON COLLUSION

In early 2005, it became public that the George W. Bush administration has been paying journalists to promote its policies through the media. Also, it was revealed that the Pentagon has been maintaining several web pages that promote its policies in Eastern Europe and the Arab countries. At the moment, the Inspector General of the Pentagon, Mr. Joseph Schmitz, has opened an investigation regarding this strategy of paying journalists to write articles and opinion pieces to influence public opinion in favor of the American government.

In January 2005, Mr. Bush's government was found to have paid "independent" journalist and commentator Armstrong Williams approximately \$241,000 to promote an education bill in the media. During the campaign, Williams failed to reveal his contract with the government to the public.

In addition, the US Department of Education paid approximately \$700,000 to a public relations firm to produce videos about the education bill pushed by President Bush, as if these were independent news items rather than a propaganda campaign.

In the end of January 2005, the Washington Post also revealed that columnist Maggie Gallagher, known for her defense of Bush's policies on marriage, had received a contract of \$21,500 to promote this policy.<sup>(1)</sup>

In each case, the contracts between the government and journalists were kept private, and journalists were portrayed as "independent." The US Congress has denounced this practice of "secret propaganda" as "illegal, "dangerous," and "unethical."<sup>(2)</sup>

Two cases that show a clear link between State Department policy and media coverage are of greater relevance to the Venezuelan situation. In the early eighties, the US State Department managed the Office for Public Diplomacy (OPD), a group headed by Otto Reich to promote US policies in Latin America. Financed by the Reagan administration, OPD used the US mainstream media to generate support for the Contras, a counter-revolutionary group fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. A major part of this campaign consisted of developing an opinion template that qualified the Sandinistas as "terrorist," "anti-democratic," and "dangerous."

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1 "Writer Backing Bush Plan Had Gotten Federal Contract", By Howard Kurtz, The Washington Post, January 26, 2005, Page C01.

2 Supra, nota 3.

In October 1987, the US General Accounting Office (GAO) published a report affirming that the OPD was staging an illegal “black propaganda” operation. The GAO declared that OPD was secretly publishing press and opinion pieces in US media outlets with the intent of garnering support for the US government’s policies in Central America. The Office of the Comptroller General discovered that the OPD prepared press articles that discredited the Sandinistas, supported US policy towards Nicaragua, and were published as if they had been written by independent sources not linked to the Reagan administration. Based on this evidence, the OPD was shut down in 1987 for failing to comply with federal guidelines.

Historical antecedents demonstrate that the US government is willing to bribe journalists to get their message across or promote its domestic and foreign policy agenda. In light of this, would anyone be surprised if the Bush administration paid US journalists to criticize Venezuela’s democracy and further its attempts to isolate President Chavez?

## **SOME EXAMPLES OF MEDIA MANIPULATION**

### **TOPIC**

Arms Buildup

### **MEDIUM/DATE**

Miami Herald. February 12, 2005.

### **STATEMENTS**

Title: Chavez Arming to Fight Attack by US.

“Washington has been trying for years to avoid a confrontation with Chavez.”

"We've tried to establish common ground with the Venezuelan government,"

Noriega said... “But, unfortunately, President Chávez has sabotaged our efforts.”

“Other agreements include the purchase of 40 helicopters and possibly of Russian MiG 29 fighters.”

### **STRATEGY USED**

Presentation of opinions as facts: In this case, the reporters present the following opinions as “facts”, when one of them is an “impression” and the other an opinion by US Undersecretary of Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Noriega.

Reiteration (the Goebbels effect): For example, the MiG 29s topic has been repeated over and over again by the press. This reporter repeats it without providing a source confirming this event.

## FACTS

As the Venezuelan President and Vice-president have often reiterated, the arms to be purchased from Russia will replace the Armed Forces' obsolete weapons and strengthen the country's defensive capacity, especially along the border with Colombia. Just as all sovereign countries-including the US, which has recently approved the biggest military budget in its history (close to \$500 billion)-Venezuela has the right to safeguard its sovereign territory. At no time has the Venezuelan government expressed intentions to enter an armed conflict with the US, much less to plan a "war" as the Miami Herald mentions. In fact, the Venezuelan government has asserted that the military equipment will be used to increase protection along the border and defend its sovereignty against any aggressor.

## TOPIC

Autocracy, Dictatorship,  
Attacks on private property

## MEDIUM/DATE

Financial Times. January 13, 2005.

## STATEMENTS

Title: Peasants 'unlikely to reap rewards of Venezuela land reform'

"The war against the estates is the oxygen of this revolution," Chávez said earlier this week, just before the arrival in this State of a group in charge of deciding the future of a large farm called "El Charcote."

"Business leaders and cattle ranchers see Mr Chávez's pursuit of a land reform programme as a clear and dangerous sign of the government's further radicalisation, particularly because such a programme challenges property rights."

## STRATEGY USED

De-contextualization: Taken out of context, the statement was linked to an act that is "presented" as proof of the arbitrary nature of the government's actions.

## CONTEXT

Excerpt of national broadcast from which statement was extracted:

Decree for the reorganization of tenancy and use of agricultural land.  
Monday, January 10, 2005: "The struggle and victory against non-producing estates is like oxygen for this revolution, it is an essential part of the life of this

people.” “The last census produced the following figures: Less than 5% of land owners or occupants in Venezuela-please take notice-less than 5% own almost 80% of the land in Venezuela. Admirals, Generals, Governors...a democracy that allows such a situation of unfairness is losing its democratic character.”

### TOPIC

Terrorism

### MEDIUM/DATE

The Wall Street Journal.

January 21, 2005

### STATEMENTS

Title: Should Chavez Be on the List Of Terrorism Sponsors?

“Reliable sources say that Interpol advised Venezuela a year ago that Granda was a wanted man.”

“Another good reason to take Chávez seriously is that there are alarming reports that suggest he may be bent on arming his revolutionary cadres all over South America.”

### STRATEGY USED

Anonymity:

Notice that the source of the first quote is identified only as an adjective - "reliable" - rather than an identity. This is how biased statements, arguments, and opinions are transmitted to the general public.

### FACTS

Interpol archives demonstrate that Granda's international capture was requested on January 9th, 2005, one month after his kidnapping in Venezuela.

The Colombian Minister of Defense Jorge Uribe said in December 2004 in an interview with Venezolana de Televisión that the allegation that Venezuela protects Colombian guerrillas was only a rumor.

### **Research team:**

**Ministry of Communication and Information:** William Castillo / Livia Suárez / Luis Delgado

**Sources:** FAIR Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting / The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

**Media outlets analyzed:** *The Washington Post / The New York Times / The Miami Herald / Los Angeles Times / Chicago Tribune / Christian Science Monitor / Fox News / Financial Times / The Sun Sentinel / Voice of America / The Wall Street Journal / The Washington Times / CNN / Dow Jones Newswires*

More information available at: [www.mci.gob.ve](http://www.mci.gob.ve)

## **Why is Venezuela a threat to the US? Chávez's Real Advantage Venezuela is an example to follow**

The real Venezuelan threat consists of teachers, doctors, athletes, coaches, and volunteers. This battalion of hope is distributing books and vaccines to the poorest and most secluded slums and towns and reinvesting the country's oil revenues for the benefit of all Venezuelans. Venezuela has a vibrant democracy, one in which popular participation is the key to success. This is a democratic model that aims to uphold national identity and values, secure the nation's sovereignty, and promote a multipolar international order that guarantees peace and respect for all nations. Who would feel threatened by such proposal?

### **EDUCATION**

#### **MISIÓN ROBINSON**

Accumulated (May 2003 - February 2005)

Graduated students .....1,314,790

#### **MISIÓN ROBINSON II**

Accumulated (September 2003 - February 2005)

New students .....1,262,621

*Misión Robinson* is a national literacy plan that aims to eradicate illiteracy from Venezuela.

## **HEALTH CARE**

### **MISIÓN BARRIO ADENTRO**

Cases	148,533,707
Medical consultations	94,345,099
Families visited	13,507,288
Nursing activities	19,770,245
Health education activities	52,686,709
Ophthalmology cases	1,738,503
Odontology consultations	7,580,539
Saved lives	22,835
Childbirth assistance	1,463

### **BARRIO ADENTRO SPORTS PROGRAM**

People benefited	1,301,506
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*Misión Barrio Adentro* is a program that provides free medical treatment and health education to Venezuela's poorest communities.

## **DIET AND NUTRITION**

### **MISIÓN MERCAL**

Soup kitchens	3,970
Soup kitchens beneficiaries	595,500
Nutritional supplement beneficiaries	201,152
Mercal Protection beneficiaries	405,841
Total beneficiaries	1,202,493

#### *Commercial Network*

Total establishments	13,490
People benefited	9,800,000
Total sales average (daily tons)	
May 2002	3,952
Regional purchases average (daily tons)	
May 2002	364

*Misión Mercal* is a distributing network for inexpensive quality food and basic staples that seeks to confront extreme poverty and hunger.

**OTHER MISSIONS**

MISIÓN RIBAS

Accumulated (October 2003-February 2005)

Students benefited .....700,535

MISIÓN SUCRE

Latest report (February 16, 2005)

Students benefited .....284,271

MISIÓN VUELVAN CARAS

Latest report (February 23, 2005)

People benefited .....282,584

\* *Misión Ribas* is a secondary school program that allows Venezuelans to finish high school.

\* *Misión Sucre* is a scholarship program that helps poor Venezuelans go to college.

\* *Misión Vuelvan Caras* is a program that prepares people for employment by training them in a particular sector that is specific to their location of residence.

**Is Venezuela Really Isolated?**

US media outlets tirelessly repeat that President Chávez is “isolating Venezuela from the rest of the world.” Despite evidence to the contrary, the mainstream media reiterates this frame as factual.

Between January and March 2005, Venezuela has initiated several international efforts to consolidate its economic position in the region. In Latin America alone, agreements have been signed with Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile, among others. Diplomatic relations with Colombia are strong and ongoing integration projects have been strengthened. Venezuela is rapidly becoming the engine for a unified South America and promotes regional integration and development by negotiating fair energy contracts. President Chávez has also signed agreements and consolidated alliances with countries such as France, Spain, China, Russia, Iran, Qatar, and – for the first time – India. Industrialized nations, as well as emerging markets, are investing heavily in the areas of energy, infrastructure, transport, basic industries, agro-industry, and services, to name a few, and there have been solid advances in joint research, health care, and high technology projects.



Bolivarian  
Government

Communication  
and Information Ministry