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**THESIS**

**VENEZUELAN BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS IN COLOMBIA:  
WHAT ARE THE REAL, UNDERLYING REASONS FOR  
THEIR EXISTENCE?**

by

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June 2013

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## ABSTRACT

The Bolivarian government of Venezuela and the government of Cuba use the legitimate status of Bolivarian Missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities. The overall aim is to undermine the Colombian state and increase the influence of political movements sympathetic to Bolivarianism in Colombian politics with the overall goal of weakening a historical international rival to Venezuela in Latin America. A comparative case study method is applied to four Venezuelan-sponsored Bolivarian missions in Colombia: *Robinson*, *Milagro*, *Guacaipuro*, and *Identidad*. A review of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez's ideology of Bolivarianism is also included. The case study analysis is complemented by fieldwork in Colombia: interviews with many key figures including former insurgents, intelligence officials of both Venezuela and Colombia, as well as politicians and analysts who have direct and indirect knowledge of the missions. This constitutes a unique and up-close perspective on the true nature of Bolivarian missions in Colombia. The Bolivarian government of Venezuela and the government of Cuba consistently seek to expand their anti-U.S. influence throughout Latin America; understanding their ideology and mechanisms for doing so yields important policy implications for the U.S. and Colombian governments, as well as democracy proponents.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| ACVC        | Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra (Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley)  |
| ALBA        | Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean)                                    |
| ALCA        | Área de Libre Comercio de las América (Spanish term for the FTAA: Free Trade Agreement of the Americas)   |
| ASCAMCAT    | Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region)  |
| BANDES      | Banco Nacional de Desarrollo Economico y Social (National Economic and Social Development Bank)   |
| CD          | Coordinadora Democrática de Acción Cívica (Democratic Coordinating Body for Civic Action)   |
| CEIMS       | La Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Liaison Committee for the Internationalization of the Bolivarian Missions) |
| COMBIFRON   | Comisión Binacional de Fronteras (Bi-National Border Commission between Colombia and Venezuela)   |
| COMINTER    | Comité Internacional (International Committee of the FARC)  |
| CUT         | Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Central Union of Workers)   |
| DIM         | Dirección de Inteligencia Militar (Venezuelan Directorate of Military Intelligence)   |
| ELAM        | Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina Alejandro Próspero Reverend (Latin American School of Medicine “Alejandro Próspero Reverend”)                       |
| ELN         | Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)  |
| FAN or FANB | Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales Bolivarianas (Bolivarian National Armed Forces)  |
| FAS         | Fondo de Apoyo Solidario (Solidary Support Fund)  |
| FARC        | Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)  |
| FEDECAMERAS | Federación de Cámaras y Asociaciones de Comercio y Producción de Venezuela (Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce)                              |
| FENSUAGRO   | Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria (Federation of National Agriculture Trade Unions)  |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| FONDEN      | Fondo de Desarrollo Nacional (National Development Fund)  |
| FONDESPA    | Fondo para el Desarrollo Economico y Social del Pais (National Economic and Social Development Fund)  |
| FONENDOGENO | Fondo de Desarrollo Endogeno (Endogenous Development Fund)  |
| ELN         | Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (National Liberation Army)  |
| GDP         | Gross Domestic Product  |
| ICG         | International Crisis Group  |
| ID          | Identification (as in Identification Card)  |
| IGO         | International Non-Governmental Organization   |
| ILDIS       | Instituto Latinamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (Latin American Institute for Social Investigation)  |
| INE         | Instituto Nacional de Estadística (Venezuelan Institute of Statistics)  |
| MECD        | Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport)   |
| NGO         | Non-Governmental Organization   |
| OAS         | Organization of American States   |
| ONIDEX      | Dirección de Identificación y Extranjería (Office of Identification and Identification Affairs)   |
| PDVSA       | Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (Petroleum of Venezuela, the Venezuelan state-owned oil and natural gas company)                                      |
| PSUV        | Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela)   |
| SAIME       | Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería (Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Immigration Affairs) |
| UNASUR      | Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations)   |
| UNESCO      | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  |
| ZRC         | Zonas de Reserva de Campesinos (Peasant Reserve Zones)  |

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade-plus, U.S. efforts in the Middle East have diminished the time, energy, attention, and diplomacy effort given to other regions of the world. Against this backdrop, the late Hugo Chávez Frías of Venezuela actively promoted his Bolivarian ideology throughout Latin America, working to build a coalition of like-minded governments, political parties, and social movements. One of the mechanisms Chávez used was the expansion of an infrastructure of “Bolivarian missions” (also known as Social Missions) that Chávez first established in Venezuela to the rest of Latin America to work with civil society in ways that complemented and supported Venezuelan foreign policy. What this thesis seeks to understand is the purpose and scope of the Bolivarian missions as they conduct activities in Colombia, primarily along its northeastern border with Venezuela. While these missions have overt mission statements that focus on humanitarian objectives for civil society, some contend that they function as legal covers for Venezuelan government-sponsored illicit or covert activities. Based on the comparison of the overt purposes of the Bolivarian missions in Colombia with their actual activities, capabilities, and organization, we aim to establish whether these organizations have a covert purpose that is directed at undermining the Colombian state.

### A. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS

This thesis examines the phenomenon of Venezuelan-sponsored “Bolivarian missions” within Colombia, and identifies their purpose. Are they legitimate social movement organizations, or are they “front organizations” to disguise covert Venezuelan activity in Colombia? Or is there a mix of overt and covert purposes for the “Bolivarian missions?”

Although the social programs of the “Bolivarian missions” have been extended to many countries in Latin America,<sup>1</sup> Colombia is a unique case for the following reasons: it

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<sup>1</sup> Javier Corrales, “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Quarterly* 32.4 (October, 2009), 98–100.

shares a lengthy border with Venezuela (1,385 miles, or 2,216 km),<sup>2</sup> it is not pro-Chávez, and it faces an internal threat from armed non-state actors in the form of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia or FARC) and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army or ELN). In addition, the Colombian government accepts the presence of Bolivarian missions within Colombia,<sup>3</sup> as do other countries in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean, simply because the aid comes “...with very few conditions.”<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the configuration, capabilities, activities and influence of the Bolivarian missions in Colombia as a way to identify their purpose. This thesis will conduct case-study analyses of four Bolivarian missions in Colombia: *Misiones Identidad*, *Milagro*, *Robinson*, and *Guacaipuro*. In each case, the thesis will evaluate the mission’s activities and whether those activities are overt or covert in nature. Given continued U.S. government investment in Colombia and the continued close relationship between Colombia and the U.S., we will examine the circumstances under which the U.S. would find it necessary to respond to the Bolivarian missions in Colombia.

Our initial hypothesis in framing the scope of our thesis was that the Venezuelan government established by the late President Chávez uses the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities. The aim is to undermine the Colombian state and increase the influence of political movements sympathetic to Bolivarianism in Colombian politics, with the overall goal of weakening a historical international rival to Venezuela in Latin America. However, through fieldwork conducted in Colombia, another hypothesis became plausible. Therefore, we consider three hypotheses that explain the activity of the Bolivarian missions in Colombia. These three hypotheses (H) are as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> Comunidad Andina, “Caracterización De La Frontera Colombo-Venezolana,” <http://www.comunidadandina.org/documentos/docSG/Ayudamemoria14-4-05.htm#arriba> (accessed February 28, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Corrales, “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” 101, 109.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

1. H1: The Bolivarian government of Venezuela uses the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for legitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy.
2. H2: The Bolivarian government of Venezuela uses the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy.
3. H3: The Cuban and Venezuelan governments use the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan and Cuban foreign policy.

## **B. WHAT EXACTLY ARE “BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS?”**

During President Chávez’s presidency, he himself, government agencies, and Bolivarian supporters all defined the missions as an achievement of the revolution, as social projects “aimed at building a new nation, giving voice and prominence to the population.”<sup>5</sup> They continue to be regarded this way. Within Venezuela, the missions are social assistance programs created to confront and defeat poverty, and provide basic services and support to the needy. The missions were created by the Venezuelan government in 2003 as a mechanism to operationalize its social plans and increase government capacity to provide social assistance to the Venezuelan population. Using the official name of *Misiones Sociales* (Social Missions), these organizations are part of the Venezuelan executive branch and therefore report directly to the president through presidential commissions that run each of the missions. Although the missions are constitutionally mandated, the missions are not under constitutional or legal control in order to avoid bureaucratic obstacles.<sup>6</sup>

Even Chávez’s detractors have recognized the efficacy of the social programs and the resulting positive impact on the population.<sup>7</sup> Despite the apparent success of the

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<sup>5</sup> Liliana Perez Rico, “Las Misiones Sociales Del Gobierno Bolivariano: Un Logro Revolucionario,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://repositorio.mpd.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_remository&Itemid=103&func=fileinfo&id=49](http://repositorio.mpd.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=103&func=fileinfo&id=49) (accessed September 08, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Yolanda D’Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Marcelo Justo, “BBC Mundo | A Fondo | 2009 | Chávez 10 | Entre Los Números y La Realidad “ BBC, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/spanish/specials/2009/Chavez\\_10/newsid\\_7837000/7837964.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/spanish/specials/2009/Chavez_10/newsid_7837000/7837964.stm) (accessed Sep 9, 2012).

missions in achieving their main goals (confronting and defeating poverty, and providing social services to the population), there is a debate about the effectiveness and purpose of the programs. The first is whether the money directed to the missions is being spent effectively and efficiently,<sup>8</sup> and the second is the political purposes of the program insofar as it strengthened Chávez's political fortunes.<sup>9</sup>

The first Bolivarian missions were established in 2003, and by 2005 the Chávez administration began to promote Bolivarian missions outside Venezuela through the establishment of the Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Coordinating Commission for Internationalization of Social [read: Bolivarian] Missions or CEIMS)<sup>10</sup> under the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Relations.<sup>11</sup> The CEIMS website identifies 23 Bolivarian missions total,<sup>12</sup> and these missions address various social development areas such as anti-poverty programs, medicine, health, indigenous land rights, and education.<sup>13</sup> Although these missions can be found throughout Latin America, this thesis limits its focus to their operations in Colombia, Venezuela's closest neighbor. The Bolivarian missions in Colombia offer a particularly useful test of the covert and overt purposes of these organizations in support of the Venezuelan government because they operated at a time of highly antagonistic relations between President Uribe of Colombia and President Chávez of Venezuela. In such a case, we would expect the covert aspects of the missions, should they exist, to diverge notably from the overt humanitarian purposes due to the hostility between the two states.

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<sup>8</sup> Francisco Rodríguez, "An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (Mar. - Apr., 2008), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Max G. Manwaring, *Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, Bolivarian Socialism, and Asymmetric Warfare* (Carlisle, PA.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, "Bienvenidos a CEIMS," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, <http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/> (accessed August 18, 2012, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Even the name of the Ministry of Foreign Relations was changed to reflect Chávez's preferences: it is now called Ministerio de Poder Popular para Relaciones Exteriores, or "Ministry of Popular Power for Foreign Relations." All of the Venezuelan ministries have undergone similar name changes.

<sup>12</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, "Misiones Bolivarianas" Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=527&Itemid=66](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=527&Itemid=66) (accessed Sep 09, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Note that although in Chapter III, Overview of the Bolivarian missions, we identify a current total of 40 separate missions, we surmise that the 23 missions listed on the CEIMS website are those that the Venezuelan government has identified as "international" missions as well.



### C. OVERT PURPOSES VERSUS COVERT PURPOSES OF INTERNATIONAL BOLIVARIAN INSTITUTIONS

On the one hand, Venezuelan foreign aid benefits the recipient states, particularly the population benefitting directly from the aid, which is typically very poor. Javier Corrales cites such examples as Venezuelan support after Haitian food riots in 2008, cash donations to Bolivia, medical aid to Nicaragua, housing investment in Peru, even heating oil subsidies to more than one million U.S. consumers,<sup>14</sup> which began in 2005.<sup>15</sup> Bolivarian missions, as a component of Venezuelan aid, have a similar track record of achievements. For instance, more than 34,000 international patients have allegedly been treated by *Misión Milagro* between 2005 and 2012, and the CEIMS website publicizes the latest international recipients.<sup>16</sup> These examples demonstrate overt/legitimate intervention of international Bolivarianism through the mechanism of the Bolivarian missions.

On the other hand, the question arises of what ulterior motives Venezuela may have in exporting Bolivarianism abroad. Although Harold Trinkunas discounts the power of international Bolivarianism to subvert governments or influence elections in some countries, he does acknowledge the possibility that Bolivarianism can create friction for governments critical of Chávez, and set up an effective network of supporters abroad.<sup>17</sup> A specific example of such activity is found in *The FARC Files*,<sup>18</sup> which ties *Misión Identidad* to covert/criminal purposes by describing how some FARC operatives, including members of the International Committee of the FARC (the COMINTER),

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<sup>14</sup> Corrales, "Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela's Foreign Policy," 99–100.

<sup>15</sup> "CITGO-Venezuela Heating Oil Program," CITGO Petroleum Corporation, <http://www.citgoheatingoil.com/> (accessed May 24, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, "Estadísticas" Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010) (accessed August 18, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> Harold A. Trinkunas, "International Bolivarianism and its Influence" (working paper, Western Hemisphere Security Analysis Center, Florida International University, FL, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> The FARC Files is a 2011 comprehensive report by the International Institute of Strategic Studies based on the files and records captured by Colombian armed forces in a March 2008 raid on a FARC camp inside Ecuador.

received Venezuelan citizenship through a simplified process.<sup>19</sup> The same concern is expressed by the Colombian journalist Marisol Gómez who, in her article, points out how Colombian criminals receive benefits from the Bolivarian missions in return for their assistance in building the Bolivarian Revolution in Colombia.<sup>20</sup> Taken together, this raises the question of the extent to which international Bolivarian missions have exceeded their overt, stated purposes to conduct covert activities in support of Venezuelan foreign policy.

#### **D. GAPS IN THE DEBATE OVER THE PURPOSE OF INTERNATIONAL BOLIVARIAN INSTITUTIONS**

Although an extensive literature has been written on Chavismo, Bolivarianism, and Bolivarian missions, the current literature generally treats the subjects separately. Furthermore, there is very little treatment of our thesis topic, Bolivarian missions in Colombia. In fact, aside from *The FARC Files*, an important resource in its own right, there is very little academic literature that specifically addresses Bolivarian missions in Colombia.

There was initially a surge of interest in Bolivarianism soon after Hugo Chávez's ascent to the presidency in 1998, such as Richard Gott's *In the Shadow of the Liberator: The Impact of Hugo Chávez on Venezuela and Latin America*, written in 2000. The interest has since tapered somewhat; thus an updated look at Chávez and his Bolivarian ideals are warranted. Some researchers study Bolivarianism exclusively as a Venezuelan issue, as we found in *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, edited by Levitsky and Roberts. Others researchers, like Petras and Veltmeyer, address the socio-political foundations, ideology and achievements of Bolivarianism and its configuration as a social movement. Much of the current literature is dedicated almost exclusively to analyzing the challenges posed by the movement to regional stability by examining Venezuelan foreign relations, diplomatic attitudes, the increase in purchases of military equipment, and its

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<sup>19</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, ed., *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of "Raúl Reyes"* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011), 103.

<sup>20</sup> Marisol Gómez, "A Través De Siete Programas Sociales Bolivarianos Se Tejería La Revolución Chavista En Colombia - Archivo - Archivo Digital De Noticias De Colombia y El Mundo Desde 1.990-Eltiempo.Com" *El Tiempo*, November 26, 2009.

links with violent non-state actors in some neighboring states, Venezuelan economic problems under Chávez's government, "petro-diplomacy" and the shortcomings of the regime, have also been extensively studied.<sup>21</sup> Trinkunas and Corrales have examined Bolivarianism as a whole, and have studied the connections between history, ideology, internal and foreign affairs and the prospective consequences.

An excellent series on the Bolivarian missions is published by Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (Latin American Institute for Social Investigation or ILDIS). ILDIS published their first report in 2006, "Social Missions in Venezuela: An approach to comprehension and analysis," followed by "The Social Missions in Venezuela" and "The Actual Status of the Social Missions: Balancing Processes of Implementation with Institutionalization" in 2008, and finally, "The Social Missions: An Alternative to Overcome Poverty" in 2010.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) also publishes extensively on Venezuela. Among their reports, three stand out for their analysis and treatment of dynamics within Venezuela prior to the missions' inception in 2003, as well as in-depth analysis of social and political dynamics during the Chávez era. These reports are, "Venezuela: Headed toward Civil War," in 2004; "Venezuela: Hugo Chávez's Revolution," in 2007, and "Venezuela: Accelerating the Bolivarian Revolution," in 2009.

However, throughout the body of literature, very little has been written on the specific topic of the Bolivarian missions as a subject in their own right, and even less so on the topic of Bolivarian missions in Colombia. In addition, the literature tends to follow major events, and as such there is a lack of recent literature that addresses the Bolivarian missions, and by extension, even less so those in Colombia. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists with respect to Bolivarian missions in Colombia, and this gap is even wider in the English language.

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<sup>21</sup> Francisco Rodríguez, "An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (March–April, 2008).

## E. METHODOLOGY USED IN THIS THESIS

This thesis employs a comparative case study method, augmented by fieldwork that consists of interviews of people with direct and indirect contact with the missions, conducted in Bogotá and Cúcuta, Colombia. The cases we study are four Venezuelan-sponsored Bolivarian missions in Colombia, *Misiones Identidad*, *Milagro*, *Robinson*, and *Guicaipuro*. These four missions were selected for case-study analysis because they are the most active and influential Bolivarian missions in Colombia. Of the approximately 40 total missions created by the Venezuelan government since 2003, the previously-cited article by the Colombian journalist Marisol Gómez<sup>22</sup> indicates only seven Bolivarian missions are active in Colombia.<sup>23</sup> Among these seven, the four missions selected are the most active, and thus have the most potential for secondary source analysis and analysis of data gained from fieldwork in Colombia. The following brief mission summaries are based on descriptions from the Venezuelan government's CEIMS website.<sup>24</sup>

- **Identidad:** The stated purpose of this mission is to facilitate the process of obtaining a Venezuelan ID card. The Colombian and Venezuelan constitutions both allow dual citizenship. Thus, this mission operates in Colombia to assist Colombians who live near the border with Venezuela to obtain a Venezuelan ID card.
- **Milagro:** The stated purpose of this mission is to attend to visual (ocular) health problems through free ocular surgery services, focusing on glaucoma and pterygium,<sup>25</sup> among others. This is the most internationally represented mission. The Venezuelan government claims that more than 34,000 foreign nationals have already benefited from this mission, Colombians among them.
- **Robinson:** The stated purpose of this Bolivarian mission is to teach basic literacy skills of reading, writing and arithmetic to illiterate adults.

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<sup>22</sup> Rodríguez, "An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez."

<sup>23</sup> For an interesting graphic on the Bolivarian missions in Colombia, see Colombian newspaper El Tiempo's infographic at Marisol Gómez and Carlos Morales, "Hilos Ocultos Del Chavismo," Casa Editorial El Tiempo, <http://e.eltiempo.com/media/produccion/chavismo/index.html> (accessed 5/18/2013, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, Misiones Bolivarianas.

<sup>25</sup> Pterygium is a non-cancerous growth in the eye, much more common in people living near the equator. Exact cause is unknown, and is more common in people with lots of outdoor exposure.

- Guaicaipuro: The stated purpose of this mission is to restore human rights and communal rights to indigenous communities. The presence of many indigenous tribes along the Colombian-Venezuelan border attracted this mission to activity on both sides of the border.

To conduct this study, we analyzed the organizational structure, the resources and capabilities, and the activities of the four selected Bolivarian missions; in doing so we illuminate the overt versus covert purposes of the missions. The four Bolivarian Mission cases are analyzed in parallel to compare variation on the dimensions of organization, capability and activity. This allows us to better understand if and how they deviate from their stated purposes. We may also be able to infer the covert purpose underlying the deviation, which could range from support from Venezuelan foreign policy, to criminal activity, to simple inefficiency and corruption. This allows us to determine whether or not their activities match their overt stated goals, or match up more closely to hidden (covert) purposes. The case study analysis of secondary sources is complemented by fieldwork in Colombia: interviews with civilians and government personnel who have first-hand experience with the missions. The fieldwork constitutes a unique and up-close perspective on the purposes of Bolivarian missions in Colombia, and as such are a new contribution to the field.

## **F. ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS**

This thesis is organized into nine chapters. The first chapter is the current chapter (Introduction), which introduces the reader to the topic of the thesis, organization of the thesis, methodology used, and the scope of the thesis. The next two chapters are primarily descriptive in nature. Chapter II provides a background for understanding the unique and eclectic Bolivarian ideology that Hugo Chávez instituted in Venezuela. Chapter III provides an overview of the Bolivarian missions: the general situation in Venezuela prior to the missions' initial establishment, the financing of the missions, the "internationalization" of the missions, and a brief introduction to all of the current Bolivarian missions. Chapters IV through VII are devoted to each case study, with sections in each chapter that delve into the overt purpose of the missions, origins and development of the mission, its organizational structure and configuration, its resources and capabilities, activities of the missions, and discussion on the nature of the mission's

activities. Chapter VIII is analysis and comparison of the case studies in parallel, in order to determine common elements among them, or any outliers among them, in terms of variation on the dimensions of organization, capability and activity. Chapter IX is the conclusion, and it serves to summarize the thesis findings, and provide policy recommendations and potential areas for further research.

## II. THE IDEOLOGICAL BASIS OF BOLIVARIANISM AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CHAVISMO

Hugo Chávez created a name for himself in the international arena. He has been increasingly recognized for his revolutionary and exotic ideas regarding Latin American politics since 1992, after his failed coup attempt to overthrow the constitutional president Carlos Andres Perez. Although the attempt was unsuccessful and Chávez was imprisoned for a bit more than two years, his imprisonment did not spell the end for Chávez but rather the beginning. After his release, he founded his own political movement and ran in the presidential elections in 1998, defeating the traditional parties and taking office in February 1999, fulfilling hopes of the Venezuelan people tired of the traditional political parties in Venezuela.<sup>26</sup>

The contemporary Chávez phenomenon, known by the all-encompassing term Bolivarianism, is a melting pot of concepts and words that attempt to comprehensively define his political ideology and form of government: “Socialism of the 21st Century,” Bolivarianism, Latin-American Left, Bolivarian Revolution, participatory democracy, and Chavismo. Chávez’s system is a good example of an eclectic ideology, given that its main elements are derived from multiple sources on apparently unconnected issues. This amalgamation includes among others Marxist theory, a profound admiration for Simon Bolivar, and an intrusive authoritarianism that extends into every component of Venezuelans’ daily lives. The ideology also seeks to cultivate a wide popular base that is centered on the lower classes and a deep sympathy professed toward twentieth century rebel leaders like Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro. Finally, the ideology incorporates actions such as the formation of paramilitary organizations to “defend the revolution,” an offensive foreign policy intended to construct a solidly established axis of allies, old-fashioned anti-imperialist rhetoric, and diversion of oil revenues into spending both in social assistance and armament.

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<sup>26</sup> Viet Juan Felix. *Venezuela Hacia el Socialismo del Siglo 21st* (Cholula, México: Altres Costa-Amic, 2008), 17–20.

It is not possible to understand the Bolivarian missions that are the focus of this thesis without understanding the ideology of President Hugo Chávez. This chapter explains some of the most important features of Bolivarianism in order to clarify how Chávez's eclectic ideology informs the activities and purposes of the Bolivarian missions.

#### **A. EXPLAINING BOLIVARIANISM**

The Bolivarian Movement is a nebulous concept that escapes precise definition. The Bolivarian Movement incorporates three concepts: support for Hugo Chávez as a leader (Chavismo), inspiration from a contemporary reinterpretation of Simón Bolívar's political thinking (Bolivarianism), and Socialism of the 21st Century. The concept of Chavismo continues even after Chávez's recent death in March, 2013, in the form of support for Chávez's handpicked successor, Nicolás Maduro. Each of these concepts encompass a broad range of socio-political concepts in their own right, thus the Bolivarian ideology is difficult to pin down. According to Harold Trinkunas, "Contemporary Bolivarianism as expressed by Hugo Chávez Frías is a difficult concept to define due to its eclecticism."<sup>27</sup>

According to Margarita Lopez Maya of the Central University of Venezuela,<sup>28</sup> Chavismo can be understood as the group of political parties, organizations, movements and individuals who have followed and supported Chávez since his first appearance in the public arena, the failed coup led by him in 1992. This group of supporters has formed the core of Chavismo through Chávez's presidential election in 1998, until the present day. Chávez's sympathizers in Venezuela and abroad are a component of Chavismo. Lopez Maya defines Bolivarianism as the clandestine movement emerging in Venezuela in the 1980s that sought to replace the traditional elites that misgoverned the country for decades, with the majority non-elite population (pueblo) as the center of political issues.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Trinkunas, "International Bolivarianism and its Influence," 5.

<sup>28</sup> Margarita Lopez Maya, "Hugo Chávez Frías: His Movement and His Presidency," In *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era*, ed. Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), 74.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–90.



However, any definition of Bolivarianism falls short without acknowledging the historical figure of Simón Bolívar and his overarching influence on South American politics. Gardner argues that Simon Bolivar's thoughts and writings are the ideological motivation behind the contemporary movement of Bolivarianism. Thus, they continue to exercise powerful ideological influence in South America, to the extent that Bolivarians still espouse a desire for unification and independence of Gran Colombia<sup>30</sup> as the materialization of Bolivar's dreams.<sup>31</sup>

According to McCoy, the principles of Bolivarianism that Chávez first described in his initial 1998 presidential campaign were somewhat vague, including "...notions of nationalism, participatory democracy, redistribution of oil wealth, and regional integration..."<sup>32</sup> However, a decade-plus into Chávez's regime, his vision of Bolivarianism ideals became more well-defined, and encompass contemporary leftist ideology. In 2006 the Chávez administration first proposed its "Socialism of the 21st Century." This approach to government mixes an anti-liberal economic agenda, an updated concept of participatory democracy, changes in property rights, provision of social assistance to the poor, and diversion of oil revenues to influence neighbor countries.<sup>33</sup>

In summary, we define the Bolivarian Movement as the socio-political movement that follows Hugo Chávez's leadership, subscribes to the Simón Bolívar-inspired ideal of Latin American unity, and a more inclusive political economy that empowers those who are traditionally suppressed, the non-elites, and is expressly anti-U.S. in foreign policy.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> One interesting effect of Chávez' turbulent relationship with contemporary Colombia is that he preferred the term, La Patria Grande as opposed to Gran Colombia when he refers to Bolivar's vision of a unified state in northern South America.

<sup>31</sup> Hall Gardner, "Three Dimensions of 'Montezuma's Revenge:' Hugo Chávez's Bolivarian Vision, War on Drugs, and 'Illegal' Immigration," In *Averting Global War*, ed. Hall Gardner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 186.

<sup>32</sup> Jennifer McCoy, "Venezuela under Chávez: Beyond Liberalism," In *Latin America's Left Turns*, ed. Maxwell A. Cameron and Eric Hershberg. (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 81.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>34</sup> Based on Jennifer McCoy, "Venezuela under Chávez: Beyond Liberalism," In *Latin America's Left Turns*, ed. Maxwell A. Cameron and Eric Hershberg (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2010), 85.

## B. THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION OF BOLIVARIANISM

The concept of Bolivarianism immediately implies a vision beyond the Venezuelan border; rather, it implies a regional vision. This latter dimension is addressed by Harold Trinkunas, who connects this with two issues: Venezuelan foreign policy under Hugo Chávez, and the transnationalization of civil society and social movements that allows them to impact in multiple countries simultaneously.<sup>35</sup> Javier Corrales also argues that Venezuelan foreign aid is a way to maintain a balance of power through social power, a process made all the easier to accomplish given the huge amount of Venezuelan government funds invested in social assistance programs abroad, and the lack of conditions that such support comes with.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Venezuelan aid coupled with very few restrictions enhances Chávez' foreign influence.

The Venezuelan government under Chávez adopted a policy of exporting the Bolivarian missions, which it sees as a necessary component of Bolivarianism. In 2005, the Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Coordinating Commission for the Internationalization of Social [read: Bolivarian] Missions or CEIMS) was established. Its stated purpose is to “be loyal to the ideas of the Liberator and the construction of 21st Century Socialism, obligated to carry the Bolivarian ideals beyond our borders, for the benefit of our sister nations ...”<sup>37</sup> Corrales asserts that “converting social policy into a primary foreign policy tool has brought Venezuela huge rewards.”<sup>38</sup>

Part of the debate on the international dimension of Bolivarianism has been centered on its agenda and the degree to which the overt goals of Latin American brotherhood and solidarity are a mask for covert activities designed to extend Venezuelan influence in the region. On the one hand, Venezuelan foreign aid benefits the recipient states, particularly the population benefitting directly from the aid, which is typically very

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<sup>35</sup> Trinkunas, “International Bolivarianism and its Influence,” 10.

<sup>36</sup> Javier Corrales, “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” *The Washington Quarterly* 32 no. 4 (October 2009): 99, 101.

<sup>37</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales,” November 18, 2005, <http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/> (accessed August 18, 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Corrales, “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” 101.

poor. Javier Corrales cites such examples as Venezuelan support after Haitian food riots in 2008, cash donations to Bolivia, medical aid to Nicaragua, housing investment in Peru, even heating oil subsidies to more than one million U.S. consumers.<sup>39</sup> Bolivarian missions have a similar track record of achievements: for instance, more than 34,000 international patients have been treated by *Misión Milagro* between 2005 and 2012, and the CEIMS website publicizes the latest international recipients.<sup>40</sup> These examples demonstrate overt/legitimate intervention of international Bolivarianism.

On the other hand, the question arises of what ulterior motives Venezuela may have in exporting Bolivarianism abroad. Although Trinkunas discounts the power of international Bolivarianism to subvert governments or influence elections in some countries, he does acknowledge the possibility that Bolivarianism can create frictions abroad for governments critical of Chávez, and set up an effective network of supporters abroad.<sup>41</sup> In addition, The FARC Files specifically ties *Misión Identidad* to covert/criminal purposes by describing how some FARC operatives, including members of the International Committee of the FARC, received Venezuelan citizenship through a simplified process.<sup>42</sup> The Colombian journalist Marisol Gómez also points out how Colombian criminals receive benefits from the Bolivarian missions in order to build the Bolivarian Revolution in Colombia.<sup>43</sup>

### C. INSTITUTIONS TO PROMOTE INTERNATIONAL BOLIVARIANISM

Bolivarianism has been promoted beyond the Venezuelan borders by Chávez using multiple means: International Non-Governmental Organizations (IGOs), economic

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<sup>39</sup> Corrales, “Using Social Power to Balance Soft Power: Venezuela’s Foreign Policy,” 99–100.

<sup>40</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Estadísticas Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales,” November 18, 2005, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010) (accessed August 18, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Trinkunas, “International Bolivarianism and its Influence,” 17.

<sup>42</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies. *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of “Raúl Reyes”* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011), 103.

<sup>43</sup> Marisol Gómez, “A través de siete programas sociales bolivarianos se tejería la revolución Chavista en Colombia,” *eltiempo.com*, *El Tiempo*, November 26, 2009, <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-6677907> (accessed July 5, 2012).

agreements, and multilateral institutions. The Bolivarian missions are part of this group of institutions intended to promote Bolivarianism internationally, and we delve further into them later on.

At the level of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the most relevant to Bolivarianism are the Congreso Bolivariano de los Pueblos, the Movimiento Continental Bolivariano, and the Foro de Sao Paulo. The first and the second are briefly but accurately addressed by Harold Trinkunas who describes the Congreso as “focused on Bolivarian-identified civil society”<sup>44</sup> and the Movimiento as “more explicitly revolutionary in identity.”<sup>45</sup> In Colombia, some political parties such as Polo Democrático Alternativo and the Colombian Communist Party allegedly belong to the Congreso. The FARC is apparently an active member of the Movimiento, to the extent that at the summit that led to the creation of the Movimiento in 2009, the now-dead leader of the FARC, Alfonso Cano, sent a message greeting the participants through a video-conference.<sup>46</sup>

The *Foro de Sao Paulo* conference is the umbrella group of all the leftist political parties and organizations throughout Latin America. This *Foro* was an initiative promoted by Fidel Castro and Lula da Silva as a response to the fall of the Soviet Union, wishing to find a new path for socialism.<sup>47</sup> Currently, the *Foro* has a strong Bolivarian influence to the extent that Hugo Chávez became one of its crucial sponsors: Venezuela hosted the XVIII *Foro's* Summit in Caracas in 2012. Interestingly, *Marcha Patriótica* (Patriotic March),<sup>48</sup> the new Colombian social organization born in 2012 and which displays clear sponsorship and ideological identification with Chávez' revolutionary ideas, petitioned for membership into the *Foro* at this event in Caracas.

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<sup>44</sup> Trinkunas, “International Bolivarianism and its Influence,” 12.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Carlos Aznarez, “En Venezuela fue lanzado el Movimiento Continental Bolivariano,” *Prensa Rural*. December 9 (2009), <http://www.prensarural.org/spip/spip.php?article3390> (accessed October 19, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> Carlos Fonseca, “La Izquierda Latinoamericana ante sus nuevos desafíos,” *Foro de Sao Paulo*. September 14 (2012), <http://forodesaopaulo.org/?p=1853> (accessed October 26, 2012).

<sup>48</sup> Foro de Sao Paulo. “Documentos del XVIII encuentro del Foro de Sao Paulo,” *Foro de Sao Paulo*, August 7 (2012), <http://forodesaopaulo.org/?p=1728> (accessed October 26, 2012).

Another important factor that plays a central role at the international level of *Bolivarianism* is economics. The most important source of revenues for Venezuela is oil exports, and this contributes to under-development of other sectors of the economy, which creates a dependence on imports for necessary materials, such as foodstuffs and other resources. The oil revenues provide Chávez the ability to exert his influence throughout the region because he uses them to pay for programs in neighboring countries. Under Chávez, the Venezuelan government has signed agreements and created institutions to facilitate commerce and advance their economic ideals. The most relevant of these institutions is the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America and the Caribbean or ALBA), an initiative stimulated by Venezuela to counter the effects of the Área de Libre Comercio de las Américas (or ALCA, Spanish for the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas FTAA). According to ALBA's advocates, this organization creates "cooperative advantages among nations to compensate [for] existent asymmetries among the hemisphere's countries."<sup>49</sup>

Following the Bolivarian postulate of an integrationist and cooperative foreign policy, the ALBA claims to fight traditional neoliberalism dogmas with socialist concepts like prohibition of agricultural subsidies, limitations to free commerce with powerful nations, strong state intervention in the market, and an emphasis on regional integration where likeminded ideology plays a significant role.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, ALBA facilitated new agreements in the economic field. One example is the *Gasoducto Del Sur* (Southern Natural Gas Pipeline), a project that would unite Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina as part of this energy interconnection.<sup>51</sup> Petrosur is a strategic alliance that was promoted by ALBA, in which the state oil companies of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela create policies and incentives to avoid market speculation. A similar agreement, known as Petrocaribe, was signed between Venezuela and 13 Caribbean countries in 2005, an

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<sup>49</sup> Viet Juan Felix. *Venezuela Hacia el Socialismo del Siglo 21st* (Cholula, México: Altres Costa-Amic, 2008), 53.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–69.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

agreement that allows exchange of oil for goods and also provides flexible payment plans to the oil-purchasers.<sup>52</sup> An additional agreement was reached in 2005 with the goal of boosting energy interdependence among the members of the Andean Community (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela). This latter agreement is called Petroandina.<sup>53</sup>

Not even the media market is exempt from Bolivarian influence. Telesur is the television channel initiated in 2005 with the cooperation of Venezuela, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Uruguay (Bolivia and Nicaragua became partners in Telesur later on). Logically, this channel is very effective not only in spreading Bolivarian ideology throughout the continent but also in creating associations with controversial organizations like Al-Jazeera, which signed a cooperation agreement with Telesur in 2006.<sup>54</sup>

Another international organization that has been skillfully used by Chávez in the promotion of Bolivarian interests is the Unión de Naciones Suramericanas (Union of South American Nations or UNASUR). This union was first conceived in 2002 as the Community of South American Nations, and adopted its current name in 2007. This entity was constituted with the main objective of building “integration and union among its peoples in the cultural, social, economic and political fields...strengthening the sovereignty and independence of the States.”<sup>55</sup>

Hugo Chávez was actively influential within UNASUR to promote his Bolivarian ideals. The most relevant case occurred in 2009 when Colombia signed an agreement with the U.S to facilitate the use of military bases in Colombia by U.S military personnel, seeking greater effectiveness in combating terrorism and narco-trafficking. Chávez used his influence at UNASUR and attained a joint UNASUR declaration repudiating the agreement and arguing that the treaty threatened the stability and peace throughout the

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<sup>52</sup> Felix. *Venezuela Hacia el Socialismo del Siglo 21st*, 73.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*,75.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*,78.

<sup>55</sup> UNASUR. “Constitutive Treaty.” unasur.org, December 06, 2011, [http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=290&Itemid=339](http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=290&Itemid=339) (accessed November 2, 2012).

region.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the current General Secretary of UNASUR is Ali Rodríguez Araque, a Venezuelan citizen closely associated with Chávez and known as a former communist activist and member of the insurgency during de 1960s.<sup>57</sup>

#### D. CONCLUSION

During Chávez's presidency, his governing philosophy was Bolivarianism, and as we have shown previously it is a curious hodge-podge of philosophies; it defies precise definition, but the precise definition is perhaps less important than what it actually aspires to, or the actions that it inspires in other individuals or organizations. If nothing else, Chávez's unique brand was certainly ambitious, spawning such terms as Chavismo—all things Chávez—and “Socialism of the 21st Century”—a “brand new” form of socialism. Not only has Chávez's political movement promulgated profound change within Venezuela, it has also shaped its foreign policy with some aggressive moves that seek to “export the revolution.” Among these moves, some notable ones are: *Misión Milagro's* health projects in other Latin American countries, promotion of alternative alliances explicitly to counter U.S. influence in Latin America, economic agreements such as Petrocaribe, and the establishment of Telesur as an alternative to mainstream media channels in Latin America.

It is worth noting here that the concepts of Chavismo, Bolivarianism, and Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century continue within Venezuela, as well as beyond its borders, even after Chávez's death. His personality and charisma were a key component of his leadership and his capacity to inspire others, traits which many observers consider were essential to his ability to rule and to attract supporters. By handpicking Nicolás Maduro as his successor, he sought to “transfer” this allegiance that his supporters felt for him, to Maduro. The Maduro regime is thus an extension of the Chávez regime, with constant references to Chávez as the “eternal leader” of the country.

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<sup>56</sup> Secretaria General UNASUR. “Declaración de Bariloche.” unasur.org. August 28, 2009, [http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=657:declaracion-bariloche-agosto-2009&catid=96:declaraciones](http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=657:declaracion-bariloche-agosto-2009&catid=96:declaraciones) (accessed November 2, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Secretaría General UNASUR. “Hoja de Vida Dr. Alí Rodríguez Araque.” unasur.org. n.d. [http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=710&Itemid=354](http://www.unasursg.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=710&Itemid=354) (accessed November 2, 2012).

Among Bolivarianism's most important principles are its Chávez -centric focus, its near-deification of all things Simón Bolívar, and ideals of inclusiveness that translate to explicit support to traditionally-ignored lower classes of Venezuela, and an ideal of Latin American unity that is expressed through Venezuela's foreign policy. As well, Chávez's Socialism of the 21st Century reflects these principles through a transformative vision of democracy as a "participatory democracy," and an economic system guided by socialist principles rather than capitalist principles, and an explicit focus on the "traditionally excluded" classes of Venezuela.

The concepts and ideals expressed within Bolivarianism find one expression through the mechanism of the Bolivarian missions. The next chapter examines in more detail the context in Venezuela that led to the missions: the conditions in Venezuela at the time, the political pressures confronting Chávez, as well as an overview of the missions themselves.



### **III. OVERVIEW OF THE BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the Bolivarian missions. This chapter argues that the origins of the missions were originally developed by Chávez as an important part of his campaign to win the 2004 presidential referendum vote that would determine whether or not he would stay in office. The first section of the chapter provides context for the missions by describing social and economic conditions within Venezuela prior to the August 2004 referendum. The next section orients the reader to the origins of the Bolivarian missions, with an emphasis on Chávez's own recollections of the dynamics within the country at the time. The next section describes how the missions are financed by the Venezuelan government. The final section provides a brief summary of each of the missions, organized by date of inception, as well as some commentary on selected missions, followed by a chapter conclusion.

#### **A. CONTEXT FOR THE MISSIONS: A DIVIDED AND CONTESTED COUNTRY**

The Venezuela of 2003, the year the missions were first conceived and established, was a country divided and contested. The events within the country stand testament to the friction and “pushback” Chávez's administration experienced as a result of the changes imposed by his administration since he first won election in 1998. Thus, the purpose of this section is to describe the context within which the missions were initiated in Venezuela in 2003, describing the social context in Venezuela prior to the missions.

By 1998, the year of Chávez's first election victory, Venezuela was reeling from an “economic and social implosion that the country experienced as a consequence of the long term decline in oil fiscal revenues in the 1980s and 1990s.”<sup>58</sup> Penfold cites figures that underscore the extent and magnitude of the economic decline. “GDP per capita in

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez's “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administracion, 2006), [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDECINEQ/Resources/1149208-1147789289867/IIWB\\_Conference\\_Clientelism\\_and\\_Social\\_FundsREVISED.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDECINEQ/Resources/1149208-1147789289867/IIWB_Conference_Clientelism_and_Social_FundsREVISED.pdf).

1998 reverted to the same levels as in the 1950s,” and from 1989 to 1998, “the share of households in poverty conditions [increased] from 20.07 percent...to 28.8 percent.”<sup>59</sup>

Another set of statistics also sheds light on the challenges that Venezuela faced in 1998–2003, the first years of Chávez’s administration:

Venezuela entered 1998 with critical problems in the economic situation of domestic households and with large structural deficits in the health care, well-being and social security of the population. [For 1998] poverty affected 40% of the population, inflation was at 20% annually, and unemployment was estimated at 15%. These figures increased dramatically in 2003. Furthermore, 70% of the population didn’t have regular health check-ups, nor were covered by health insurance; the majority of adolescents and youth of both sexes dropped out of the education system, the informal sector [of the economy] employed more than 50% of workers, lack of adequate housing affected close to 60% of households and approximately 80% of the population could not count on any sort of retirement security [or retirement plans, either public or private].<sup>60</sup>

Little wonder, then, that the electorate of Venezuela voted Chávez into power in 1998, given that the two-party system in place since 1958, the Punto Fijo pact,<sup>61</sup> had failed to deliver good governance. Thus, Chávez came to power in 1998 amid a profound sense of desperation and loss of trust for the existing system among the Venezuelan population.

According to Elia:

Venezuelans of all social classes showed their frustration for government dysfunction and the poor quality of public service, inflation, unemployment, civil disorder, violence and civil insecurity, lack of governance, galloping corruption, as well as general criticism that the governments didn’t hold themselves accountable for satisfying citizens’ demands.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds*.

<sup>60</sup> Yolanda D’Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

<sup>61</sup> The 1958 Punto Fijo pact is essentially a power-sharing agreement between the formerly dominant parties of Venezuelan politics, Acción Democrática (AD) and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI). The pact lasted until the 1998 election of Chávez.

<sup>62</sup> Yolanda D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis* Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, October 2006.

Chávez had as his central campaign promise a sweeping vision for reform: “constitutional reform through the seating of a new National Constituent Assembly.”<sup>63</sup>

### **1. The Attempted Coup d’État of 2002**

As of 2002, the Chávez administration had been in place for five years (inclusive of 1998–2002). During that period, Chávez progressively implemented his election promises, as well as tightened his control of the various organs of government, essentially increasing the strength of the executive branch of government (especially the office of the president) at the expense of the legislative and judicial branches of government.

It is important to note that some of these changes were in fact campaign promises by Chávez, and were therefore voted for by the Venezuelan voters themselves. For example, Chávez promised during his 1998 campaign to create a new constitution, which he in fact did in 1999 soon after taking office.<sup>64</sup>

A significant change Chávez wrought via the constitution is the change from a bicameral Congress to a unicameral Congress (the National Assembly), a significant structural change for the legislature. The essential point here is not the structural change itself, but rather that the change reflected Chávez’s philosophical shift away from “representative democracy”—democracy via a party system and elected representatives—to a “participatory democracy” that enshrines “popular sovereignty as a fundamental right.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, one could argue that a unicameral Congress is easier for an autocratic president such as Chávez to control and influence, and a unicameral body enabled Chávez to symbolically have more of a “direct link” with the people, especially the lower classes.

The concentration of power in the presidential office that Chávez achieved was substantial. In sum, from taking office in 1998 until 2002, he effectively pushed through

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<sup>63</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*.

<sup>64</sup> Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez’s “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution* (Bogotá / Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2007), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19\\_venezuela\\_hugo\\_Chávezs\\_revolution.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19_venezuela_hugo_Chávezs_revolution.pdf).

a new Constitution as mentioned above, and appointed a Supreme Court and Electoral Council loyal to him. The powers granted his office under the new constitution reflect this concentration: the term of office increased from five to six years, re-election of the president became possible, special *leyes habilitantes* (enabling laws)<sup>66</sup> granted the president wide-ranging powers previously in the legislature, and approval of promotion of military officers in the rank of colonel and above transferred from the legislature to the president.<sup>67</sup> The *leyes habilitantes* are especially noteworthy because they granted Chávez sweeping powers to decree laws with very little legislative or judicial review, and thus are significant in the manner they increased Chávez's power.

Perhaps predictably, the opposition became increasingly agitated and nervous over what they perceived to be a loss of rights as well as the increasing autocratic bent of the Chávez administration. Over the time period of approximately 2000–2002, a series of opposition activities, such as demonstrations, strikes, press releases, etc., reflected their growing concern and strong disagreement with Chávez's government reforms.

The changes sought by Chávez during this time period served to unite the disparate opposition groups into a unified organization, and this galvanizing effect had important consequences. Among the various changes, “the catalyst [that drove the opposition to unite] was a November 2001 law passed by the National Assembly, where the government coalition held 101 of 165 seats, which allowed the president to issue 49 social and economic decrees.”<sup>68</sup> These 49 laws were passed under the *leyes habilitantes* power granted to Chávez, and the wide scope of their subject matter suggests the extensive scale of change Chávez was after. Among the 49 laws, there were laws on land and rural development, hydrocarbons (oil), fishing, “special zones of sustainable

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<sup>66</sup> *Leyes Habilitantes* are essentially “judicial tools of constitutional-level authority that enable the president to issue decrees with the rank, value, and force of law on issues that are deemed necessary given the necessities and/or emergency situations of the country.” See also Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “*Leyes Habilitantes*,” Procuraduría General de la República, [http://www.pgr.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2911](http://www.pgr.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2911) (accessed April 20, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> See Penfold-Becerra, “Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez's “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela,” 13–14 and “Venezuela: Hugo Chávez's Revolution, 6.”

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

development,” and social security.<sup>69</sup> “The business sector believed that the new laws threatened property rights in the agricultural and hydrocarbon sectors.”<sup>70</sup> The growing unrest finally culminated in the attempted coup on 11-13 April 2002, which would prove short-lived.

Notwithstanding the failure of the coup d’etat, the coup itself serves important functions. Among them, the coup is evidence of the deeply divided nature of Venezuelan society during Chávez’s first administration. The events leading up to the coup demonstrate the deep reservations within much of Venezuelan society to many of the changes sought by Chávez, best exemplified by the strong resistance to the implementation of the “49 laws” of November 2001 passed under the *leyes habilitantes* provision. But, perhaps the most important functions of the coup are as follows: 1) Chávez was “clearly shaken by the coup [and therefore adopted] a more conciliatory tone”<sup>71</sup> for some months after the coup, at least until the national and oil strike of December 2002; and 2), the coup is an indicator of the capacity of the opposition to come together and act in a unified manner. By this point, the opposition to Chávez consisted of a wide cross-section of Venezuelan society, such as some trade unions, media companies, business executives, the Frente Institucional Militar (Institutional Military Front), opposition parties, and the Chamber of Commerce Federation, Fedecameras. The opposition coalesced and organized under the umbrella group Coordinadora Democrática de Acción Cívica (Democratic Coordinating Body for Civic Action or CD). In summary, the military officers who actually led the coup felt strong enough, with enough support from throughout Venezuelan society, with a high-enough likelihood of success, to go ahead and act on their convictions to unseat Chávez. The failure of the coup forced the now-unified opposition to continue their efforts, which led eventually to the national and oil strike of December 2002, as detailed in the next section.

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<sup>69</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, 204.

<sup>70</sup> Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez’s “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela.*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution*, 8.

## **2. The National and Oil Strike of December 2002**

Having been unsuccessful at unseating Chávez via the attempted coup, the CD attempted to force Chávez to turn power over via a national strike. The basic logic behind the strike was that Chávez would be forced from power if PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., or Petroleum of Venezuela, the Venezuelan state-owned oil and natural gas company) stopped producing oil, and therefore, revenues. The impetus of the strike began on in early December of 2002 within PDVSA. This is significant, as the national oil company of Venezuela PDVSA produces the overwhelming majority of GDP. The strike quickly gained momentum, and other sectors of the economy quickly followed suit with strikes of their own. Thus, what was just an oil strike became a national strike. Although the strike was in fact devastating to the national economy, and although it did last until February 3, Chávez emerged emboldened by the strike, essentially because he had outlasted it. Furthermore, the strike allowed Chávez to finally consolidate control over PDVSA, because it gave him the opportunity to lay off thousands of anti-Chávez striking workers, and to install pro-Chávez management throughout the organization.<sup>72</sup>

### **B. ORIGINS OF THE BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS**

The following quote summarizes, in President Hugo Chávez's own words, his recollections of how the Bolivarian missions came to be. President Chávez delivered these comments in November, 2004 at Fuerte Tiuna, the military headquarters of Venezuela, at a seminar on "The New Strategic Map of Venezuela."<sup>73</sup> The quote is instructive and insightful because it encapsulates many of the dynamics Venezuela was going through in 2003, the time of the missions' inception. Furthermore, it highlights many of the concerns that preoccupied Chávez at the time, as well as his initial responses to them, one of which was the establishment of the missions.

You should all recall that, as a product of the coup d'état and all of that friction, the ungovernability that reached alarming levels, the economic

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<sup>72</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez's Revolution, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.; See also: Taller De Alto Nivel "El Nuevo Mapa Estratégico" 12 y 13 De Noviembre De 2004 Intervenciones Del Presidente De La República Hugo Chávez Frías (Caracas: Ministerio de Comunicación e Información, n.d.).

crisis, our own errors, there was a moment in which we were on par with [the opposition], or even a little below. There was an international polling agency recommended by a friend who came to Venezuela mid-2003, spent about two months here and came to the Palace and gave me the bombshell: ‘Mr. President, if the referendum [the 2004 referendum] was held today, you would lose.’ I remember that that night for me was the bombshell, because you all know that many people don’t tell you such things, so much as they try to ‘polish it up.’...Well, it was then when we began to work with the missions, we designed the first one here and first asked for support from Fidel [Castro]. I told him: ‘Look, I have this idea, attack from the bottom with all of our strength,’ and he told me: ‘If I know anything it is about this [attacking from the bottom], so you can count on all my support.’ And the doctors began to arrive by the hundreds, an aerial bridge, airplanes go, airplanes come, as well as the search for resources, at this point the economy improved....And that avalanche of people that arrived on top of us,...we began to combine our efforts together,...all of the PDVSA team, the Francisco de Miranda Front, we formed the political command, we adjusted a little bit more, and that is how we began to climb in the polls, and the polls never fail, ... it’s politics, it’s not magic, and look how far we have come.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, as the referendum (scheduled for August 2004) approached, the original set of missions was established: *Misión Barrio Adentro* (Mission Inside the Neighborhood) in April 2003; *Misiones Robinson I* and *Sucre* in July 2003; *Misiones Robinson II* and *Miranda* in October 2003; *Ribas* in November 2003; *Milagro* and *Mercal* in January 2004; *Identidad* in February 2004; and *Vuelvan Caras* in March 2004. These ten missions were established prior to the presidential referendum vote in August of 2004, and therefore can be considered as the “original” or “founding” missions. (Note: see table in Section E of this chapter for summary of all of the missions organized by date of establishment.)

International Crisis Group explained that government spending to benefit the population via the missions ramped up as the referendum approached: “As the recall referendum approached, spending increased.”<sup>75</sup> The following quote provides a glimpse

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<sup>74</sup> Intervenciones Del Presidente El Dia 12 De Noviembre Del 2004, <http://infovenezuela.org/democracy/attachments-spanish/T3%20ST05%20N5%20Discurso.pdf> (accessed April 20, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution, 10.

into the explosive growth of the missions' activities prior to the August 2004 referendum, with apparent results in approval ratings commensurate with the increased spending.

Between July and December 2003, the doctors attached to the Barrio Adentro mission increased from 303 to 9,179. In June–July 2004, [the number of] Mercal markets increased from 3,869 to 8,299. The number of beneficiaries also increased from 1,025,814 at the end of 2003, to 3,834,600 in mid-2004. A survey showed that people who agreed Chávez helped the poor increased from 53 per cent to 62 per cent between March and June 2004; those who disagreed dropped from 44 to 36 percent.<sup>76</sup>

Worth emphasizing in the preceding quote is the dramatic, seemingly exponential, growth of the size of the missions. For example, the increase in Barrio Adentro doctors from 303 to 9,179 is approximately a 3000 percent increase in a six-month period. The missions were seemingly building on the momentum created by such growth: “The social missions were gathering speed and had proved their political worth.”<sup>77</sup> In other words, the establishment of the missions, and their activities prior to the referendum, played a significant role in Chávez's campaign to win the presidential referendum of August 2004. This is reflected in his recollections of the run-up to the referendum vote, as well as in the actual numbers behind the missions.

### **C. FINANCING OF THE MISSIONS**

The Bolivarian missions are financed by the Venezuelan government, this much is clear. However, the mechanisms that are used to finance the programs are opaque and do not offer clear and transparent views into the money spent on the various missions. Therefore, it is difficult and a challenge to report accurate and correct budgetary numbers that make up the financing of the missions. Nevertheless, some figures exist that allude to the magnitude of spending on the missions as a national-level project.

Penfold explains the opaque nature of the funding for the *Misiones* this way:

One reason for this lack of information is that the programs were expanded by accessing non-budgetary means from the oil windfall managed by PDVSA. These resources were not under the direct oversight

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<sup>76</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez's Revolution, 10..

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.



either of the National Assembly or the Central Bank. The financing of the “misiones” were conducted as off-balance spending and in order to increase the amount of financial resources available for the programs the government violated established budgetary and even monetary rules.<sup>78</sup>

The actual mechanisms to manage the “windfall” create a veritable “alphabet soup” of fund names and agency names. The initial budget mechanism to support the missions was created in 2004 as a component of the ordinary budget with the name Programa Social Especial, or Special Social Program. However, subsequent funding came from various sources that were not necessarily reflected in the national budget. Additional funds came from the Impuesto al Debito Bancario (Bank Debit Tax or Bank Transaction Tax), Banco Nacional de Desarrollo Economico y Social (National Economic and Social Development Bank or BANDES), and directly from the state-owned oil company, PDVSA. The funds directly from PDVSA were managed through three official funds: Fondo para el Desarrollo Economico y Social del Pais (National Economic and Social Development Fund or FONDESPA), Fondo de Desarrollo Endogeno (Endogenous Development Fund or FONENDOGENO), and the Fondo de Desarrollo Nacional (National Development Fund or FONDEN).<sup>79</sup>

A Reuters report from 2012 describes FONDEN as:

The largest of a handful of secretive funds that put decisions on how to spend billions of dollars in the hands of Chávez...Since it's founding seven years ago FONDEN has been funneling cash into hundreds of projects personally approved by Chávez but not reviewed by Congress—from swimming-pool renovations for soldiers, to purchases of Russian fighter jets, to public housing and other projects with broad popular appeal.<sup>80</sup>

The report goes on to state that “The fund now accounts for nearly a third of all investment in Venezuela and half of public investment, and last year received 25 percent of government revenue from the oil industry. All told, it has taken in close to \$100 billion

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<sup>78</sup> Penfold-Becerra, Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez's “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela., 23.

<sup>79</sup> D'Elia and Cabezas, Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Brian Ellsworth and Eyanir China, “Special Report: Chávez's Oil-Fed Fund Obscures Venezuela Money Trail | Reuters,” Thomson Reuters, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/09/26/us-venezuela-Chavez-fund-idUSBRE88P0N020120926> (accessed May 6, 2013).

of Venezuela's oil revenue in the past seven years.”<sup>81</sup> Another way to put this dollar amount in perspective is that for the time period of 2005-2012, FONDEN received a bit over \$14 billion per year from PDVSA to fund the missions.

The values from the Reuters report appear in line with recent official reports from Venezuelan government sources. In a 2012 report, Elias Aljuri, President of *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (Venezuelan Institute of Statistics or INE), stated that during the Bolivarian Revolution the government has spent around \$500 billion dollars in social investment, which represents 61% of the total revenues received by the country, which is \$770 billion dollars.<sup>82</sup> In another recent example, PDVSA's president claimed in the FY2011 annual report that PDVSA's spending was distributed in three programs: *Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela* (Great Mission Venezuela Housing), \$4 billion dollars; social missions, \$11.6 billion dollars; and contributions to the FONDEN (National Development Fund) with \$14.475 billion dollars.<sup>83</sup>

The story of how FONDEN was established reflects that it was intended to ensure Chávez's direct control of funding for the missions from its inception. Chávez founded it as a corporation owned by the finance ministry, rather than as a state agency. This status “...lets it disburse billions of dollars in state money while subject to few of the reporting and disclosure requirements that apply to government entities.”<sup>84</sup> How the money is spent does not require approval from Congress, but rather, “...FONDEN outlays begin with Chávez's approval and are viewed by a board of directors made up of his closest allies.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ellsworth and China, “Special Report: Chávez's Oil-Fed Fund.”

<sup>82</sup> “Eljuri: Inversión Social En Venezuela Se Ha Duplicado Con El Gobierno Bolivariano | AVN” Agencia Venezolana de Noticias, <http://www.avn.info.ve/contenido/eljuri-inversión-social-venezuela-se-ha-duplicado-gobierno-bolivariano> (accessed October 14, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Rafael Ramírez, “PDVSA: Ganancias a Pesar Del Gasto Social,” 100octanos.com, <http://www.100octanos.com/nota.php?idarticulo=146&catID=100&categoria=Hidrocarburos> (accessed October 14, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Ellsworth and China, Special Report: Chávez's Oil-Fed Fund Obscures Venezuela Money Trail | Reuters .

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

International Crisis Group characterized the state spending by Chávez as a promotion of state spending to “...unprecedented levels with the implementation of the “missions,” and that such spending is part of an “...uncontrolled parallel budget used to keep pro-Chávez groups content and increase military spending.”<sup>86</sup> The parallel budget refers to the off-balance spending described in previous paragraphs, and primarily consists of the components of the budget outside Congressional control, and essentially are directly under the control of Chávez.

The nature of the Venezuelan state spending on the missions combines with the “Dutch Disease”<sup>87</sup> that most resource-wealthy states suffer from, to create a unique condition that Corrales and Romero dub, “Bolivarian Disease.”<sup>88</sup> One of the unique aspects of “Bolivarian Disease” is the mismanagement of the state-owned oil sector, wherein revenues necessary for capital upkeep and reinvestment into oil production capacity are diverted to social spending, especially the Bolivarian missions. This revenue deviation severely impacted the necessary reinvestment in maintenance and exploration.

Penfold perhaps summed it up best when he wrote,

These “misiones” were financed through opaque and non-budgetary mechanisms, namely by transferring oil revenues directly from the state-owned oil enterprise (PDVSA) to a special fund managed by the presidency. According to several accounts, the fund in 2003 and 2004 managed each year more than 2 billion dollars (close to 2.5% of GDP.) Measured by size, the “missions” were probably one of the largest social fund experiment[s] administered in Latin America in the last decades.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution, 28.

<sup>87</sup> “Dutch Disease” is the economic term to describe the inverse relationship between natural resource exports (such as oil) and other sectors of the economy. Export of the natural resource increases the value of the currency, thus making other sectors of the economy less competitive abroad. Especially prevalent in resource-rich states, such as Venezuela.

<sup>88</sup> Javier Corrales and Carlos A. Romero, *U.S.-Venezuela Relations Since The 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 79.

<sup>89</sup> Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez’s “Misiones” Programs in Venezuela*, 5.

## **D. TAKING THE MISSIONS INTERNATIONAL**

The Chávez administration began to operate some of the Missions abroad beginning in 2005. The office responsible for internationalization of the Missions, La Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Liaison Committee for the Internationalization of the Bolivarian missions or CEIMS) is a component of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and it was established 07 September, 2005. The missions that are most active internationally are: *Misión Milagro* (ocular health care), *Robinson* (literacy), and *Identidad* (provision of government IDs).

### **1. Mission, Vision, and Objectives of the CEIMS**

According to the official CEIMS websites, its mission, vision, and objectives are as follows.<sup>90</sup>

**Mission:** Offer to the national-level organizations in charge of the Social Missions the necessary knowledge, capacities and technical support found within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and through the missions in operation outside of Venezuela; to successfully bring about the process of internationalization of the missions.

**Vision:** As one of the pro-active offices of the Chancellery, consolidate the process of strengthening Latin American and Caribbean integration under the fundamental principles of solidarity, humanism, and cooperation with all the peoples of the world.

**Objectives:**

- Serve as a line of communication between the Venezuelan embassies in the exterior, and the various entities in charge of the Social Missions.
- Contribute to the internationalization of the Social Missions.
- Promote the New Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, based on the principles of cooperation, solidarity, complementarity, and respect for the sovereignty of every state.
- Strengthen the Integration of the Peoples of the ‘Great Fatherland.’

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<sup>90</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, “¿Quiénes Somos?” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=522&Itemid=27](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=522&Itemid=27) (accessed May 6, 2013).

The mission statement, vision, and objectives are at first glance fairly perfunctory and straightforward. The mission statement is functionally-oriented and serves the purpose of a “single point of contact” for Venezuelan embassies abroad to coordinate mission activities, rather than coordinate directly with what would otherwise be many individual missions.

However, within the objectives of the office, the phrases “New Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean,” and “the principles of cooperation, solidarity, complementarity, and respect for the sovereignty of every state” trace their roots back to founding principles of the Bolivarian state. Within the preamble of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the terms “cooperation,” “solidarity,” “complementarity,” and “respect for the sovereignty of every state,” and the idea of Latin American integration are all referred to, either word-for-word or the idea is expressed.<sup>91</sup> Thus, we see that the office identifies two of its objectives as functional, and two of its objectives as aspirational—contributing to the export of Bolivarian ideals across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Further examination of the CEIMS website displays a map that highlights the countries where the missions are active, as well as contacts for the missions in the respective Venezuelan embassies located within those countries.<sup>92</sup> The countries listed are: Argentina, Belize, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Paraguay. The main point here is that the CEIMS website does not list Colombia, whereas we purport to show in this thesis that the missions are indeed active in Colombia.

Given that the Chávez administration did go ahead and establish an office to “internationalize” the missions, it follows that the missions fit into the foreign policy of the Bolivarian government of Venezuela. Of course, as with the concept of Bolivarianism itself, a Bolivarian foreign policy is rather nebulous: “To the extent that it can be defined,

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<sup>91</sup> Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Public Law 2013 (2006): Preamble. University of Minnesota Human Rights Library.

<sup>92</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, “CEIMS: Contacto,” [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=528&Itemid=69](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=528&Itemid=69) (accessed May 8, 2013).

President Chávez's Bolivarian foreign policy seeks to defend the revolution in Venezuela, promotes a sovereign and autonomous leadership role for Venezuela in Latin America, opposes globalization and neoliberal economic policies, and works towards the emergence of a multipolar world in which U.S. hegemony is checked."<sup>93</sup> The timing of the CEIMS office establishment itself provides some insight into this proposition. As a result of the "... domestic tranquility in the wake of his victory in the 2004 referendum on his leadership ...,"<sup>94</sup> Chávez gained room to maneuver, so to speak, to go ahead and communicate his Bolivarian ideology abroad. Thus, the timing of the CEIMS office opening infers that Chávez was comfortable enough domestically, to "export" his ideology. "What is new about President Chávez's Bolivarian foreign policy is that it has moved beyond Venezuela's traditional efforts to maintain strategic independence and maximize oil revenue to one of explicitly seeking out allies in a bid to check U.S. power and influence in Latin America."<sup>95</sup> This latter aim of "seeking out allies" is a solid fit for the missions.

## **E. OVERVIEW OF THE BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS**

Rodríguez frames the missions as the Chávez administration's new approach to social programs in Venezuela: "... the government has carried out a complete overhaul of social policy, replacing existing programs with a set of high-profile initiatives—known as the *Misiones*, or missions—aimed at specific problems, such as illiteracy or poor health provision, in poor neighborhoods."<sup>96</sup>

In order to provide context for the four missions that constitute our four case studies (*Misiones Milagro*, *Identidad*, *Robinson*, and *Guaicaipuro*), this section introduces the reader to all of the missions in chronological order, from the first mission, *Barrio Adentro*, to the most current missions, up to and including a mission that is only in

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<sup>93</sup> Harold A. Trinkunas, "What is Really New about Venezuela's Bolivarian Foreign Policy?" (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 2006), <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/11447> (accessed May 8, 2013).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Francisco Rodríguez, "An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 2 (March–April, 2008), 52.

the proposal stage. This mission is *Gran Misión Eficiencia o Nada*, or Great Mission Efficiency or Nothing, which is intended to combat inefficiency, bureaucracy, and corruption throughout the Venezuelan state.<sup>97</sup> Due to the number of missions (40), they are presented in table format in Table 1.<sup>98</sup> In the “Mission” column, the name of the mission is listed in Spanish in italics, followed by the English translation as necessary. (Missions named after proper nouns, such as a name, are not translated because such translations are unnecessary.)

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<sup>97</sup> “Nicolás Maduro Ofrece Una Misión Para Atacar La Corrupción - Nacional y Política - El Universal,” <http://www.eluniversal.com/nacional-y-politica/130409/Nicolás-maduro-ofrece-una-mision-para-atacar-la-corrupcion> (accessed April 25,2013).

<sup>98</sup> In addition, a brief summary description of each of the missions is listed in Appendix 1.

Table 1. List of Missions by Date of Establishment<sup>99</sup>

| <b>Mission</b>                                      | <b>Date est.</b> | <b>Area of Action</b>                    | <b>Associated Ministry</b> |
|---|------------------|--|----------------------------|
| <i>Barrio Adentro I / Inside the Neighborhood I</i> | Apr-03           | Neighborhood Access to Public Health     | Health                     |
| <i>Robinson I</i>                                   | Jul-03           | Basic Literacy                           | Education                  |
| <i>Sucre</i>  | Jul-03           | Undergraduate & Graduate Education       | Higher Education           |
| <i>Robinson II</i>                                  | Oct-03           | Primary Education<br>(to 6th Grade)      | Education                  |
| <i>Frente Francisco de Miranda / Miranda Front</i>  | Oct-03           | Reserve Militia                          | Office of the President    |
| <i>Ribas</i>  | Nov-03           | Remedial High School Education           | Petroleum & Mining         |
| <i>Milagro / Miracle</i>                            | Jan-04           | Vision / Ocular Health Care              | Health                     |
| <i>Mercal / Market</i>                              | Jan-04           | Subsidized Food & Basic Goods            | Food                       |
| <i>Identidad / Identity</i>                         | Feb-04           | Provision Of National ID Cards (Cédulas) | Interior & Justice         |

<sup>99</sup> Based on “Cronología de las Misiones” table in D’Elia and Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*, 8, and updated with information from “Gobierno De Venezuela: Misiones,” Centro Nacional de Tecnologías de Información, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/home/misiones.dot> (accessed April 15, 2013).



| <b>Mission</b>   | <b>Date est.</b> | <b>Area of Action</b>   | <b>Associated Ministry</b>   |
|--|------------------|---|------------------------------|
| <i>Vuelvan Caras / About Face</i>                            | Mar-04           | Encourage Domestic Sustainable Local Development Via Cooperatives And “Endogenous Development Nuclei” | Communes & Social Protection |
| <i>Hábitat / Habitat</i>                                     | Aug-04           | New Housing Construction  | Housing                      |
| <i>Guaicaipuro</i>   | Oct-04           | Indigenous Peoples’ Rights  | Indigenous Affairs           |
| <i>Piar</i>  | Oct-04           | Support To Small-Scale, Independent Miners  | Petroleum & Mines            |
| <i>Zamora</i>  | Jan-05           | Land Reform & Land Redistribution   | Agriculture & Land           |
| <i>Barrio Adentro II / Inside the Neighborhood II</i>        | Jan-05           | Secondary Health Care   | Health                       |
| <i>Cultura / Cultural Education</i>                          | Jul-05           | Cultural Education  | Culture                      |
| <i>Barrio Adentro III / Inside the Neighborhood III</i>      | Aug-05           | Advanced Health Care  | Health                       |
| <i>Robinson III</i>  | Oct-05           | Bolivarian Reading Circles  | Education                    |
| <i>Ribas Técnica y Social / Ribas Technical &amp; Social</i> | Oct-05           | Remedial High School Education, Technical & Social Emphasis   | Petroleum & Mines            |
| <i>Negra Hipólita</i>  | Jan-             | Homeless Assistance   | Communes & Social Protection |

| <b>Mission</b>   | <b>Date est.</b> | <b>Area of Action</b>                              | <b>Associated Ministry</b>   |
|--|------------------|--|------------------------------|
|  | 06               |  |                              |
| <b><i>Ciencia / Science</i></b>                              | Feb-06           | Science Education                                  | Science & Technology         |
| <b><i>Madres del Barrio / Mothers of the Barrio</i></b>      | Mar-06           | Support To Female Head-Of-Household (Hoh) Families | Women & Gender Equality      |
| <b><i>Árbol / Tree</i></b>                                   | Jun-06           | Sustainable Management Of Forests                  | Environment                  |
| <b><i>Barrio Adentro IV / Inside the Neighborhood IV</i></b> | Oct-06           | Specialty Health Care                              | Health                       |
| <b><i>Revolución Energética / Revolutionary Energy</i></b>   | Nov-06           | Promote Energy Efficiency                          | Electricity                  |
| <b><i>Sonrisa / Smile</i></b>                                | Nov-06           | Prosthetic Dental Work                             | Health                       |
| <b><i>Villanueva</i></b>                                     | Mar-07           | Urban Planning                                     | Housing                      |
| <b><i>Alma Mater</i></b>                                     | May-07           | Creation Of New Universities                       | Higher Education             |
| <b><i>Che Guevara</i></b>                                    | Sep -07          | New Name For 'Vuelvan Caras'                       | Communes & Social Protection |
| <b><i>Música / Music</i></b>                                 | Nov-07           | Music Education For At-Risk Youth                  | Office of the President      |
| <b><i>José Gregorio Hernández</i></b>                        | Mar-08           | Health Program For The Disabled                    | Communes & Social Protection |

| <b>Mission</b>   | <b>Date est.</b> | <b>Area of Action</b>   | <b>Associated Ministry</b>                          |
|--|------------------|---|---|
| <b><i>13 de Abril / 13th of April</i></b>  | Apr-08           | Barrio Improvement & New Social Commune Construction            | Communes & Social Protection                        |
| <b><i>Gran Misión AgroVenezuela / Great Mission AgroVenezuela</i></b>                            | Jan-10           | Increase Agricultural Output Via Support To Small-Scale Farmers | Food  |
| <b><i>Niño Jesús / Baby Jesus</i></b>  | Dec-10           | Maternity And Prenatal Health Care                              | Health  |
| <b><i>Gran Misión Vivienda Venezuela / Great Mission Venezuela Housing</i></b>                   | Apr-11           | End Housing Shortage In Venezuela                               | Housing   |
| <b><i>Gran Misión en Amor Mayor Venezuela / Great Mission Love for the Elderly Venezuela</i></b> | Dec-11           | Social Security Mission   | Labor & Social Security                             |
| <b><i>Gran Misión Hijos de Venezuela / Great Mission Children of Venezuela</i></b>               | Dec-11           | Welfare For Families In Poverty with Children                   | Communes & Social Protection                        |
| <b><i>Gran Misión Saber y Trabajo / Great Mission Knowledge &amp; Work</i></b>                   | Jan-12           | Employment  | Education   |
| <b><i>Gran Misión Eficiencia o Nada / Great Mission Efficiency or Nothing</i></b>                | TBD              | Fight Corruption  | TBD (Note: Mission Proposed by Maduro in April '13) |

The missions are associated with 17 of the 25 current ministries of the Venezuelan government (as of April 2013). In addition, there are a few notable concentrations of missions in ministries that are associated with social services. For example, seven missions are associated with the Ministry of Health, four with Education, six with the Ministry of Communes and Social Protection, and three with Housing. Some

of the links between mission and associated ministry are at first glance, tenuous. For example, the link between *Misión Ribas* and *Misión Ribas Técnica y Social* (Mission Ribas Technical and Social) which purposes are remedial high school education and remedial high school education with a technical and social emphasis, respectively, are associated with the Ministry of Petroleum and Mines. Yet, their topic areas seem to “line up” more closely with the Ministry of Education, as they in fact have “remedial high school education” in their name.

A general pattern observed with the missions is a trend toward extreme subject area specialization as time progressed. For example, the ten founding missions—those established prior to the presidential referendum of 2004—addressed social problems with wide applicability, such as health care, literacy, defense, development, and education. Whereas, some later missions seem to address social problems of a very narrow scope—the term “niche market” comes to mind. Examples of this type of mission are: *Misión Piar* (support to small-scale, independent miners), and *Misión Revolución Energética* (promotion of energy efficiency).

Another mission of note is *Misión Musica*, which achieved worldwide fame under its original name of El Sistema (the System). In fact, this mission has a long history that predates the Bolivarian missions, going back to 1975, when it was first founded by José Antonio Abreu. The System in effect became *Misión Musica* in 2007 when it was essentially co-opted as a mission by President Chávez. The most famous alumnus of the program is clearly Gustavo Dudamel, who is currently the conductor and Music Director of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The System itself has achieved worldwide recognition, and has inspired similar grassroots music programs in the U.S. and Great Britain, among others. Some

notable U.S. examples are the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (YOLA),<sup>100</sup> and the Youth Orchestra Salinas of Salinas, California,<sup>101</sup> both of which use the El Sistema method.

In addition, the actual efficacy of the missions is under debate. This debate is understandable as a result of the opaque reports of, and grandiose claims by, the Venezuelan government regarding the missions. This behavior is similar to the opaque nature of finance and budget reporting by the government, as discussed in Section C, Financing of the Missions. For example, on 28 October 2005, Chávez famously declared Venezuela as free of illiteracy, due to the efforts of *Misión Robinson*. This declaration gained currency especially after recognition from UNESCO. However, Francisco Rodriguez and Daniel Ortega "... found that there were more than one million illiterate Venezuelans by the end of 2005, barely down from the 1.1 million illiterate persons recorded in the first half of 2003, before the start of the Robinson program."<sup>102</sup> Another glaring inconsistency from the same source is that the government claimed employment of 210,410 trainers in the mission, "... yet there is no evidence in the public employment data that these people were ever hired or evidence in the government budget statistics that they were ever paid."<sup>103</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION

Chávez was elected into power in 1999 due to deep divisions within Venezuela, deep dissatisfaction among a large portion of the population, and a sense among the majority of the population that the government was not functioning in providing good governance, nor basic social services. After a period of tumult within Venezuela, to include direct challenges to his rule in 2002 and 2003 via an attempted coup and a nationwide strike, Chávez was feeling intense pressure on his administration. As his

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<sup>100</sup> "Youth Orchestra LA (YOLA) | LA Phil," Los Angeles Philharmonic Association, <http://www.laphil.com/education/yola> (accessed May 9, 2013).

<sup>101</sup> "Welcome to Youth Orchestra Salinas | Youth Orchestra Salinas," <http://www.youthorchestrasalinas.org/> (accessed May 9, 2013).

<sup>102</sup> Rodríguez, "An Empty Revolution: The Unfulfilled Promises of Hugo Chávez," 55.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 55–56.

extensive quote from Section B shows, Chávez felt a need to take action to ensure his victory in the upcoming 2004 referendum on his presidency, and the Bolivarian missions proved to be a significant and effective component of his victorious strategy.

Thus, from the beginning of the missions, we see evidence of political motivation behind them, not just the altruistic aims of their respective overt mission statements. The budgets of the missions are difficult to pin down owing to the same nebulous budgetary mechanisms Chávez used throughout the government, especially after gaining solid control over PDVSA, the state-owned oil company. They have been “internationalized” by the Bolivarian government via the CEIMS, the agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs charged with taking the missions “beyond the borders.” They have also expanded in number from the original ten to approximately forty today. The missions continue to play an active and significant role in Venezuelan government and society. In the following chapters, we delve into more detail on four missions that constitute our case studies: *Misiones Identidad*, *Milagro*, *Robinson*, and *Guaicaipuro*.

## IV. MISION IDENTIDAD AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

Social exclusion is one of the social problems that the Bolivarian government claims to fight against, almost to obsession. According to the revolutionary rhetoric that is a trademark of the Venezuelan government, wide segments of the population, especially the poor, have traditionally been prevented from exercising some of the most very basic rights of citizenship and meeting their basic human needs. Among these rights is the right to proper identification as a citizen. Thus, *Misión Identidad* (Mission Identity) became a vehicle for the Venezuelan government to solve the long-lasting inequality in the provision of legal identification (i.e., government ID cards) to traditionally under-served classes and groups of Venezuelans and resident foreigners in the country.

We assert in this chapter that the mission's activities in Colombia go beyond its overt mission statement and contribute to the strengthening and expansion of the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela and abroad, with a particular emphasis on the consequences that the mission's activities bring to Colombia. This chapter explains and describes *Misión Identidad's* mission, its origins and development, its organizational structure and configuration, its resources and capabilities, and its activities, and concludes with an examination into the mission's activities in Colombia.

### A. OVERT PURPOSE OF THE MISSION

*Misión Identidad* is a project created by the Venezuelan government in order to accomplish the Bolivarian Constitutional mandate (Article 56)<sup>104</sup> which states that every person has the right to his own name, to be included in the government's registration, and to possess the necessary public documents to corroborate their own identity.<sup>105</sup> Following the Bolivarian logic of the Venezuelan government, the mission satisfies the right to

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<sup>104</sup> Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Public Law 2013 (2006): Article 56. University of Minnesota Human Rights Library.

<sup>105</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, "Misión Identidad," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.saime.gob.ve/Mis\\_ident/mision\\_ident.php](http://www.saime.gob.ve/Mis_ident/mision_ident.php) (accessed February 4, 2013).

existence that is guaranteed in the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>106</sup> Proof of identity is recognized through an identification card or document that is known in several Latin American countries—including Venezuela—as the *cédula*. The primary purpose of *Misión Identidad* is to facilitate the issuance of *cédulas* to all Venezuelan citizens living in the country, as well as foreigners residing in Venezuela who wish to gain Venezuelan legal identification. Accordingly, the mission statement for *Misión Identidad* is as follows:<sup>107</sup>

1. To complete the Constitutional mandate to grant the status of legal citizenship with all rights thereof, to thousands of forgotten, [historically] excluded Venezuelans, and without the legal protections that legal identification documents confer.
2. Guarantee social justice to those sectors of the population, indigenous and rural, who have traditionally been denied these rights.
3. At the same time, the mission proposes to transform the old bureaucratic structures into a new public institution, thus enabling application of efficient tools for management of the state.

## **B. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT: FROM RHETORIC TO IMPLEMENTATION**

As well as the other missions, *Misión Identidad* was born in the aftermath of the failed coup against Hugo Chávez in 2002.<sup>108</sup> Chávez perceived his power to be undermined not only by the coup attempt but also by the 2002 oil strike<sup>109</sup> and the 2002-2004 campaign to revoke his presidency through a referendum.<sup>110</sup> In response, he created the Bolivarian missions in an effort to regain public support. The first wave of the

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<sup>106</sup> The Universal Declaration of Human Rights Public Law 2013, Article 6, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#atop>.

<sup>107</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, "Misión Identidad: Mission Statement," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.saime.gob.ve/Mis\\_ident/mision.php](http://www.saime.gob.ve/Mis_ident/mision.php) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>108</sup> Yolanda D'Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

<sup>109</sup> Annie Schleicher, "NewsHour Extra: Venezuelan Oil Strike—Jan. 22, 2003," MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/jan-june03/venezuela.html> (accessed March 2, 2013).

<sup>110</sup> Mary Beth Sheridan, "Chávez Defeats Recall Attempt," *Washington Post*, [washingtonpost.com, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A4208-2004Aug16.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A4208-2004Aug16.html) (accessed March 4, 2013).



missions was created in 2003 and *Misión Identidad* followed in February 2004, with a mandate to correct a shortfall in legal identification where “seven out of every ten Venezuelans do not have a laminated identification card, and 90 percent of them belong to the lower classes.”<sup>111</sup>

The emergence of the mission is closely associated with what is known as the Plan de Cedulación (Identification Plan), a decree issued by the Venezuelan government in 2004 under the name Plan Nacional de Regularización y Naturalización de Extranjeros y Extranjeras (National Plan of Regularization and Naturalization of Foreign Citizens).<sup>112</sup> The plan allocated the responsibilities and resources between the executive branch and Dirección de Identificación y Extranjería (Office of Identification and Identification Affairs or ONIDEX),<sup>113</sup> to carry out the task of providing citizenship and identification documents not only to Venezuelans that lacked legal identification documents, but also to aliens. *Misión Identidad* emerged parallel to this process under Chávez’s creation of the missions.

### C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CONFIGURATION

More recently, in 2009, ONIDEX changed its name to Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería (Administrative Service for Identification, Migration and Immigration Matters or SAIME). The name change occurred to reflect “a fundamental structural change...wherein the necessary procedures will be totally automated and simplified.”<sup>114</sup> Regardless of the name change, *Misión Identidad* maintains the same organizational relationship to SAIME as it did to ONIDEX, which is

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<sup>111</sup> Viet Juan Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st* (Cholula: Altres-Costa Amic, 2008), 145.

<sup>112</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, “SAIME: Reseña Historica,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, <http://www.saime.gob.ve/resena.php> (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Radio Nacional de Venezuela, “La Onidex Ahora Se Llamará Saime,” Noticias24.com, <http://www.noticias24.com/actualidad/noticia/58755/la-onidex-ahora-se-llamara-saime/> (accessed February 4, 2013).

essentially one of parallel responsibility for provision of *cédulas*, with the caveat that the mission is intended to extend the reach of government to those “previously excluded classes” as much as possible.

Although the Constitutional referendum sought by the Chávez administration in 2007 did not pass,<sup>115</sup> or perhaps because of its failure to pass, the Chávez administration built up multiple mechanisms and stratagems to put into practice what the failed referendum was intended to. Part of this reform effort was to elevate all of the Bolivarian missions to a constitutionally recognized status. D’Elia and Cabezas assert that this structural change represents a complete conversion of the concept of public administration, “placing the institutions under the tutelage of the revolutionary powers and not vice versa, the government organs under the rule of law.”<sup>116</sup> The main objective, in effect, was to assign to the Bolivarian missions a special administrative category completely subordinate to the executive branch, and thus on par with, and therefore independent of, the ministries of the Venezuelan government.<sup>117</sup>

*Misión Identidad*, therefore, despite the failure of the constitutional reform, was placed under the administrative control of the Ministry of Popular Power for Internal Relations and Justice. At the same time, however, the mission acts in cooperation with SAIME, and enjoys administrative support from SAIME, as previously mentioned (see page three). Interestingly, the SAIME website for *Misión Identidad* describes it as “a project where the National Executive can be seen working with SAIME in order to provide improved service to all Venezuelans.”<sup>118</sup> The same web page mentions that thousands of Bolivarian Revolutionary youths of the Francisco de Miranda Front support the operation of *Misión Identidad*.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> “BBC NEWS | Americas | Chávez Defeated over Reform Vote,” BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7124313.stm> (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>116</sup> D’Elia and Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*, 8.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, *Misión Identidad*.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

It is unclear to what extent the mission overlaps the SAIME's responsibilities; nevertheless, the operation of *Identidad* is obviously closely associated with that agency. Considering that the principal mission of *Identidad* is providing identity cards, and that one of the principal missions of SAIME is "to guarantee the right of identity to all citizens,"<sup>120</sup> it is curious that virtually the same activity is carried out throughout the country by two agencies through what seems to be a co-equal operating relationship.

#### **D. RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES: FIGHTING BUREAUCRACY FROM THE BUREAUCRACY**

##### **1. Budget**

A Venezuelan government document, *Las Misiones Sociales del Gobierno Bolivariano: Un Logro Revolucionario* (Social Missions of the Bolivarian Government: A Revolutionary Achievement) states that from the establishment of the mission, until 2009, the financial support from PDVSA, the state oil company of Venezuela, was \$45 million dollars.<sup>121</sup> This works out to roughly nine million dollars per calendar year from 2004 until 2009.

##### **2. Facilities and Infrastructure**

The mission uses the facilities of the SAIME, which has 129 locations evenly distributed among the Venezuelan states, but the locations are identified as part of *Misión Identidad*.<sup>122</sup> The SAIME website provides one web page that lists the 129 locations of the agency throughout the country;<sup>123</sup> and a subsequent Web page that lists the points of

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<sup>120</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, "SAIME: Misión—Visión," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.saime.gob.ve/mision\\_vision.php](http://www.saime.gob.ve/mision_vision.php) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>121</sup> Liliana Pérez Rico, "Las Misiones Sociales Del Gobierno Bolivariano: Un Logro Revolucionario," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://repositorio.mpd.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_remository&Itemid=103&func=fileinfo&id=49](http://repositorio.mpd.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_remository&Itemid=103&func=fileinfo&id=49) (accessed March 4, 2013).

<sup>122</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, "SAIME: Módulos Fijos A Nivel Nacional," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.saime.gob.ve/general/noticias\\_sec/modulos\\_fijos.php](http://www.saime.gob.ve/general/noticias_sec/modulos_fijos.php) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

contact for *Misión Identidad* in every Venezuelan state.<sup>124</sup> According to Viet Juan Felix, another service of the mission is to provide mobile facilities, currently numbering around 190, to improve ease of access for citizens to procure government identification.<sup>125</sup>

### 3. Staff and Personnel

The mission enjoys support from the personnel of SAIME, and as well as unpaid volunteers of the *Frente Francisco de Miranda*, to accomplish its mission. In addition, employees of *Misión Identidad* itself work in conjunction with the personnel from the other agencies. Yet, as will be explained, the mission staff apparently do not enjoy all of the benefits of full employment. A few days before the 2012 presidential elections, there was a hint of a crisis when around four thousand workers of the mission circulated a document threatening the government with going on strike until their employment status was definitively resolved. The workers' claim was that they were performing the same tasks that SAIME is responsible for, such as "issuing identification cards, passports, birth certificates, immigration processes, and staffing of the [SAIME] border offices across the nation. We perform the functions that they generate within SAIME."<sup>126</sup> Despite this importance, the mission's workers do not have an official contract with SAIME; they function as contractors that can be fired or laid off without any compensation.<sup>127</sup> It seems that the revolutionary mission of "transforming the old bureaucracy into a new public institution machine" does not necessarily translate into job security for the workers of *Misión Identidad*. Instead, it appears that *Misión Identidad* operates to complement the "old bureaucracy" of SAIME with lower-cost labor provided by the mission, but with no real benefits for the mission's employees.

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<sup>124</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, "SAIME: Directorio Misión Identidad," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.saime.gob.ve/general/noticias\\_sec/directorioMision.php](http://www.saime.gob.ve/general/noticias_sec/directorioMision.php) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>125</sup> Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st*, 147.

<sup>126</sup> "Casi 4 Mil Trabajadores De La Misión Identidad Exigen La Asignación De Cargos Fijos," noticias24.com, <http://www.noticias24.com/venezuela/noticia/128823/casi-4-mil-trabajadores-de-la-mision-identidad-exigen-la-asignacion-de-cargos-fijos/> (accessed February 4, 2013); Adriana Rivera, "Encargados De Cedulación Trabajan Como Tercerizados," *El Nacional*, [http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/Encargados-cedulacion-trabajan-tercerizados\\_0\\_54594625.html](http://www.el-nacional.com/politica/Encargados-cedulacion-trabajan-tercerizados_0_54594625.html) (accessed March 3, 2013).

<sup>127</sup> "Casi 4 Mil Trabajadores De La Misión Identidad Exigen La Asignación De Cargos Fijos."

## E. MISSION ACTIVITIES: PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY OR ELECTORAL AMBITION?

The *Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales* (Coordinating Commission for the Internationalization of Social Missions or CEIMS) website asserts:

In sum, more than 18 million citizens of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have benefited from *Misión Identidad*, and they now possess an identification document that facilitates their access to education, health, credit, and to the most clear and tangible expression of a participatory and democratic people: voting.<sup>128</sup>

Recent reporting about the performance of the mission suggests the very fast pace that SAIME and *Misión Identidad* worked at before the past elections when, according to SAIME's director Dante Rivas, almost three million people received their identity cards from January until September 2011. In the same declaration, he announced that the mission was re-launched to allow the population easy access to the identification and the right to vote.<sup>129</sup>

The mission's activities are not restricted to Venezuela. Besides successfully providing legal identification to foreigners living in Venezuela (akin to "green cards" in the U.S.), *Identidad* has also supported similar documentation programs in other countries. The most publicized such program occurred in the country of Bolivia, under the name, *Existo yo, existe Bolivia* (I exist, therefore Bolivia exists). The program that was carried out under the banner of "Bolivarian solidarity," supporting Bolivia with technical training as well as material and personnel resources to give an identification card "to the last Bolivian citizen."<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, "Misión Identidad," [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=43:mision-Identidad&catid=23:misiones-bolivarianas&Itemid=66](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=43:mision-Identidad&catid=23:misiones-bolivarianas&Itemid=66) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>129</sup> *Prensa VTV*, "Más De 2 Millones De Venezolanos Han Sido Cedulados Entre Enero y Septiembre," SAFONACC: Servicio Autónomo Fondo Nacional de los Consejos Comunales, [http://www.safonacc.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1987&Itemid=80](http://www.safonacc.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1987&Itemid=80) (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>130</sup> Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st*, 148.

## F. MISIÓN IDENTIDAD: OVERT VERSUS COVERT PURPOSES

Up to this point, *Misión Identidad* awakens more questions than answers. Why is the mission duplicating, or at least supporting, SAIME's responsibilities? Was it really necessary to create an entire mission dedicated to the purpose of providing cédulas? Was the identification problem as bitter and brutal as the government presented it, with its colorful revolutionary language characterizing “forgotten, excluded sectors of the population, indigenous and rural,” which were previously denied “social justice and other rights?”<sup>131</sup> What are the real benefits of receiving a Venezuelan *cédula*—the laminated national identification card? Why this apparently hybrid structure simultaneously within and outside the traditional bureaucracy? Why is the naturalization of the foreign residents within Venezuela so important? In this section, we attempt to answer these questions as concisely as possible.

As previously mentioned, the primary task, the *raison d'être*, of *Misión Identidad* is clear: to facilitate the issuance of *cédulas* to all Venezuelan citizens living in the country. And, as also previously pointed out, a government agency already existed that executed this task: the ONIDEX, which later became SAIME. The main question then becomes: why did it become necessary to create a Bolivarian Mission to duplicate a core task of an existing government agency or at the very least, to complement it? One possible explanation is derived from a statement made by reporter Adriana Rivera in her article on a potential strike by *Misión Identidad* employees: “the *cédula* is the only valid document to exercise the right to vote.”<sup>132</sup> In essence, then, increasing the number of Venezuelans with *cédulas* is therefore increasing the pool of eligible voters. It could be argued, then, that the core interest of *Misión Identidad* is to increase the number of potential voters that ultimately are going to support the Chávez regime during elections.

It appears that *Identidad* is at least equally or more politicized than the other Bolivarian missions because, according to the government, the core of the workers of the

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<sup>131</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, *Misión Identidad: Mission Statement*.

<sup>132</sup> Rivera, “Encargados De Cedulación Trabajan Como Tercerizados.”

mission come from the Francisco de Miranda Front.<sup>133</sup> The Front is best defined as a uniformed militia loyal to Chávez and the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela or PSUV); a “disciplined political organization, anti-imperialist, dynamic and organized;...an instrument that supports the Missions and contributes to the successful development of the programs promoted by the Bolivarian Government...corresponding to Bolivarian ideology and Commandant Chávez’s thought.”<sup>134</sup> All else being equal, it appears that *Misión Identidad*, the organization in charge of providing identification documents legally required to vote, is an organization entirely politicized and embedded with the ideals of one specific ideology and one specific man, Chávez.

The importance of *Misión Identidad* to the regime’s electoral machinery is also inferred by the emphasis placed on providing cédulas to foreigners residing within Venezuela. Presidential Decree No. 2823 initiated a campaign to “pay the ‘historic Venezuelan debt to immigrants,’”<sup>135</sup> by facilitating provision of cédulas to immigrants who were previously undocumented.<sup>136</sup> This dedicated effort to document foreign residents of Venezuela, and therefore provide them the document required for voting, suggests electoral interests lie behind the apparent humanitarian decision to grant cédulas to foreign residents of Venezuela.

Another group of Venezuelans who are eligible to receive cédulas are those that enjoy dual-citizenship with other countries. Of this group, the largest number is those citizens who enjoy Venezuelan-Colombian dual citizenship. Both constitutions, Venezuelan and Colombian, allow the right to double citizenship (Articles 34 and 96, respectively). This enables a large portion of the population to move freely between the two countries, as well as to participate in the political processes in both countries—that is, to vote.

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<sup>133</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, Misión Identidad.

<sup>134</sup> Joel Zerpa, “Frente Francisco De Miranda Socopo: Quienes Somos?” <http://frentefranciscodemirandasocopo.blogspot.com/p/sobre.html> (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>135</sup> Prensa VTV, Más De 2 Millones De Venezolanos Han Sido Cedulados Entre Enero y Septiembre

<sup>136</sup> Servicio Administrativo de Identificación, Migración y Extranjería, SAIME: Reseña Historica.

Although the number of Venezuelan-Colombian dual citizens who have received their Venezuelan cédulas during the Chávez' government is unknown, it is well known that the number has increased exponentially since 1999, the year when the Bolivarian Constitution was signed.<sup>137</sup> Some recent estimates assert that there are a million and a half Colombian voters within Venezuela who were eligible to vote in Venezuelan elections, which would represent the third largest population in Venezuela in terms of states, even surpassing the number of voters in Caracas, the capital city. The group Nacionalizados Con Capriles (Nationalized with Capriles) confirmed 170,000 votes to support the opposition's candidate, Henrique Capriles. On the other hand, an organization named Colombians in Venezuela Association, claimed to have organized half a million voters for Hugo Chávez's campaign.<sup>138</sup>

The situation with Colombians living outside Venezuela, but who are eligible to vote in Venezuela, particularly along the shared border, is slightly different. The most influential journal in Colombia, *El Tiempo*, analyzed the impact of the 2012 Venezuela election on bi-national relations.<sup>139</sup> This report highlights the situation in the Colombian city of Cúcuta, the main border crossing from Colombia to Venezuela, and which has a historic, influential, and long-lasting relationship with Venezuela. In Cúcuta, two groups organized to gather voters to support Chávez's campaign. The first group, called Colombians with Chávez, is led by a Colombian citizen named Ramon Tamara. Tamara asserts that he is one of the "patrolmen" that work for the "red dots," concepts implemented by the complex Bolivarian electoral structure. According to his description, patrolmen need to fulfill the following requirements:

He has to have double citizenship (Venezuelan and Colombian), convert his house to a 'red dot' to 'provide information to the electorate,' and being a link in a kind of electoral pyramid where every 'patrolman,'

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<sup>137</sup> Exequíades Chirinos, "La Clave Del Voto Colombiano | Elespectador.Com," *El Espectador*, <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/temadeldia/articulo-379422-clave-del-voto-colombiano> (accessed February 4, 2013).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Andres Garibello, "Así 'Pescan' Los Chavistas Los Votos En La Frontera," *El Tiempo*, [http://www.eltiempo.com/Multimedia/especiales/eleccionesvenezuela2012/asi-pescan-los-chavistas-los-votos-en-la-frontera\\_12233563-7](http://www.eltiempo.com/Multimedia/especiales/eleccionesvenezuela2012/asi-pescan-los-chavistas-los-votos-en-la-frontera_12233563-7) (accessed February 4, 2013).



properly certified by the Chávez party, must bring at least a dozen voters with Venezuelan identification cards to vote for the President's reelection on October 7th."<sup>140</sup>

Tamara also describes how, the day before elections, the Colombian voters were transported to the Socialist House in the Venezuelan village of Ureña (the Venezuelan town just across the border from Cúcuta), where they received lodging and dinner, and went the next day to vote in support of Chávez. According to him, there were no additional benefits from supporting Chávez, although the voters did receive some information about "how to get a retirement salary in Venezuela or medical treatment without any cost"<sup>141</sup> The other Chavista faction in Cúcuta is led by David Corredor and is apparently less organized than Tamara's group, but which constitutes another "red dot" in support of Chávez' cause. Corredor has been claiming a "place at the negotiating table" in La Habana between the Colombian government and the FARC.<sup>142</sup>

#### **G. MISIÓN IDENTIDAD IN COLOMBIA: BEYOND THE OVERT PURPOSES**

Our field research in Colombia, which consisted of interviews in the cities of Bogota and Cúcuta in the two-week period prior to the Venezuela presidential election in April 2013, strongly suggests that *Misión Identidad* goes far beyond its overt humanitarian purposes (that of providing Venezuelan cédulas to eligible people). We assert that this mission provides a reciprocal benefit to a "triad" of organizations, composed of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Regime, a segment of the Colombian population, and the terrorist groups in Colombia, primarily FARC or ELN. Moreover, although we cannot claim that this is its primary task, the operation of the mission suggests that the purely humanitarian mission is co-opted by the above organizations for their own benefit - a sort of *quid pro quo* style of delivery of humanitarian assistance.

To summarize briefly, this *quid pro quo* system of reciprocal benefits works as follows. The Venezuelan Bolivarian Regime provides *cédulas* to Venezuelans and/or

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<sup>140</sup> Garibello, "Así 'Pescan' Los Chavistas Los Votos En La Frontera."

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

Colombians in Colombia along the border region, thus assuring themselves a larger electorate that is going to support the regime by voting for it when needed. The segment of the Colombian population that receives the *cédula* thus gains access to additional benefits via the other missions, such as medical attention, educational programs, retirement pensions, etc. The FARC or ELN function in this process as an intermediary between the Bolivarian Regime and the population. In so doing, they exercise influence over the target population because they determine who is eligible or not to receive the *cédula*. The benefits the groups derive are the following: they guarantee themselves safe haven in Venezuela, they obtain Venezuelan identification for their members, and they exercise leverage over the vulnerable population within Colombia who desire the Venezuelan *cédula*. For example, they promise to assist a poor Colombian campesino who desires a *cédula*, but in return they “ask” for assistance from him, or ask him to attend one of their lectures, as an “introduction” to their philosophy.

A member of the Colombian intelligence services and ELN expert interviewed for the purpose of this thesis relates how easy the process to gain a *cédula* is. For example, any Venezuelan citizen can go to a Registry office in Venezuela and register somebody as a son or daughter without providing documentation of such a relationship such as a birth certificate, and regardless of the ages of the people involved. So, for example, a 22-year old person may register a 20-year old as their son or daughter. Such a farcical situation suggests this is done with at least the tacit knowledge and consent of the authorities, given the impossibility of such a scenario (that a 22-year old may be a 20-year old’s biological parent.)

This Colombian intelligence official also relates the story of a Venezuelan woman known as “the Mother of 100 Guerrillas” because she proudly asserts that she registered more than 100 ELN operatives as Venezuelan citizens.<sup>143</sup> Another intelligence official relates the story of alias Bigotes (Moustache), who is currently the liaison between the

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with ELN Intelligence Analyst, Cúcuta, April 8, 2013.

Venezuelan government and the ELN Central Command. One of his functions is to provide Venezuelan IDs to the members of ELN, or the people selected by the organization.<sup>144</sup>

The relationship between *Identidad* and terrorists is not exclusive to ELN. According to a former FARC operative who was responsible for providing logistical support in a Colombian-Venezuelan border area for seven years, one of her missions was recruitment of people eligible to receive the cédulas. As part of this recruitment, she personally brought the recruit to the mission's office to receive the document. The only pre-requisites were the desire to receive the ID, and attendance at "revolutionary talks" provided by members of the Bolivarian Circles.<sup>145</sup> It was not even necessary to provide photo ID or other proof of identity, because the whole process was done there at the office, and the document was issued only three days later.<sup>146</sup> This contrasts with the process to get a Colombian cédula, a process that can take anywhere from six months to one year.<sup>147</sup> This demobilized FARC operative also indicated that some of the Colombians who received the cédula were granted a small farm on the Venezuelan side of the border, a place that would often be used as a FARC training and/or "rest and recuperation area."<sup>148</sup>

Señor Martínez, a Colombian citizen who has lived in Cúcuta for the past 25 years, describes that it is common knowledge in the city that the Venezuelan cédulas received through the Bolivarian Circles (read: *Identidad*) are necessary in order to vote and to receive benefits such as medical assistance and retirement benefits. However, the cédula is immediately deactivated if the cédula-holder does not participate in elections.<sup>149</sup> One of the Colombian intelligence officials corroborated Mr. Martínez's views when he

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<sup>144</sup> ELN Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Demobilized FARC Member, Bogotá, April 3, 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> For an engaging look at the process for an expat to get a cédula in Colombia, see Richard Emblin, "Where's My Cédula? The City Paper Bogotá," *The City Paper Bogotá*, sec. News, February 25, 2013, <http://thecitypaperbogota.com/news/wheres-my-cedula/>.

<sup>148</sup> Demobilized FARC Member, interview.

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Señor Martínez, Cúcuta, April 9, 2013.

described a process that assured votes for the regime. The process described is essentially as follows: the cédula-holder votes in Venezuela, receives the voting receipt, takes a picture of the receipt, and then sends the picture to their respective boss demonstrating that they voted for the regime's candidate. This same source asserts that people are threatened with losing their jobs if they do not participate in the vote, or do not send the required proof-of-voting image.<sup>150</sup> This process of voter assurance appears to be part of a larger system of manipulation of the electoral process by the Venezuelan government.

In addition to the voter assurance process, another component of electoral manipulation is selective closing of the border with Colombia. According to Mr. Martinez, many exiled Venezuelans (that is, anti-regime Venezuelans) living in Colombia cross the border during the elections and vote for opposition candidates. As a result, the Táchira and Zulia states were in the hands of the opposition. (Táchira state is situated directly across from Cúcuta in Colombia, the largest border crossing between Colombia and Venezuela. Zulia state includes Maracaibo, Venezuela's second-largest city, and is directly across the border from La Guajira state. Thus, these two states account for the bulk of border crossing between the two countries, as the rest of the border runs through very sparsely populated areas.) This situation compelled the government to close the border with Colombia at least 5 days prior to the elections without notice, thus preventing the border-crossing and subsequent voting by those opposition voters. Mr. Martinez said that this is a tactical move that enabled the Bolivarian Regime to win the elections in those disputed border states, and thus negate the votes of opposition-leaning Venezuelan exiles residing in Colombia.<sup>151</sup>

First-hand experience corroborated this tactic of no-notice border closing. On the Sunday prior to the latest presidential elections, April 7, 2013, 14 buses transported people to Ureña, the Venezuelan city across the border from Cúcuta. A taxi driver explained that the buses transport Colombians who would vote for Nicolás Maduro (Chávez's hand-picked successor in the 2013 presidential elections) in Venezuela, and that they had to move one week in advance because the border would be closed anytime

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<sup>150</sup> ELN Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>151</sup> Señor Martinez, interview.

that week; ostensibly, the buses were coordinated with the Venezuelan government. The border was in fact unilaterally closed (and without any advance notice to the Colombian government) the following Wednesday, 10 April. (Needless to say, Maduro was elected President by a very narrow margin.) This pattern conforms to that described by the interviewees: facilitation of pro-Chávez voters across the borders, along with unannounced closing of the border to prevent border crossing by anti-regime voters. This is eerily similar to Venezuelan government actions in the run-up to the August 2004 presidential referendum vote: “During the process, the government closed the border with Colombia and several private airports in Caracas apparently to impede citizens living or staying in the neighbouring country from returning. It did not allow citizens abroad the opportunity to deposit signatures at embassies.”<sup>152</sup>

The events described above comport with previous reporting on Venezuelan government behaviors—this is perhaps the most significant finding from our fieldwork. An International Crisis Group report from February 2007 reported that “The Chávez campaign blatantly used state resources to ensure that voters reached the polling stations and to encourage them to vote for the president when they got there.”<sup>153</sup> The movement of the fourteen buses across the border from Cúcuta prior to the unannounced closing of the border fits into this category. The same report indicates that *Identidad* “...may also have prepared the ground for [election] victory. It was carried out by Chavista groups who in some instances urged citizens both to get a new ID card and to vote for the president.”<sup>154</sup> Again, the interviews we conducted in 2013 indicate the same behavior—that the issuing of a cédula by *Identidad* carried with it either an implicit or explicit expectation to vote for Chávez’s successor, Maduro.

Interviews and observations for this thesis occurred in the largest border crossing between Venezuela and Colombia, Cúcuta. However, the shared border between the two

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<sup>152</sup> Venezuela: Headed Toward Civil War? (Quito / Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/040510\\_venezuela\\_headed\\_toward\\_civil\\_war](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/040510_venezuela_headed_toward_civil_war).

<sup>153</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution (Bogotá / Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2007), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19\\_venezuela\\_hugo\\_Chávezs\\_revolution.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19_venezuela_hugo_Chávezs_revolution.pdf).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

countries is much longer and not limited to just this one border crossing, so it is possible similar events occurred at other sites. La Guajira, the northernmost mainland Colombian state along the Venezuelan border, and hence imbued with strategic location, seems to play host to similar patterns. Maria Luisa Ruiz, a speaker of the Wayúu ethnic community, observed that during elections in Venezuela “La Guajira is emptied”<sup>155</sup> because most of the members of her community cross the border to vote on the Venezuelan side in support of the Bolivarian regime. Other related videos show how members of the Wayúu tribe proudly say, “Chávez gave us the *cédula*, so we vote for him and for his people.”<sup>156</sup>

## H. CONCLUSION

In summary, although initially engineered to operate outside the traditional bureaucracy, *Misión Identidad* became a hybrid organization that operates in coordination with the “traditional bureaucracy” of the SAIME, in order to provide identification cards to Venezuelan citizens. The impact of *Identidad* on growing the Venezuelan voter rolls appears significant. International Crisis Group reports numbers from the Venezuelan National Electoral Commission: “The electoral roll grew from 12.3 million in February 2004 when *Identidad* was launched to 16.08 million in September 2006.”<sup>157</sup> This particular task, and its importance in increasing the number of voters who are likely to be pro-Chávez, and by extension, pro-Maduro, qualifies this mission as a fundamental piece of the Bolivarian electoral machinery.

Domestically, *Misión Identidad* is a very effective mechanism used by the Bolivarian government to remain in power. Besides the apparent humanitarian intent of providing people with the basic right of identification and public recognition, the issuing of the identification documents allows the government to manage distribution of *cédulas* for its own benefit, serving the particular interests of the “revolution.” Our provided

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<sup>155</sup> This audiovisual interview was recorded by the Fundación Identidad Colombia (Foundation Colombian Identity), and contributed to the current research by Carlos Sierra, President of Federación Verdad Colombia (Truth Colombia Federation), an umbrella organization that brings together multiple foundations and organizations that investigate current affairs and human rights in Colombia.

<sup>156</sup> “Interviews with the Wayúu,” (audiovisual interview, Fundación Identidad Colombia).

<sup>157</sup> “Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution,” 20.

evidence supports this claim, as does the pattern of behavior observed prior to the 2006 presidential election and the April 2013 presidential election.

Internationally, specifically talking about the Colombian case, we observed a similar pattern of electoral system manipulation. Colombian citizens receive the cédula that enables them to cross the border, vote and gain access to further benefits. These citizens, in turn, benefit the Bolivarian regimes by voting for their candidates. Finally, either wittingly unwittingly, this same bloc of voters benefits those groups which helped them to get the document; either the Venezuelan authorities, or FARC and ELN operatives, or some combination thereof.

The FARC and ELN structures benefit from the mission by giving citizenship to their operatives, families, and people chosen by them. In exchange for their commitment to support the Venezuelan regime ideologically, these groups gain access to safe haven in Venezuelan soil.

In sum, the Bolivarian regime is singularly focused on remaining in power and actively internationalizing the revolutionary process. Therefore it invests significant amounts of money in supporting the mission's function; in effect turning over a blank check to the mission's officials, terrorists groups, and foreign population, expecting in return the necessary votes to retain power and spread its revolutionary ideals throughout the region, but particularly in Colombia. Our evidence, gathered through interviews and fieldwork, is consistent on this point, as is the comparison of electoral system manipulations across time, 2006 and 2013. As Penfold explained, "Chávez's ability to link the social benefits of the programs with his need to assure the political mobilization of his popular base through the *Misión Identidad* became the cornerstone of his political strategy."<sup>158</sup>

Thus, among the candidate hypotheses reviewed in the Introduction chapter, *Misión Identidad* supports Hypothesis 2: The Venezuelan government of President

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<sup>158</sup> Michael Penfold-Becerra, *Clientelism and Social Funds: Empirical Evidence from Chávez's "Misiones" Programs in Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administracion, 2006), [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDECINEQ/Resources/1149208-1147789289867/IIWB\\_Conference\\_Clientelism\\_and\\_Social\\_FundsREVISED.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTDECINEQ/Resources/1149208-1147789289867/IIWB_Conference_Clientelism_and_Social_FundsREVISED.pdf).

Chávez used the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy. This was due to the organization of the mission as parallel to the Ministry of Internal Relations and Justice, but able to take advantage of the resources from that ministry without any accompanying bureaucracy that impeded Chávez's control of it; the capability of the mission to employ "volunteers" from the Francisco de Miranda Bolivarian militia; and the documented activities of the mission in both Venezuela and Colombia to use state resources in partisan fashion to mobilize voters on both sides of the border, with a clear bias toward voters in support of the Chávez regime.



## V. MISION MILAGRO: A COMMON VIEW OF THE WORLD

One of the most high-profile Bolivarian missions that the Venezuelan government supports is *Misión Milagro* (miracle mission). This chapter demonstrates that, besides the overt and noble purpose of this mission - to help people with vision problems - there is a covert purpose as well: spreading Chávez's Socialism of the 21st Century throughout Latin America. The chapter describes the mission's overt purposes, its origin and development, its organization, resources, capabilities and activities, and then analyzes this mission's activities in the country of Colombia. By describing the mission and its activities in Colombia, it is possible to make a solid evaluation of the mission's essential character; whether it is a wholly overt health care mission, or whether it purports to advance the Bolivarian Revolution domestically and internationally, or some combination thereof.

### A. OVERT PURPOSE OF THE MISSION

According to the Venezuelan government, *Misión Milagro* is a humanitarian program created to provide free medical care (specifically, ocular health care) to populations with scarce resources that suffer vision problems, and is a program carried out as part of the cooperative agreements under the Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (Bolivarian Alternative for Latin American and the Caribbean or ALBA).<sup>159</sup> The Venezuelan government states that the original motivation for the mission arose from a desire by the executive branch to correct the historic difficulties that the “excluded classes” had in receiving ocular health care, and providing such health care in order to reintegrate them into everyday life as productive citizens.<sup>160</sup> The mission's website states the mission has three core objectives:<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, “La Misión Milagro,” [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=523&Itemid=35](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=523&Itemid=35) (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Misión Milagro: Una Visión Solidaria Del Mundo,” <http://www.misionmilagro.gob.ve/Index.htm> (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>161</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Misión Milagro: Misión—Visión—Objetivos,” <http://www.misionmilagro.gob.ve/Objetivos/Vision.htm> (accessed January 22, 2013).

1. Enhancing the skills and abilities of people with visual impairment, thus integrating them into social life in Venezuela and other Latin American countries.
2. Execution of social policies promoted by the national government to involve citizens who have their vision problems treated, therefore facilitating individual and collective development.
3. To settle the social debt of the Venezuelan state to this segment of society, in the search for social justice and equal conditions for all Venezuelans.

Some of the pathologies attended to by the mission include “pterygium [non-cancerous growths on the surface of the eye], cataracts, strabismus, retinopathies, glaucoma, myopia, ptosis, and difficulties in the cornea,”<sup>162</sup> and “[t]he programme (sic) provides free eye operations, including correcting and restoring eyesight as well as providing free consultations and glasses.”<sup>163</sup>

## **B. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT: FROM CUBA TO THE REST OF THE CONTINENT**

*Misión Milagro* was not an original idea of the Chávez administration. The program traces its roots to Cuba, which began receiving Venezuelan patients in order to treat their ophthalmological problems in Cuba rather than in Venezuela.<sup>164</sup> Then, in 2005, during a summit in the Cuban city of Sandino, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez signed what is known as the “Sandino Pact,” which stated purpose is to alleviate visual problems for up to six million Latin American and Caribbean inhabitants over a period of 10 years. Thus, *Misión Milagro* was an internationally-oriented mission from its beginning. This international orientation is reinforced by other international movements of patients since December 2005, when the first group of international patients from Ecuador arrived in Venezuela for treatment.<sup>165</sup> Although *Misión Milagro* traces its origins to *Misión Barrio Adentro* (Mission Inside the Neighborhood), which purpose is to

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<sup>162</sup> Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland, “Fact Sheet: Misión Milagro,” embavez-uk.org, [http://www.embavenez-uk.org/pdf/fs\\_mision\\_milagro.pdf](http://www.embavenez-uk.org/pdf/fs_mision_milagro.pdf) (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Misión Milagro: Antecedentes Históricos,” <http://www.misionmilagro.gob.ve/Mision/Antecedentes.htm> (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>165</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, La Misión Milagro.

bring medical assistance to poor neighborhoods throughout Venezuela (with heavy Cuban support in materiel and physicians), *Milagro* quickly grew in popularity with the population and the government, to the point that it became its own standalone mission, and is currently one of the most high-profile missions of the Bolivarian government.<sup>166</sup>

### C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CONFIGURATION

The mission's structure is composed of two branches, the domestic and the international. Regarding the domestic organization, *Milagro's* structure is as eclectic as the Bolivarian ideology: it is directly dependent on the office of the Vice-President of Venezuela, but it also has a subordinate relationship to the Ministry of Popular Power for Health. The mission also functions as a non-governmental foundation whose president is appointed by the Venezuelan President. Currently, this is Lenys Alberto Contreras Rojas, who formerly was the director of the Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Coordinating Commission for the Internationalization of Social Missions or CEIMS).<sup>167</sup> The international branch of *Misión Milagro* is organized under the office of the CEIMS, and each individual country that it operates in is designated a point of contact for the CEIMS program.

#### 1. Resources and Capabilities

According to the Venezuelan government, there are 52 facilities within Venezuela that participate in the program. 28 of the 52 are dedicated to serving international patients; among this group, 13 belong to the Ministry of Health, 12 belong to the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security, and three are Venezuelan military hospitals.<sup>168</sup> Further examination of the geographic distribution of the facilities reveals some

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<sup>166</sup> Viet Juan Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st* (Cholula: Altres-Costa Amic, 2008), 115.

<sup>167</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, "Se Designa Nuevo Presidente De La Fundación Misión Milagro," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=628:nuevo-presidente-de-la-Fundación-mision-milagro&catid=13:noticias&Itemid=33](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=628:nuevo-presidente-de-la-Fundación-mision-milagro&catid=13:noticias&Itemid=33) (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>168</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, "Centros De Atención," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=525&Itemid=34](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=525&Itemid=34) (accessed January 22, 2013).

irregularities in their distribution. For example, in the state of Miranda, where the governor is the former opposition presidential candidate, Henrique Capriles Radonski, there is only one facility affiliated with *Misión Milagro*, despite the size of the state's population, almost three million inhabitants. Conversely, the state of Maracay, with a population of about 1.3 million inhabitants, and whose governor is a member of the PSUV, has four facilities affiliated with *Misión Milagro*. In addition, the state of Táchira with a population of about 1.5 million (half of Miranda's population) has 4 facilities affiliated with the mission, including one military hospital. All of these are located in the city of San Cristóbal which is only 20 miles from the Colombian border city of Cúcuta, the main border crossing between Venezuela and Colombia. The geographic dispersion of the medical facilities affiliated with *Misión Milagro* suggests two factors at play in the location of *Misión Milagro* installations: one, the political affiliation of the governor seems to play a larger role than size of the population within a given state; and second, the large concentration of facilities in San Cristóbal, near the busiest border crossing Cúcuta (Colombia) y San Cristóbal (Venezuela) between Colombia and Venezuela.<sup>169</sup> The latter suggests a strategic interest in supporting beneficiaries of *Misión Milagro* who are crossing the border from Colombia, and therefore influencing them to empathize with the Venezuelan government, as the provider of this specialized health care via *Misión Milagro*.

#### **D. MISSION ACTIVITIES**

Some of the figures provided by the Venezuelan government indicate substantial numbers of patients served. The total number of patients attended to between 2005 and 2012 is over 1.5 million, of which more than 30 thousand are international citizens (that is, non-Venezuelans). Among non-Venezuelans, the largest number of patients comes from Ecuador, with the smallest number from Bolivia, Cuba, and Italy, with only one

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<sup>169</sup> Comunidad Andina, "Caracterización De La Frontera Colombo-Venezolana," <http://www.comunidadandina.org/documentos/docSG/Ayudamemoria14-4-05.htm#arriba> (accessed February 28, 2013).

patient each. 1,177 Colombian citizens have also received the benefits of *Milagro*. In Figure 1, we display the charts obtained from the CEIMS Web page:<sup>170</sup>



Figure 1. Total Patient Treatments Completed in Misión Milagro, 2004–December 2012

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<sup>170</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, “Estadísticas” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=232:estadisticas&catid=28&Itemid=100010) (accessed 08/18, 2012).



Figure 2. *Misión Milagro* Patient Treatments Completed by Venezuela, 2005–December 2012

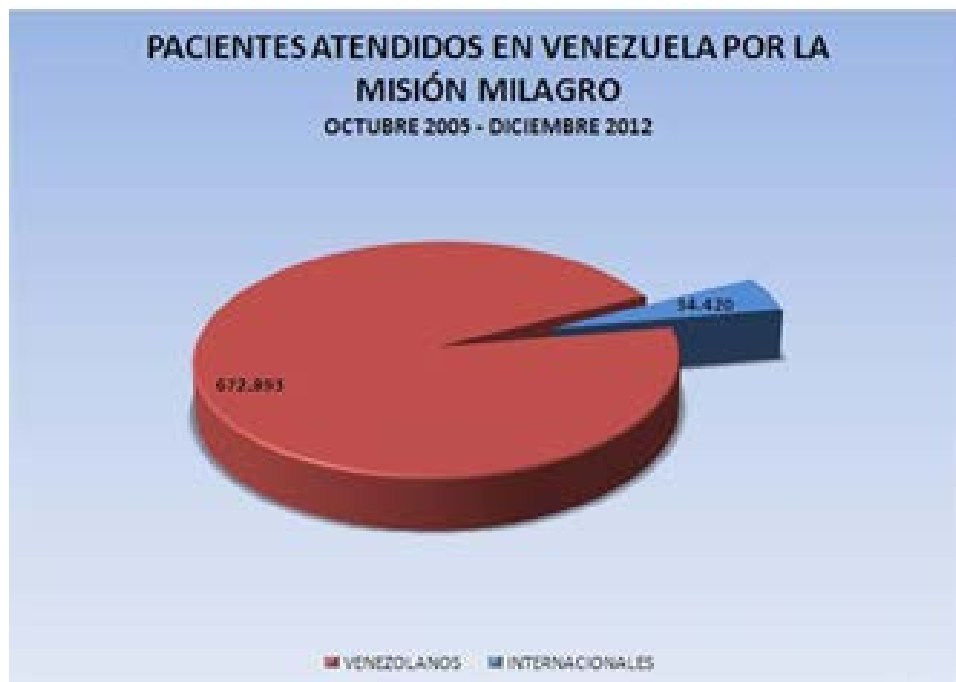


Figure 3. Number of Patients Treated in Venezuela by *Misión Milagro*, October 2005–December 2012

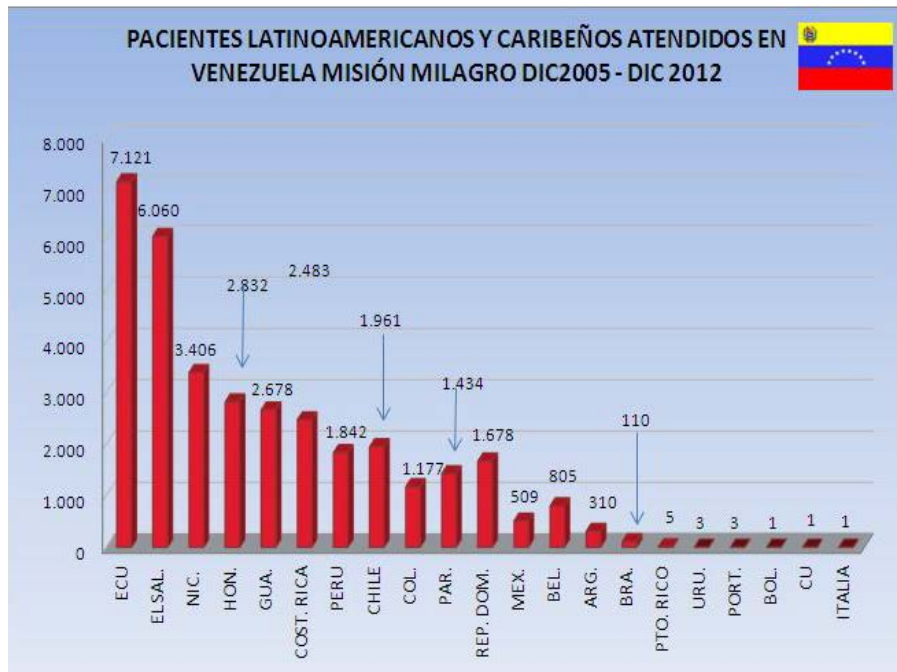


Figure 4. Latin-American and Caribbean Patients Treated in Venezuela’s *Misión Milagro*, December 2005–December 2012

Figure 1 indicates that the total number of patients treated through *Misión Milagro* for the time period 2004–2012 is approximately 1.6 million, an average of about 182,000 patients treated per year. Thus, the stated goal of the Sandino Pact—treatment of six million Latin Americans who have vision problems by 2015—is likely to be unmet. If the current trend continues, the estimated number of patients treated will likely be closer to 2.2 million (calculations by the author).

The mission’s international operations vary across the international countries it is present in. Essentially, the international operations consist of four basic functions: recruitment of international patients, transport of international patients to Venezuela for care, provision of *Misión Milagro* care in other countries, and transport of Venezuelan citizens to Cuba for care. The main tool to recruit international patients is Venezuelan diplomatic missions, either embassies or consulates. For example, the CEIMS Web page displays 14 embassies with a Venezuelan point of contact for the mission, who a

prospective patient may contact for further information.<sup>171</sup> However, *Misión Milagro*'s official website, which is different from the CEIMS website, displays additional points of contact for the mission in 15 countries, including Colombia and the U.S. These countries do not appear in the initial list of embassies provided by CEIMS on its website.<sup>172</sup> Sometimes the recruited international patients are brought to Venezuela to be treated at the expense of the Venezuelan government, while in other cases the medical staff of the mission visits other countries to provide care. In a third category, Venezuelan citizens are transported to Cuba in order to receive the medical care there.<sup>173</sup>

As has already been shown in this chapter, *Milagro* is far from achieving its stated goal of treating 6 million patients with vision problems in ten years. Through the official statistics provided by the CEIMS' web page, it is clear that the stated goal is beyond the capacity of the facilities and resources available to achieve it. Given these numbers, a fact sheet for *Misión Milagro* provided by the Venezuelan Embassy in the U.K. raises suspicion with some of the ambitious figures it provides. The document, "Fact Sheet *Misión Milagro*" cites the following numbers of patients treated by the mission:

Hundreds of thousands of people have also been treated across Latin America: 17 million people have been treated, 75,000 operations in Nicaragua, 110,000 operations in Ecuador, 50,000 operations in Haiti, 82,000 operations in Bolivia, 1,400 operations in Peru, 29,000 operations in Argentina, 12,000 operations in Guatemala, 40,000 operations in Guyana. Mission Milagro has also treated thousands in Costa Rica, Uruguay, Paraguay and El Salvador, Suriname, Brazil and the Dominican Republic, Mexico.<sup>174</sup>

It is uncertain if the inflated data on the fact sheet has been placed intentionally or accidentally.

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<sup>171</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, "Misión Milagro En El Mundo," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=526&Itemid=64](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=526&Itemid=64) (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>172</sup> Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, "Misión Milagro: Puntos De Contacto," <http://www.misionmilagro.gob.ve/Contacto/embajadas.htm> (accessed January 22, 2013).

<sup>173</sup> Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st*, 116.

<sup>174</sup> Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland, Fact Sheet: Misión Milagro.



The above data widely contradicts the original information published by the Venezuelan government shown earlier in this chapter in the graphs, given that the graphs account for just 34,000 international patients treated since 2004 until December 2012, and not 17 million total patients as the fact sheet claims. A couple of arguments seem plausible for the wide variation in figures provided by the Venezuelan government. The first is simple miscommunication or misunderstanding among various agencies of the same government. For example, given that the websites of CEIMS, which is an office within the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the websites of *Misión Milagro*, which reports directly to the Venezuelan Vice-President's office but also to the Ministry for Public Health, report differing numbers of total patients treated by *Misión Milagro*, it stands to reason that the Venezuelan Embassy in the U.K. might suffer confusion and report inflated numbers. There is also the possibility that the numbers reported are not fact-checked with due diligence and are intended to impress the casual reader who is not likely to double-check the figures provided in an official government press release.

To summarize and clarify the number of patients treated by *Misión Milagro*, the CEIMS website claims a total of approximately 1.6 million patients treated by *Misión Milagro* from 2004-2012;<sup>175</sup> the *Misión Milagro* website claims a total of 733,000 surgical interventions since the inception of *Misión Milagro*;<sup>176</sup> and the "Fact Sheet *Misión Milagro*" published by the Venezuelan Embassy to the U.K. claims 17 million people treated in total across Latin America by *Misión Milagro*.<sup>177</sup> The significant disparity in claims by agencies of the same Venezuelan government calls into question the validity of any of the figures provided by the Venezuelan government.

Regarding the argument that the performance of *Milagro* is suffering from poor execution, Venezuelan analysts Yolanda D'Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, in their report published by the impartial, independent organization Instituto Latinoamericano de

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<sup>175</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, Estadísticas.

<sup>176</sup> Daniela Uzcatia, "Misión Milagro: Misión Milagro Mejora La Calidad Visual De Los Venezolanos y Pueblos Hermanos," Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, <http://www.misionmilagro.gob.ve/Info/Noticias.htm> (accessed March 1, 2013).

<sup>177</sup> Embassy of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the UK and Ireland, Fact Sheet: Misión Milagro.

Investigaciones Sociales (Latin American Institute for Social Investigations or ILDIS) convey some solid arguments about the likely reasons for the alleged underachievement. According to their analysis, the reasons for the weakening of the mission are rooted in the variety of problems faced by the *Milagro's* "mother mission," *Barrio Adentro*. This study, titled *Las Misiones Sociales en Venezuela*<sup>178</sup> (the Social Missions in Venezuela) explains several probable difficulties that brought that mission to a stalemate:

1. Lack of medical infrastructure: Only 40% of the initial goal of 6,500 health centers was constructed by 2006. By 2007, approximately 30% of the completed health centers were closed or deactivated because of multiple types of deficiencies. The construction of related health facilities like diagnostic rooms, emergency rooms, and rehabilitation rooms also achieved similar modest completion rates; only 50% of the initial construction goal for these facilities was achieved.
2. Cuban advisors: The medical performance by Cubans has not been certified nor regulated by the Venezuelan academic authorities. The official data shows a reduction of Cuban medical personnel in Venezuela of about 20% from 2005 to 2007 (from 15,000 to 12,000), a situation that severely impacts the medical care available to patients, and disrupting the different activities initially programmed. One possible explanation the report posits is an inadequate rotation system to replace departing Cuban medical professionals, whose time of service is capped at three years.

In summary, the lack of facilities, and human and material resources, represents a serious handicap for *Misión Milagro's* purposes. But, despite the apparent underachievement of *Misión Milagro*, as compared with its initial goals, the mission continues to function not only in Venezuela but throughout Latin America, including Colombia.

#### **E. MISIÓN MILAGRO IN COLOMBIA: OVERT VERSUS COVERT PURPOSES**

*Misión Milagro* seems to be the most popular and well-known of all of the Bolivarian missions, or at least to have the most name recognition, both within Venezuela

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<sup>178</sup> Yolanda D'Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

as well as internationally. This popularity is due to its humanitarian *raison d'être*, its easy access for patients, as well as for the generous and effective assistance it provides to the beneficiaries in Venezuela, as well as throughout Latin America. On the other hand, the mission, after being scrutinized through our fieldwork, no longer appears as solely a humanitarian mission. It benefits from a complicated network that allows its operation in Colombia. Among the nodes that support *Milagro* in Colombia, we find a myriad of organizations and individuals ranging from NGOs to criminal organizations, and activities that range from selfless aid to others, to unabashed support to insurgency groups. This section elucidates the network of *Misión Milagro* in Colombia through our fieldwork conducted in Colombia in April 2013.

### 1. Interviews

Two prominent Colombian politicians and analysts we interviewed for our research, posit differing hypotheses to explain the underlying reasons for the presence of *Milagro* (and the other missions studied) in Colombia. Rafael Guarín, former Colombian Vice-Minister of Defense and expert in defense and security matters, argues that the presence of the mission in Colombia is “a new dimension of irregular conflict, and that dimension is social assistance where the state’s presence fails,”<sup>179</sup> adding that the missions represent “a new level of war, the delivery of essential services.”<sup>180</sup> Dr. Guarín considers that *Milagro* and the other missions are part of the machinery used by the Bolivarian Government to develop social control and consolidation policies, and therefore the mission’s presence in Colombia is the “combination of political action and violent action.”<sup>181</sup> Or in other words, the mission’s presence is able to provide a legitimate “cover” for violent action.

Fernando Londoño Hoyos served as the first-ever Colombian Minister of Interior and Justice from 2002 to 2004 during President Uribe’s first term. He is also a victim of a FARC terrorist attack in 2012. Londoño reaches further afield than does Guarín in his

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<sup>179</sup> Interview with Rafael Guarín (former Colombian Vice-Minister of Defense), Bogotá, April 3, 2013.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

rationale for the missions in Colombia. He asserts that the missions were designed in Cuba as one of the instruments to expand socialism and communism. Dr. Londoño devalues the Venezuelan involvement in the missions, arguing that the real motivations of them is found in Cuba, in Fidel Castro's ambition to develop communism in Colombia, because of Castro's belief that Colombia's geo-strategic position is vital in order to export communism further—to the north and south.<sup>182</sup>

A similar view is shared by Isidro Perez, a retired Colonel of the Venezuelan Army currently exiled in Colombia. Colonel Perez asserts that there is no difference between the Cuban and the Bolivarian revolution of Venezuela, and furthermore that the missions are considered as a vital element to “subjugate the population domestically, and export the revolution internationally.”<sup>183</sup> Colonel Perez supports his argument through his personal experience as a Colonel on active duty in Venezuela. In 2001, he carried out orders from Hugo Chávez to conduct a review of the border areas between Colombia and Venezuela along with Cuban experts to “study the social problems along the border,” during which he observed an intense interest by the Cubans in understanding the problems on the Colombian side of the border, particularly the presence and activities of FARC.<sup>184</sup>

In Cúcuta, the local citizens (Cucuteños) do not know *Misión Milagro* by its name, but the visual and multiple medical services that the *Cubanos* provide is common knowledge. In other words, *Misión Milagro* is commonly known among the local population—taxi drivers, waiters, merchants, and so forth—not as “the Venezuelan medical assistance program that provides visual health care to the population,” but rather “*los Cubanos*,”—the Cubans, or just by its area of action, ocular (visual) health care. It is also common knowledge in the Cúcuta area that it is very easy to receive this type of

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Fernando Londoño (first-ever Colombian Minister of Interior and Justice, 2002 to 2004), Bogotá, April 11, 2013.

<sup>183</sup> Interview with Isidro Perez (retired Venezuelan Army Colonel), Bogotá, April 11, 2013.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

medical care just by crossing the border and dropping into the medical clinic in Ureña, and that *los Cubanos* sometimes come into Colombia, ostensibly to provide medical care.<sup>185</sup>

In fact, access to the mission is easy. Señor Martínez, a local Cúcuta citizen, remarked that several of his neighbors have received attention; all they have to do is sign up or register for the medical care, up to and including surgeries. The only payment expected of the patients is through the process of signing up, “the people [become] committed to support the revolution because they are registered with address and personal information so they can be reached by the Bolivarian Circles.”<sup>186</sup> Martínez adds that the service is considered excellent, and sometimes even includes trips to Caracas and Cuba, depending on the particular patient’s condition. The easy availability of the medical care is confirmed through many interviewees, including a Colombian intelligence official who asserts that the patients receive attention no matter their nationality, and that they often receive not only temporary assistance or delivery of lenses, but also comprehensive treatment to solve the root cause of their visual problems.<sup>187</sup> According to this official, it is during the medical checkups when the patients are invited to “socialization talks” that ultimately may lead them to become members of the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela or PSUV), the Bolivarians party of Hugo Chávez.

The previous views generally accord, and converge on a view of *Misión Milagro* as expansionist in intent and in practice. However, a Venezuelan Dirección de Inteligencia Militar (Directorate of Military Intelligence official or DIM) interviewed for this thesis vehemently rejects this view on the missions in general. He argues that “...Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua have benefited [from the missions] and it does not mean that we are going to conquer those countries.”<sup>188</sup> He argues that the mission has an

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<sup>185</sup> Jorge Galindo, “Personal Observations” (observations, direct experiences of the author, Cúcuta, April 7–11, 2013).

<sup>186</sup> Señor Martínez, interview.

<sup>187</sup> ELN Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>188</sup> Interview with DIM Official, Cúcuta, April 8, 2013.

exclusive humanitarian purpose to the extent that patients receive attention just by showing either their Venezuelan or Colombian cédula. Questioned about the socialization talks with political purposes, he said that the medical attention is not conditioned on the attendance of those lectures, but that obviously the people are invited to voluntarily attend, if they so choose. He offered a hypothetical scenario to explain this distinction: that if someone were to come in with a broken arm, the treatment of the arm wouldn't be held up by first asking the person whether or not they'd attend a lecture, but he did acknowledge that invitations to talks are made after immediate care is provided, such as at an appointment for follow-up care. Finally, he acknowledges that given its open humanitarian mission, some members of the FARC or ELN could have benefited from the mission without the Venezuelan government's knowledge.<sup>189</sup>

The possible involvement of FARC and ELN operatives in *Misión Milagro* is a “wicked problem.” That is, it is difficult to determine whether or not there even is a problem, and if so, exactly what that problem is. For example, if a Colombian citizen who is also a FARC member receives medical care from *Misión Milagro*, does this somehow constitute a formal link between the mission and FARC? A counter-example is whether or not FARC or ELN members receive medical care via *Misión Milagro* because of formal agreements between the organizations, be they written or unwritten, transparent or opaque. The following interviews provide some insight to whether or not these organizational relationships exist.

A former FARC operative stated in one interview, that by 2005 there was a health clinic in Cúcuta that was set up specifically to attend to members of the FARC and their relatives, as well as the local civilian population that was attracted by the mission's benefits (i.e. free health care). This particular former operative was in charge of finances and logistical support in her region, and therefore she was responsible for paying physicians, nurses, and buying medicine with the FARC's resources.<sup>190</sup> This health clinic is a legal facility in a category under the Colombian health system that is known as an Empresa Promotora de Salud, or Health Promotion Company. Regardless, this former

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<sup>189</sup> DIM Official, interview.

<sup>190</sup> Demobilized FARC Member, interview.

FARC operative stated that this was just the legal “front organization” to cover the clinic’s real purpose—medical care to FARC members and their relatives.<sup>191</sup>

A Colombian intelligence official who is an analyst of FARC’s Front 33 (the FARC unit that operates in and around the Norte de Santander border region) provided information on the FARC-*Milagro* relationship. He asserts that within *Milagro*, there is a program specifically created for providing medical care and training to FARC operatives, and that it has the capability to move wounded or sick FARC members to San Cristóbal—three hours travel time from Cúcuta—or to Caracas, depending on the patient’s condition.<sup>192</sup> As an example, this official cited an August 2012 attack by Colombian troops on a FARC camp in the Catatumbo region, near the border with Venezuela. The operation killed an important operative, alias Danilo Garcia, and some FARC members were wounded. One of those wounded terrorists was transported to Venezuela and subsequently received life-saving medical care from both Cuban and Venezuelan specialists. Currently (as of April 2013) this terrorist (whose alias was not revealed because it is classified information) is recovering in the Venezuelan state of Táchira under the supervision of a Cuban woman known as Antonieta. Antonieta is apparently not only the supervisor and coordinator of *Milagro* in Venezuela, but also the person in charge of care for Colombian terrorists receiving medical care in Venezuela, all of this within the auspices of the Bolivarian Government.<sup>193</sup>

Another individual with firsthand experience with the missions through her job as a consultant to various NGOs, says that *Milagro* is affiliated with two NGOs that operate in Colombia, ACVC (*Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra*, or Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley), and ASCAMCAT (*Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo* or Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region).<sup>194</sup> This NGO consultant

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<sup>191</sup> Essentially, EPS is best represented to United States readers as health insurance companies or health insurance providers. For more information, see Law Reference: Public Law 100 of 1993 (1993), <http://www.alcaldiaBogotá.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=5248> and also Natalia Ospina Vélez, “EPS, IPS, POS...El Glosario De La Salud,” *El Colombiano*, July 8, 2010, 2013.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with FARC Intelligence Analyst, Cúcuta, April 8, 2013.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> Interview with NGO Consultant, Bogotá, April 5, 2013.

also states that one of the selection criteria to determine which patients will benefit from the health care services of the missions is that the patient is between 15 and 25 years old, or has family members in their household who are that age. The idea behind this criterion is that the 15 to 25 year olds fit the FARC's profile to be politically educated later, when the mission or its organizers require.<sup>195</sup> The NGO consultant also asserts that most of the people from rural areas who receive medical care by *Misión Milagro* are chosen by the FARC. During treatment and travel for the treatment, which averages five days, the patients must attend political and revolutionary lectures. And finally, she states that peasants and farmers who refuse to attend these activities are usually fined with money or community service, and in extreme cases even ordered to move away, and all of these actions are ordered or controlled by FARC members. (This description is in line with a legal complaint detailed in the next section of this chapter, Section E2.)

The geographic regions referenced above in the names of the NGOs, the Cimitarra valley and the Catatumbo region, bear further examination. Both regions are adjacent to the Venezuela-Colombia border, within the Norte de Santander department. The Cimitarra valley is part of the Magdalena River basin, and is located where four Colombian departments converge. Cúcuta is located within the Catatumbo region, which is in the northern half of the department of Norte de Santander. Both of these areas play host to heavy FARC influence which generally resist outside influence, but *Misión Milagro* functions there without any harassment from the FARC.

## **2. Documents**

There are also criminal complaints against members and activities of the aforementioned NGOs, ACVC and ASCAMCAT, that link these NGOs with the FARC.<sup>196</sup> This criminal complaint in particular originates with a peasant, Hernando Naranjo, who used to live in the Cimitarra region, in a remote village, Puerto Matilde. In the complaint Naranjo stated he was a victim of forced displacement by members of the

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<sup>195</sup> NGO Consultant, interview.

<sup>196</sup> Criminal Complaint against ACVC Members and the Middle Magdalena Bloc of the FARC (Criminal Complaint against ACVC Members and the Middle Magdalena Bloc of the FARC, 2012).



ACVC, arguing that the ACVC is just a branch of the FARC, and that the ACVC is empowered by the FARC to control coca plantation, cultivation, commerce, and even taxation in the region. In all, the criminal complaint provides 39 pieces of evidence that demonstrate a close relationship between ACVC and the FARC. Within the criminal complaint document against the ACVC, a 2007 report by the ACVC states the following: “We carried out a census of 370 people in the villages...from where we sent out 150 people...For the scholarships to Venezuela there are 10 candidates, we are waiting ‘green light’ to let them leave.”<sup>197</sup>

The International Institute for Strategic Studies references documents that demonstrate links between the FARC and *Misión Milagro* in its book, *The FARC Files*,<sup>198</sup> that analyzed and reported the information captured by Colombian troops in a military operation against alias Raul Reyes, the second in command within FARC at the time. Alias Timochenco—the FARC’s current leader—explicitly reports to FARC’s Secretariat about *Misión Milagro*, a letter referenced as I2340 of April 2007:<sup>199</sup>

We got an agreement with the ones who manage *Misión Milagro* in Venezuela (eyes’ problems) (sic) to attend initially 150 people from the region. The first group has been already evacuated. The idea is to amplify the attention to other health problems.

In the very same document, alias Timochenco praises the relevance of ACVC in achieving the work of the masses in the region of the middle Magdalena, and states that they are trying to implement a sister organization in the Catatumbo region,<sup>200</sup> a project that seems to have materialized a few years later with the creation of ASCAMCAT as an NGO. The letter is dated 2007, and ASCAMCAT was established as an NGO in 2009. (In official documents ASCAMCAT was founded in 2005 as a farmers’ cooperative, but its transition to an NGO with pro-FARC sympathies appears to have occurred in 2009.)

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<sup>197</sup> Criminal Complaint against ACVC Members and the Middle Magdalena Bloc of the FARC (Criminal Complaint against ACVC Members and the Middle Magdalena Bloc of the FARC, 2012), 23.

<sup>198</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, ed., *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of “Raúl Reyes”* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

## F. CONCLUSION

*Misión Milagro* operates upon three fundamental principles: Cuban support; government affiliation (it is an official sub-agency of the Venezuelan government); and party affiliation (with Chávez's *Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*, United Socialist Party of Venezuela or PSUV) of the employees of the mission and its beneficiaries. These operating principles of *Misión Milagro* show that there is a heavy ideological and political component to the mission, and therefore it is not purely humanitarian in nature.

In the international arena, those ideological and political components are reflected in the evidence collected. Even though there is an undeniable social purpose that facilitates easy access to many patients regardless of their nationality or ideological orientation, it is also true that *Milagro* pursues clear political objectives.

The organization of the mission is heavily dependent on Cuban medical health professionals. The Sandino Pact of 2005 demonstrates this, because it formalized a relationship between Cuba and Venezuela specifically for ocular health care, the subject area of this mission. In addition, the organization of the mission demonstrates a large and well-developed coordinating infrastructure via Venezuelan diplomatic missions abroad; this is in line with the status of the mission as the most high-profile of the missions internationally. Interesting to note is that this coordinating infrastructure includes the Venezuelan consulate in Chicago as one of the points of contact for prospective international patients of the mission.

The capabilities of the mission are robust, featuring 52 facilities within Venezuela that are affiliated with the mission, and a geographic concentration of the facilities in San Cristóbal, the nearest large city to the Cúcuta border crossing. In addition to these facilities, the coordinating infrastructure is capable of arranging for transport, care, and recuperation of international patients, as well as treatment in Cuba for some Venezuelans via the program. Within Colombia, the activities of the mission demonstrate both overt and covert intent. Although the Colombian population is generally apathetic to the ideas of the Socialism of the 21st Century, there are groups within Colombia that demonstrate open sympathy toward this revolutionary doctrine, primarily the FARC and ELN and

their sympathizers. The evidence provided in this chapter strongly implies a systematic pattern of reciprocal cooperation between the Bolivarian government of Venezuela, the FARC and ELN and sympathizing NGOs, and vulnerable populations in Colombia. The Venezuelan government supplies medical care via *Misión Milagro*, while the FARC and ELN, and some NGOs facilitate the mission to extend its reach into Colombia. The FARC benefits from the medical care provided to them, and from increased influence over the population that results from its role of choosing which Colombian citizens will receive medical care from the mission. This latter activity is carried out in close coordination with the peasant association NGOs, Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra (Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley or ACVC), and Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region or ASCAMCAT).

The interviews conducted show an established organizational relationship between the Venezuelan government and the FARC. Reference is made to a clinic set up ostensibly as a local clinic, but in reality as a clinic in direct support of FARC members and their families; to a network within Venezuela to provide advanced medical care to FARC members; and to the influence FARC and ELN have over which Colombians may enjoy access to *Misión Milagro* health services. This demonstrates a humanitarian mission co-opted by organizational interests. *Misión Milagro* in Colombia facilitates Venezuelan government support to FARC and ELN via provision of medical care, and the Colombian state is de-legitimized because it is portrayed as incapable of assisting its own citizens, while at the same time the mission legitimizes the FARC and ELN with local segments of the population because they are able to provide an essential service, medical care. We conclude therefore the activities of *Misión Milagro* in Colombia support Hypothesis 3: the Cuban and Venezuelan governments use the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan and Cuban foreign policy.

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## VI. MISION ROBINSON: LITERACY OR INDOCTRINATION?

To those unfamiliar with the history of Latin America, non-Hispanic names appear out of place, and therefore the name *Misión Robinson* may inspire confusion and curiosity: how does a Venezuelan mission acquire such a seemingly out-of-place name? Additionally, the name itself doesn't connote what type of Bolivarian mission it is. However, within Latin American history, there are a few notable figures with non-Hispanic names that allude to the diverse societies and cultures that have impacted Latin America, for example Bernardo O'Higgins, one of the founding fathers of Chile, William Brown, the founder of the Argentine Navy, or Alberto Fujimori, a recent president of Peru. In a similar fashion, the name "Robinson" is derived from Simón Rodríguez, one of the tutors of Hugo Chávez's hero, Simon Bolivar. Rodríguez adopted the English pseudonym Samuel Robinson after leaving from Caracas as a dissident in 1797 to take a trip that would bring him to visit the United States and Europe.<sup>201</sup> Rodríguez is allegedly the most influential tutor and mentor of the liberator Simon Bolivar, and Bolivar himself acknowledges that Robinson "taught me reading and writing, and grammar"<sup>202</sup> and "formed my heart for liberty, for justice, for the great, for the beautiful."<sup>203</sup> Thus inspired, Chávez adopted the name Robinson for the first educational mission of the Bolivarian missions.

This chapter analyzes the Bolivarian Mission *Misión Robinson*, and argues that it is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, the mission pursues the noble and altruistic goal of bringing literacy to a population historically forgotten and without the possibility of access to basic education; an area in which the mission has demonstrated results, albeit with some controversy. On the other hand, the darker and more problematic one, we argue that the mission is used as a vehicle to instill radical ideology and perpetuate the ideas of Chavismo, and spread the Bolivarian revolution throughout other countries, particularly Colombia. We do this by addressing the mission through the same pattern

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<sup>201</sup> John Lynch, *Simon Bolivar* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

that we have used to analyze the previous missions: the mission's overt purposes, the origins of the mission, organizational structure and configuration, resources and capabilities, mission activities, and a look at the mission's possible covert dimensions, with an emphasis on the mission's activities in Colombia through firsthand research.

#### A. OVERT PURPOSE OF THE MISSION

The revolutionary government of Chávez identified a social problem, in this case the “[social] exclusion caused by not knowing how to read and write,”<sup>204</sup> and therefore the mission's *raison d'être* became clear: provide literacy programs as an avenue to inclusion for the previously illiterate, in order that they might become productive members of society. The mission statement of the Fundación Samuel Robinson is as follows:

Eradicate illiteracy and achieve completion of the sixth grade in Basic Education in youth and adult populations, to a national and international level, guaranteeing political, social, and economic inclusion, with the purpose of obtaining higher levels of development and welfare in the most needy social groups of the country.<sup>205</sup>

The original mission eventually became known as *Misión Robinson I*, with the motto *Yo si puedo* (Yes I can).<sup>206</sup> According to the Venezuelan government, *Robinson I*'s objectives are defined as follows:<sup>207</sup>

1. Eliminate illiteracy in the youth and adult population nationwide.
2. Improve the reading comprehension skills of all of the beneficiaries of the mission.

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<sup>204</sup> Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales, “Misión Robinson I, II,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=51:Mision-robinson-ii&catid=23:Misiones-bolivarianas&Itemid=66](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51:Mision-robinson-ii&catid=23:Misiones-bolivarianas&Itemid=66) (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>205</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, “Fundación Samuel Robinson - La Fundación,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogsection&id=8&Itemid=49](http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=8&Itemid=49) (accessed March 17, 2013).

<sup>206</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, “Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson,” [http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=45](http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=45) (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

3. Inspired by the principles of equality, gender equality, and respect for all ideologies, develop the creative power of every human being, as well as the full exercise of one's personality in the midst of a democratic society.

Subsequent phases of the mission, *Robinson II* and *Robinson III*, have their own specific mission statements that further develop the basic literacy skills from *Robinson I* to meet primary and secondary education standards. *Robinson II*, under the motto *Yo Si Puedo Seguir* (Yes, I can keep going), is responsible for providing primary education (up to 6<sup>th</sup> grade) to graduates of *Robinson I* and those Venezuelans who were never able to complete their primary education for whatever reason. The third phase, *Robinson III*, also known as *Circulos de Lectura* (Reading Circles), has the goal of promoting the reading habit in the participants through articles of “political, economic, social, cultural, and national interest.”<sup>208</sup>

## **B. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT: BOLIVARIAN INSPIRATION, SOCIALIST IMPLEMENTATION**

The original conception for the mission also resulted from three other specific motivations. The first was the fact that the existing education plan, *Educación para Todos* (Education for All) designed and executed by the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport or MECD) in 2002, did not adequately provide for educating the Venezuelan population excluded from the education system. The second was an “urgency on behalf of the National Executive”<sup>209</sup> (read: Chávez) to instill basic literacy to no less than one million Venezuelans in no more than two months. And the third was a desire by the national government to meet Goal 4 of the 2000 World Education Summit held in Dakar, Senegal: to achieve a fifty per cent improvement in adult literacy levels by 2015, especially for women, and facilitate equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.<sup>210</sup> Essentially, *Misión Robinson* was created in June 2003 as a result of these motivations.

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<sup>208</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, “Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson.”

<sup>209</sup> Yolanda D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales (ILDIS), October 2006).

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

In addition, according to its promoters *Misión Robinson* is the response to the “darkness” in which the population lived, thanks to the incompetence of previous governments, under which just seven thousand citizens became literate annually.<sup>211</sup> Facing these long-lasting inequalities, the Chávez government created the mission, invoking Articles 102, 103 and 107 of the Venezuelan Constitution that define education as a human right and a social duty that must be accessible to everybody.<sup>212</sup>

Additional impetus for the mission stems from the October 2000 Energy and Social agreement signed by Cuba and Venezuela, the *Convenio Integral de Cooperación* (Integral Cooperation Accord), essentially a barter-style program in which Cuba exports “technical support in the fields of education, health care, sports, and science and technology,”<sup>213</sup> in return for much-needed oil from Venezuela. This agreement provided the support necessary, in terms of manpower, expertise and material, to establish the initial operation of the mission, especially given such an ambitious timeline for increasing literacy by at least one million Venezuelans in less than two months (as previously mentioned).

The Cuban support aided a “mobilization” of resources by the Chávez government to achieve the ambitious timeline. Indeed, the composition of the “Presidential Literacy Commission” announced by Chávez in Decree number 2,434 reflects a national interagency effort. The commission was chaired by Captain (Ret.) Eliézer Otaiza, a longtime Chávez loyalist, but the most interesting aspect of it is the breadth of government agencies on it: the Vice-Minister of Culture; the Vice-Minister for Communications Management; President of the National Youth Institute; Director General of Adult Education of the MECD; the Assistant to the Vice-Minister for Student

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<sup>211</sup> Viet Juan Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st* (Cholula: Altres-Costa Amic, 2008), 82–83.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 87; *Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (2006): Articles 102, 103, 107. University of Minnesota Human Rights Library.

<sup>213</sup> Dan Erikson, *Castro’s Chávez Strategy*, Center for Latin-American & Caribbean Studies, 2005.



Policies, Ministry of Higher Education; the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade; the Unified Command of the Fuerzas Armadas Nacionales (National Armed Forces or FAN); and the Director of the Bolivarian Ecological School “Simón Rodríguez.”<sup>214</sup>

### C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CONFIGURATION

As with all of the missions, *Robinson* seems to occupy a space within the organizational structure of the Venezuelan government that is at once parallel to its corollary ministry, in this case the Ministerio del Poder Popular para la Educacion (Ministry of Popular Power for Education), and subordinate to it at the same time. Indeed, it appears the mission was originally conceived as a foundation in order to fit into the organizational structure of the ministry. What sets the mission apart from its supporting ministry is its unique focus on the “traditionally excluded classes” within Venezuela, especially the indigenous populations and the poorer classes. The mission is run by the Ministry of Education through the Fundación Samuel Robinson, and its Office for Adult Education, and of course a presidential commission exists to oversee the mission as well, which is the same board as described in the previous section.

The mission is structured into three phases as previously described, as well as three supporting components: *Robinson Productivo* (Robinson Productive), *Fondo de Apoyo Solidario* (Solidary Support Fund or FAS), and *Robinson Internacional* (Robinson International). The purpose of *Robinson Productivo* is to integrate real-world work opportunities, something akin to internships, into the mission in order to support the new socialist economic model of the country. The purpose of the FAS is to provide health care and social assistance support to students, facilitators, and administrators of the mission, and it was created by order of President Chávez in December 2004. The purpose of *Robinson Internacional* is to provide a mechanism for cooperation and interchange in the areas of education and sport, with Latin America countries which could benefit from such programs in the areas of literacy and comprehensive education.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, 80.

<sup>215</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, *Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson*.

Each individual class in the *Robinson I* program is composed of an average of twenty students, and for each class there is one facilitator. Beyond that there are few requirements for a class to take place, other than the actual location, which could be “someone’s home, a school classroom, a shed, or any other space which complies with the minimum requirements.”<sup>216</sup> These minimum requirements are: it is a covered space, a facilitator is available, a VHS, a television, electrical power, and a blackboard, and of course the educational materials themselves. The members of the mission staff, or facilitators, are called *Ejercito de la Luz* (the Army of the Light) and the students (the participants) receive the title *Patriotas* (Patriots).<sup>217</sup> Requirements for *Robinson II* and *III* are similar, albeit with smaller average class sizes.

The website for the NGO Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana (Latin-American Pedagogic Foundation) includes a series of videos that illustrate this concept in action.<sup>218</sup> In fact, the lead video on the page, “Alfabetización: Yo Si Puedo” shows the process of a classroom taking shape, as the students bring the required components together in one student’s home: the TV, the media player, the reading materials, etc. Although in Spanish, it is a clear and informative look at the “Yo Si puedo” process that *Misión Robinson* uses as well. Other interesting aspects of the video are: it is a clip originally from Telesur, which is the broadcast company founded by the Bolivarian government; the video clearly makes reference to *los Cubanos* (the Cubans), and the location of the video is from Pasto which is in southwest Colombia, close to Ecuador.

## **D. RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES**

### **1. Budget**

Reliable budget figures are difficult to come by. However, some researchers’ findings account for 50 billion Bolívares (approximately \$36 million according to 2003

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<sup>216</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, 87.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> “Alfabetización y Educación Para Los Colombianos,” Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana, <http://www.fpl.org.co#!/videoteca> (accessed April 3, 2013).

exchange rates) assigned as the initial budget of the program in 2003,<sup>219</sup> supplemented by 30 billion more a bit later (approximately \$21.5 million) that was obtained through banking taxation.<sup>220</sup>

In addition, the website for the state oil company of Venezuela, PDVSA, cites a figure of \$72 million dollars allocated to support the mission, ostensibly directly from PDVSA.<sup>221</sup> This apparently reflects the total allocation toward the mission from PDVSA from 2004 until 2011, as the initial funding was apparently replaced by the funding directly from PDVSA beginning in 2004. In other words, the funding for the mission just from these figures provided above amounts to a bit over \$16 million dollars per year, for the years 2003–2011.

## **2. Facilities / Infrastructure and Staff / Personnel.**

To demonstrate the extent to which Cuba supported the mission, it is important to describe some of the components of the previously mentioned Cuban-Venezuelan cooperation agreement of 2000, the *Convenio Integral de Cooperación* (Integral Cooperation Accord). In the education field, the agreement covered four main points: deployment of advisors, educational video-rooms, educational techniques, and social media communications. The first point encompasses the quantity and quality of advisors in pre-school, special, elementary, middle, technical and professional schools, including the disposition of teachers destined for the project, “Bolivarian Schools.” The second point refers to the actual shipment of educational video-rooms produced in Cuba as well as the communication of Cuban experiences through the materials shown in the video-rooms; this includes a specific emphasis on sharing the Cuban experience with “Youth

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<sup>219</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, 88.

<sup>220</sup> “Aprueban Recursos Para El Plan Robinson,” *El Universal*, July 13, 2003.

<sup>221</sup> “Misión Robinson: Yo Si Puedo I y II,” Petróleos de Venezuela S.A. (PDVSA), [http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readsearch.tpl.html&newsid\\_obj\\_id=1501&newsid\\_temas=0](http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readsearch.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=1501&newsid_temas=0) (accessed March 17, 2013).

Computation Clubs.”<sup>222</sup> The third and fourth points, educational techniques, and social media communications, refer to the education and training on communication via mass media.<sup>223</sup>

By the end of 2005, around 234,000 *ambientes* (environments), the name given to each location where the classes take place, were installed in 2005 throughout Venezuela, with the support of 74 Cuban technicians and 50,000 volunteer members of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB).<sup>224</sup> Essentially, the *ambientes* are created when the Cuban-provided educational materials are installed in any given location that meets the minimum requirement detailed previously in this section. In all, almost two million books, thousands of TVs, videos, and even reading glasses were brought from Cuba in order to set up the mission.<sup>225</sup>

#### **E. MISSION ACTIVITIES**

Regardless of whether or not the mission is well-organized, or whether the funding comes from taxation or from deviation of oil revenues, the results of the mission have been described as nothing short of outstanding. The biggest goal attained was the declaration of the country as “a territory free of illiteracy,” as announced by President Chávez on 28 October, 2005, due to the success of the mission in bringing literacy to 1.5 million previously illiterate Venezuelans. However this claim is believed to be exaggerated (see Chapter III, Section E). It is reasonable to say that the mission did in fact provide an opportunity for education to many of the “historically disadvantaged” groups across Venezuela, from diverse Indian communities in nine states, to inmate populations, to the blind through provision of Braille books.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Cuban “Youth Computation Clubs” are essentially Cuban government-approved institutions that are one of the only legal mechanisms for Cubans to access the internet. For more information see “Freedom on the Net 2009—Cuba,” <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,FREEHOU,,CUB,,49d4758f24,0.html>.

<sup>223</sup> D’Elia, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela: Una Aproximación a Su Comprensión y Análisis*, 79.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> Yolanda D’Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

<sup>226</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, *Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson*.

Regardless, *Misión Robinson* is far from perfect. Some analysts forecast an uncertain future for the mission regarding its activities, proficiency and efficacy; particularly the benefits that the mission purports to provide to the general welfare of the country. Some of the problems with the mission are the low quality of the program presented by ill-trained facilitators and advisors, high truancy rates, and high rotation of personnel. These factors contribute to a climate of instability within the program. Besides the problems with human resources, there is also a problem with scarcity of teaching materials, and the poor condition of teaching facilities (the *ambientes*). This poor condition stands to reason as the requirements for an *ambiente* are so minimal, as mentioned in the previous section, and as seen in the videos referenced therein. Another problem is a lack of effective mechanisms for supervision and evaluation of teaching results.<sup>227</sup> Corruption within the mission is another serious problem, given that several students migrate to different missions that offer higher scholarships such as *Misión Che Guevara*, or the number of scholarships is exaggerated by administrators in order to receive additional funds (although this problem is more prevalent in *Misión Ribas* than in *Robinson*).<sup>228</sup>

Other issues in the mission seem not to be unique to it, but rather are symptomatic across many of the missions. Yolanda D'Elia and Francisco Cabezas point out quite concisely some of these flaws: <sup>229</sup>

1. The Missions evolved from a device for confronting political and economic adversity, to a mechanism for imposing institutional, political, and social control to advance the goals of the revolution.
2. Educational missions, like Robinson, are vulnerable to influence by recognized revolutionary practitioners, rather than organizations dedicated [solely] to generate educational policies.
3. The ideological and political character of the missions creates systemic vulnerabilities, and jeopardizes their continuity.

At the end of the cited document, the analysts suggest that the only option to save the missions from failure is by abandoning their political-ideological commitment;

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<sup>227</sup> D'Elia and Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*, 14.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

however, they cast doubt on this possibility, given the course the government chose in 2006, actually reinforcing the political-ideological character of the missions.<sup>230</sup>

## **F. MISIÓN ROBINSON: OVERT VERSUS COVERT PURPOSES**

At the beginning of this chapter we asserted that this mission is not only intended for purely educational purposes such as improving literacy in Venezuela, but that it is also used to for the ideological and political purposes of reinforcing Bolivarian ideology and strengthening the PSUV, Chávez's political party. Our assertion is supported by Chávez's own words:

Every classroom or environment, as we call them, [...], in each one of them, the students must build organization. The militants of the party, the Bolivarian circles, the reservists, the Francisco de Miranda Front, the facilitators in every classroom, the urban land committees, [...] this is the strategic guidance and the fundamental frame for the new basic social order.<sup>231</sup>

Although one could argue that these words are nothing extraordinary, or that they present no "hidden agenda," but rather just legitimate presidential guidance for his social programs, the comments actually closely resemble descriptions of the cellular organization of the bolshevist party, of an underground organization, or even of a criminal network. The results of such a scheme are analyzed later on in this chapter.

As previously mentioned, multiple official sources from the Venezuelan government publicize activities of *Misión Robinson* in countries like Nicaragua and Bolivia. Less publicized, if at all, are the efforts of the mission to support foreign citizens in other countries, and the circumstances under which these activities have been developed. We talk specifically of Colombia.

A remarkable example is the Venezuelan behavior in 2010, when Colombia denounced Venezuela in the Organization of American States (OAS), accusing the Bolivarian government of providing safe haven in Venezuela to the Colombian terrorist groups FARC and ELN. The immediate consequence of this was that Chávez ordered the

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<sup>230</sup> D'Elia and Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*, 14.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

freezing of diplomatic relations and militarization of the shared border.<sup>232</sup> In the midst of this tense situation, *Misión Robinson* claimed more than three thousand displaced Colombian citizens in the Venezuelan state of Táchira became literate thanks to it. Edgar León, at that time the Venezuelan Vice-Minister of Education, asserted that “this is the response to those who have been trying to divide our countries with lies, because the diplomatic rupture is with the government, not with the people.”<sup>233</sup> Almost simultaneously, in August 2010, *Misión Robinson* invited people from the two countries to participate in discussions about the political situation between Colombia and Venezuela, in order to “demonstrate to the world that the missions are not only for the Venezuelans. We have no discrimination to any nationality,”<sup>234</sup> said Fredy Arana effusively, the coordinator of *Misión Robinson* in the municipality of Paez, Apure state.

## **G. MISIÓN ROBINSON IN COLOMBIA: OBSERVATIONS FROM FIELDWORK**

Results of our fieldwork suggest that Mission Robinson is active in the Colombian education sphere. The noteworthy component of this activity is that it is accomplished via official Colombian governmental channels, and not on a covert basis, as we will demonstrate in this section. We first discuss an educational NGO in Colombia, which traces its roots to Cuba, and uses the same Cuban-developed teaching program that Mission Robinson does; then we discuss interviews we conducted in Colombia.

### **1. Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana (Latin American Pedagogic Foundation)**

Through our research and fieldwork in Colombia, we came across a literacy program that is carried out via an agreement between several department-level

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<sup>232</sup> The International Institute for Strategic Studies, ed., *The FARC Files: Venezuela, Ecuador and the Secret Archive of “Raúl Reyes”* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011), 436.

<sup>233</sup> María Fernanda Márquez, “En Táchira La Misión Robinson Alfabetizó Más De 3 Mil Desplazados Colombianos,” Primicias24.com, <http://primicias24.com/nacionales/en-Táchira-la-Mision-robinson-alfabetizo-mas-de-3-mil-desplazados-colombianos/> (accessed February 12, 2013).

<sup>234</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, “Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson Comenzó Jornadas De Reflexión En Apure,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=176](http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=176) (accessed February 12, 2013).

governments (equivalent to U.S. states) in Colombia, and the Cuban government. The implementation of the agreement and the execution of the literacy programs is carried out by an NGO called Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana (Latin American Pedagogic Foundation),<sup>235</sup> which headquarters is located in one of the most exclusive neighborhoods of Bogotá, Colombia's capitol city. (Both the Colombian and Cuban flags hang from the office's walls.) The names of the foundation's programs are the exact same names as the phases of *Misión Robinson: Yo si puedo* (Yes, I can), which corresponds to *Robinson I*; and *Yo si puedo seguir* (Yes, I can keep going), which corresponds to *Robinson II*.

The foundation's magazine, *Ambito Pedagógico* (Pedagogic Scope) includes information and articles that detail the sources for the foundation's literacy programs, as well as the philosophy behind its particular pedagogical principles.<sup>236</sup> Among the most important observations about this foundation is that its programs in Colombia *Yo si puedo* (Yes, I can), which corresponds to *Robinson I*; and *Yo si puedo seguir* (Yes, I can keep going), are Cuban programs; that is to say, they were developed in Cuba by the Cuban Ministry of Education.

An interview in the magazine of Mario Lujan, a delegate of the Cuban Ministry of Education reports that approximately seventy-five thousand Colombian citizens in at least five different departments have graduated the *Yo si puedo* program.<sup>237</sup> The Foundation's Executive Director reports that the program has been successfully implemented in Bogotá, Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Santander, Cesar, and Nariño departments in Colombia.<sup>238</sup> Lujan also states that this is a world-wide initiative that employs more than fifteen thousand Cuban instructors throughout the world.<sup>239</sup> The Foundation describes itself as a "private, non-governmental and non-profit organization created in June of 2009

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<sup>235</sup> "Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana - Alfabetización y Educación Para Los Colombianos," [http://www.fpl.org.co/#!](http://www.fpl.org.co/) (accessed May 11, 2013).

<sup>236</sup> Pedagogy is the science and art of education.

<sup>237</sup> "Yo Si Puedo," *Ámbito Pedagógico*, 2012, 21.

<sup>238</sup> Luz Constanza Fandiño, "Editorial," *Ámbito Pedagógico*, 2011, 6.

<sup>239</sup> *Yo Si Puedo*, 21.



to support social pedagogy programs [...] through agreements signed with the Cuban Ministry of Education and [Colombian] Department Governments.”<sup>240</sup>

The foundation does not cite nor mention Venezuelan involvement in the programs, nor does it mention *Misión Robinson*. However, there are strong similarities between the foundation’s literacy programs in Colombia, and those of *Misión Robinson*. In addition, the content of the literacy programs and their teaching materials include material that is political or ideological in nature. We discuss the similarities and the content of the programs in the following paragraphs.

The similarities between *Misión Robinson* and Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana are striking. As previously mentioned, *Misión Robinson* uses the very same names for its programs as do the foundation’s programs in Colombia. Another strong similarity is the description of the “educational environments” is exactly the same as the *ambientes* of the Robinson missions, and the structure of the classes and their sequencing is identical. Moreover, some of the videos that show the Foundation’s achievements are produced by Telesur,<sup>241</sup> the channel created by the Bolivarian regime to support its political agenda and to which we referred to previously (see Chapter II).

The content of the magazine *Ambito Pedagógico* (Pedagogic Scope) implies a pro-Cuban political-ideological agenda that is instilled through the educational programs already mentioned, which is doctrine that contradicts the regular texts and teaching procedures in Colombia. The magazine is replete with articles written by Cuban specialists and advisors, articles that praise the Cuban revolution and its leader, Fidel Castro, and simultaneously criticize countries and doctrines opposed to the Cuban Revolution.

One of the Cuban Advisors, Jesús Martínez, quotes Fidel Castro regarding which social factors contribute to illiteracy, and then follows that with regrets that the goals of the program were not fully achieved in Honduras “...due to the coup against President

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<sup>240</sup> Fandiño, *Editorial*, 6.

<sup>241</sup> *Alfabetización y Educación Para Los Colombianos*.

Zelaya.”<sup>242</sup> Another contributor, Maria Dolores Abad, who is referenced as a pedagogue of the Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño (Pedagogic Institute for Latin American and the Caribbean or IPLAC),<sup>243</sup> comments that the program must follow the logic of “... the dialectical materialism [that] evolved as a general method to analyze the relationship [of] nature-society.”<sup>244</sup> She adds that “...the philosophical focus of this program is given by the materialistic idea.”<sup>245</sup> The article finishes by summarizing that the program’s context must respond to globalization trends, providing the students with a critical view of the world to “...understand how they are negatively affected by the organization of the geographic space in relation to the hegemonic interests of Capitalism.”<sup>246</sup>

Another teaching (pedagogic) expert from Cuba, Guillermo Roig, praises the way Cuba has prioritized education since the triumph of the revolution in 1959, keeping intact the basic revolutionary principles that have supported the educational policies since then. He also comments on the success of the literacy programs in the Venezuelan Bolivarian Revolution and 28 more countries, including Nicaragua, Ecuador, and Bolivia.<sup>247</sup> The end of the article states that “Cuba develops constantly [despite] the many negative things, often exaggerations, and sometimes pure lies”<sup>248</sup> against the country. Another example of the global extent of the literacy program comes from Australia, wherein “The Cuban government awarded literacy certificates to a second group of Australian Aborigines who learned to read and write thanks to the Cuban “Yes I Can” [i.e., *Yo si*

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<sup>242</sup> Jesús Isaac Martínez, “Yo Si Puedo, Educación Sin Fronteras,” *Ámbito Pedagógico*, 2012, 15.

<sup>243</sup> IPLAC, founded in 1990, is an institution of the Cuban Ministry of Education. For more information, see *Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana—Alfabetización y Educación Para Los Colombianos*.

<sup>244</sup> Maria Dolores Abad, “La Geografía Como Una Herramienta Para La Vida,” *Ámbito Pedagógico* (2012), 23.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>247</sup> Guillermo Alberto Roig, “La Educación En Cuba,” *Ámbito Pedagógico*, 2011, 14–15.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

*puedo*] method.”<sup>249</sup> The report also states that “The “Yes I Can” method was developed by the Cuban Institute of Pedagogy for Latin America and the Caribbean, or IPLAC, and in 2006 received the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize.”<sup>250</sup> In sum, the materials from the *Ámbito Pedagógico* magazine are written almost exclusively by Cuban pedagogic experts, and the instruction method used by the foundation in Colombia was developed by IPLAC, an institution of the Cuban Ministry of Education. Thus, the philosophical background of the program is Cuban, and therefore its intent is suspicious.

## **2. Interviews in Colombia Regarding Misión Robinson**

Although the Latin American Pedagogic Foundation has been officially operating in Colombia since 2009, activity similar to it has been going on prior to then. In an interview with Fernando Londoño, former Colombian Minister of the Interior and Justice from 2002 to 2004, and currently an analyst and journalist, he described a discussion between himself and the Colombian Minister of Education at the time, Cecilia Maria Velez. The discussion was about the presence of Cuban advisors in Colombia who provided literacy programs, advisors that the Minister of Education considered as “awesome educators.”<sup>251</sup> Londoño, in turn, contested Velez’ perception as “naïve,” arguing that behind these programs was a very simple but efficient platform for advancing [communist] ideology, simplified to one fundamental idea: “Hatred toward all those who have a penny.”<sup>252</sup> According to Dr. Londoño, the simple idea of “hatred towards those who have something” via the literacy programs is the most effective method for the Cubans to transmit their ideas. Questioned about why Uribe’s government would allow the presence of Cuban advisors in Colombia, despite the public rivalry between Uribe and the Castro-Chávez axis, Dr. Londoño justified this discrepancy as

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<sup>249</sup> “Australian Aborigines Complete Cuban Literacy Program | Fox News Latino “FOX News Network, LLC, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2012/09/04/australian-aborigines-complete-cuban-literacy-program/> (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Fernando Londoño, interview.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

simply due to too many other pressing problems when President Uribe took office.<sup>253</sup> Or in other words, as politicians across the world are all too familiar, there were simply “bigger fish to fry” for President Uribe.

Although previous discussion focused on the Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana and its literacy programs in Colombia that use a method developed in Cuba, these programs are linked to *Misión Robinson* by the fact they both use the Cuban-developed methods and programs, and by other interviews with average citizens, intelligence officials, and political analysts. Cúcuta citizen Señor Martínez said in an interview that Mission Robinson is very popular among the community because the mission awards a *bachillerato* (roughly equivalent to a high school degree) in just 6 months to the attendants, even granting scholarships to Cuba to students who demonstrate above average performance.<sup>254</sup> A Colombian intelligence official also describes that, according to credible human intelligence sources, *Misión Robinson* is intended to teach revolutionary education in order to create a “revolutionary army.” Referring to San Cristóbal, the large Venezuelan city close to Cúcuta, the intelligence official stated that several Colombians have been invited to attend revolutionary talks in a club located there.<sup>255</sup>

Carlos Sierra, a Colombian political analyst and vice-president of the Truth Colombia Federation, asserts that the missions are a “concerted effort to gain the support of the population,”<sup>256</sup> arguing that the Socialism of the 21st Century is promoted through the missions and led by the Sao Paulo Forum. The educational programs, Robinson included, fit a pattern of entrenching themselves into a society in order to transform its thinking.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Fernando Londoño, interview.

<sup>254</sup> Señor Martínez, interview.

<sup>255</sup> FARC Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Carlos Sierra (Colombian political analyst and Vice-President, Truth Colombia Federation), Bogotá, April 5, 2013.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

In addition to the interviews, public documents establish a pattern of political interference conducted by the Cuban-Venezuelan alliance on Colombian soil, closely associated with educational programs. Citing the Colombian magazine *Cambio*,<sup>258</sup> Sierra described how, during the Central American and Caribbean Games that took place in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2006, Venezuelan and Cuban officials from their country's respective sports delegations were tasked to promote revolutionary values in poor neighborhoods of the city, rather than attending to official sports delegation business. A specific example of this is the Venezuelan Vice-Minister of Culture and Sport, Eduardo Esteban Alvarez, who, accompanied by Cuban delegates, carried out political proselytizing throughout the city, recruiting a group of young Colombians to travel to Venezuela and receive sports training.<sup>259</sup>

Another controversial case occurred in 2007 when Jose Luis Pirela, a Congressman from the Venezuelan State of Zulia, and Victor Hugo Merino, Director of the Bolivarian University of Venezuela, were expelled from Colombia because they were accused of illegal interference in domestic politics and unauthorized political proselytizing. The situation took place in the city of Baranoa (south of Barranquilla on the Caribbean coast), where these two Venezuelan officials were invited to sign cooperation agreements on medical attention and medicine between the local government and the Venezuelan government.<sup>260</sup> The problem arose when the Venezuelan guests declared that:

Here in Colombia we have to begin from the bottom to the top, from the locals and regionals, to allow the Bolivarians to reach the Presidency...We are here because of that, because we trust these leaders to lead local and regional governments in a revolutionary manner...We want revolutionary local and regional governments.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Baracutey Cubano, Blog, October 20, 2006, <http://baracuteycubano.blogspot.com/2006/10/revista-cambio-espionaje-cubano.html>.

<sup>259</sup> Carlos Sierra, *Una Propuesta Estrategica Para Colombia Frente a La Politica Expansionista Del Socialismo Del Siglo XXI* (Bogotá: Centro de Análisis Sociopolíticos, 2008), 40.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

The following anecdote alludes to the real motivation behind the Venezuelan government-sponsored educational programs writ large, and not just *Misión Robinson*. The article follows Gabriel Guerrero, a Colombian citizen eager to study medicine, who was selected along with 32 other applicants to study in the Escuela Latinoamericana de Medicina Alejandro Próspero Reverend (Latin American School of Medicine “Alejandro Próspero Reverend,” or ELAM), an institution located in the Venezuelan state of Miranda which was founded in 2005 as part of the Sandino agreement between Venezuela and Cuba.<sup>262</sup> Guerrero was unhappily surprised when he realized that instead of medical training, he was receiving revolutionary indoctrination that included the study of “Latin American thinkers” like Che Guevara and Tirofijo, the founder of the FARC. Thoroughly disenchanted and feeling cheated, he dropped out of the program and returned to Colombia in order to avoid “brainwashing,” where he has subsequently received threatening calls for being “a traitor to the revolutionary cause.”<sup>263</sup>

## H. CONCLUSIONS

Misión Robinson is touted by the Venezuelan regime as one of its flagship missions with an outstanding track record of achievements. The reduction of the illiteracy rates to apparently record lows, the fact the mission is free of charge, its wide coverage throughout much of Venezuela, and its concentration on service to “traditionally excluded classes,” are at first glance, definitely worthy of applause, and apparently free from any ideological bent. It is extremely difficult to argue against the merits of a free, nationwide, literacy program. Furthermore, it is reasonable that the Venezuelan government would include such an apparently successful mission as part of a foreign policy program to “export” successful missions to neighboring countries.

However, upon closer inspection, the reality of Mission Robinson appears to be quite different. A myriad of factors negatively affect the performance of the mission in

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<sup>262</sup> “En El Lugar Equivocado,” *Cambio*, November 2, 2008, [http://www.cambio.com.co/paiscambio/735/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA\\_INTERIOR\\_CAMBIO-3656702.html](http://www.cambio.com.co/paiscambio/735/ARTICULO-WEB-NOTA_INTERIOR_CAMBIO-3656702.html).

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*

pursuit of its stated mission, factors that range from bureaucratic ambitions, to its undeniable ideological and political character, to ill-trained facilitators. Despite its problems, it is being still exported to different countries, including Colombia.

Also, similar to the other missions, the Bolivarian regime uses Robinson as a tool to advance socialism and its ideals, both within Venezuela and abroad. In effect, the mission strayed from a single focus on providing a literacy program, to a mixed focus of providing a literacy program and advancing an ideological agenda. The interviews and secondary sources referenced within this chapter attest to the ideological agenda within the mission, as well as related literacy programs in Cuba that use the Cuban-developed methodology.

From the evidence collected about the presence of *Misión Robinson* in Colombia, we may conclude that the Cuban literacy program, if not the mission itself, has an established presence in Colombia. That 75,000 people taught through the Cuban-Colombian agreements in many departments throughout Colombia is significant. The socialist-leaning political-ideological orientation in the Cuban-developed method and material is evident. This orientation is worrisome considering that Colombia has been fighting a terrorist threat from the FARC for the last five decades, which is ideologically aligned with the revolutionary ideals promoted from Cuba and Venezuela. Behind *Misión Robinson* exists a clear intention to instill revolutionary ideals, or at least sympathy thereunto, in the people made literate by the program. This doctrine is completely contradictory to the long-standing democratic values intrinsic to Colombia.

The examples of Cuban and Venezuelan activities from public media accounts also suggest covert intent of education-related activities that are otherwise overt, specifically with respect to using events such as international sporting events to engage with youth. This type of activity is made more suspicious by the fact that it was apparently Venezuelan and Cuban officials working together at the 2006 Central American and Caribbean Games in Cartagena, Colombia.<sup>264</sup> The personal account of Gabriel Guerrero, a Colombian who travelled to Venezuela ostensibly for medical

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<sup>264</sup> Sierra, *Una Propuesta Estrategica Para Colombia Frente a La Politica Expansionista Del Socialismo Del Siglo XXI*.

training, is also persuasive, especially with his reference to feeling “duped” and “brainwashed” regarding the true nature of the education he had signed up for.<sup>265</sup>

We conclude that the activities of *Misión Robinson* within Colombia are a component of a larger activity of teaching literacy that is inspired by, or actually is composed of, the Cuban-developed methodology of the *Yo si puedo* literacy program promulgated in Colombia by the NGO, Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana (Latin American Pedagogic Foundation). And that furthermore, although the foundation asserts that it is an NGO without any government ties, the almost exclusive reliance on Cuban contributors to its magazine, its connection to Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño (Pedagogic Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean or IPLAC), a component of the Cuban Ministry of Education, and the fact that the *Yo si puedo* literacy program is developed in Cuba all imply a strong ideological component of the program. This is reinforced by the observations of D’Elia and Cabezas, when they stated that in 2006, the Venezuelan government reinforced the political-ideological character of the missions.<sup>266</sup> Thus, the activities described in this chapter actually align more closely with hypothesis three from the introduction chapter: the Cuban and Venezuelan governments use the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan and Cuban foreign policy.

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<sup>265</sup> *En El Lugar Equivocado*.

<sup>266</sup> D’Elia and Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela*, 13.



## VII. MISION GUICAIPURO: THE POLITICS OF INDIGENOUS MOBILIZATION

*Cacique* is the Spanish word to designate the chief of an Indian tribe; he is the one who holds authority, governance, and even supernatural powers. *Waica Epuro* is the name of the most famous *Cacique* of what is now Venezuela, who ferociously defended the motherland against the Spanish conquistadors.<sup>267</sup> The word *Guicaipuro* is the hispanicized version of *Waica Epuro*, and it is also the name given to the Bolivarian Mission established in order to support the indigenous tribes in Venezuela, as well as throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

The argument of this chapter is that *Misión Guicaipuro* was created by the Chavista government in order to pursue two specific purposes: first, solidify a grass roots organization composed of the indigenous tribes to perpetuate Bolivarianism in power; and second, to expand the influence of the Bolivarian Revolution to other countries, by indoctrinating indigenous communities abroad with the ideology of Chávez's Socialism of the 21st Century.

Through the description of its mission, origins and development, organizational structure and configuration, resources, capabilities, and activities, we demonstrate how *Misión Guicaipuro* helps the Bolivarian regime in achieving the purposes stated above, including the expansion of its revolutionary ideology to its neighbor Colombia. Before we continue, definition of some terms used throughout this chapter is in order. The Spanish words, *pueblos* or *etnias* are used interchangeably to refer to Indian communities and indigenous tribes both within Venezuela and abroad. These definitions are necessary for understanding this chapter. This concept of one “people” (i.e. the *pueblo*, or one “ethnic group,” e.g., the *etnia*) is how these communities see themselves: as *pueblos* without borders. This means—for instance—that members of the *etnia Wayúu*, or the Wayúu tribe, born either in Colombia or in Venezuela, do not recognize the political

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<sup>267</sup> “8 De Diciembre: Día Nacional De Guaicaipuro y De Los Caciques Heroicos | PSUV,” PSUV: Partido Socialista Unido De Venezuela, <http://www.psuv.org.ve/portada/8-diciembre-dia-nacional-guaicaipuro-y-caciques-heroicos/#.UZBPcUp0k9Z> (accessed March 13, 2013).

border in between the two countries and embrace, instead, ethnic linkages that make them members of one and the same *pueblo*. (A corollary within the United States is the Navajo Nation, which crosses state borders; although the Navajo Nation is spread across borders with sub-groups and sub-tribes, all members recognize themselves as members of the Navajo Nation.) The promoters of Bolivarianism, aware of this cross-border construct, take advantage of it, as we will show in this chapter.

#### **A. OVERT PURPOSE OF THE MISSION**

The overall purpose of *Guicaipuro*, according to the government, is to promote “the active and comprehensive inclusion”<sup>268</sup> of the Indian communities in the socialist transformation of the country, thus accomplishing the constitutional mandate of officially recognizing these *pueblos*. The specific objectives of the mission are stated as follows:<sup>269</sup>

1. To demarcate and properly title the lands of indigenous peoples and communities.
2. To promote harmonious and sustainable development of the indigenous peoples, through a vision that respects their different conception of development.
3. To promote the integral development of the indigenous peoples, ensuring the effective enjoyment of their social rights (health, education, housing, water and sanitation), and economic, cultural and political rights enshrined in the Bolivarian Constitution.
4. Promote, develop, and execute the Bolivarian policies intended to settle, with the entities of the national government, the historic debt owed to the organized indigenous communities, by enforcing the Simon Bolivar National Plan, through the perspective of a single Bolivarian revolution and a single Commander President.

#### **B. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT**

Facing the possibility of an electoral defeat and harassed by economic and fiscal restrictions, the Venezuelan government presented the missions in order to speed up the

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<sup>268</sup> “Misión Guicaipuro,” [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=54:mision-guicaipuro&catid=23:misiones-bolivarianas](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=54:mision-guicaipuro&catid=23:misiones-bolivarianas) (accessed March 13, 2013).

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

revolution and deepen the implementation of the Socialist program.<sup>270</sup> Thanks to this adroit political move, the Chávez regime survived the referendum that attempted to oust him from power in 2004. *Misión Guicaipuro* benefitted from the “New Strategic Plan” conceived by the government to confront the critical situation in order to maintain popular support. The first attempt to create this mission was made in 2003 during the celebration of the Day of Indigenous National Resistance,<sup>271</sup> but *Guicaipuro* was not formalized until 2004, through Presidential Decree 3040.<sup>272</sup>

Initially, the mission was a component of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources; in 2005 the mission was moved to the Ministry of Social Development and Participation, where it remained until 2007. In 2007, when Chávez created the Ministry of Popular Power for Indigenous Peoples as he began to fully implement his Socialism of the 21st Century, and the mission became aligned with this ministry.<sup>273</sup> An interesting component of the Socialism of the 21st Century is the increase in the number of government ministries. Under Chávez, ministries increased from thirteen to 27,<sup>274</sup> and there are currently 25 ministries according to the Venezuelan Embassy in the U.S., as of April 2013.

### C. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CONFIGURATION

Similar to several other missions, *Guicaipuro*'s organization is as eclectic as the Bolivarian ideology. The CEIMS website states there are two lines of action within *Guicaipuro*: the first is titled “Social Assistance,” with a focus on health and registration of the population, or in other words, cedulaación, the issuance of the national ID cards. The second line, “Project Development,” focuses on implementation of productive

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<sup>270</sup> Yolanda D'Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

<sup>271</sup> Viet Juan Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st* (Cholula: Altres-Costa Amic, 2008), 167.

<sup>272</sup> “Misión Guaicaipuro—Historia,” <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/es/mision-guaicaipuro> (accessed March 13, 2013).

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Venezuela: Hugo Chávez's Revolution (Bogotá / Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2007), [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19\\_venezuela\\_hugo\\_Chávezs\\_revolution.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/latin-america/venezuela/19_venezuela_hugo_Chávezs_revolution.pdf) (accessed March 13, 2013).

community-based projects.<sup>275</sup> There are also four components that constitute a “fundamental axis” of the program, as Viet Juan Felix posits. They are:<sup>276</sup>

1. Ethno-development: Financial support, education, health services, etc.
2. Strengthening of community management: Incorporating the *pueblos* into the economic and governance activities of the country.
3. Providing care to indigenous homeless and migrants: return these citizens to their place of origin.
4. Demarcate and properly title the lands of indigenous peoples and communities: return ancestral lands back to their historical owners.

In order to accomplish these objectives, the mission functions as a mediator or coordinator between the indigenous peoples and the other missions, in order to connect the services of the other missions to the 36 *etnias* throughout Venezuela.<sup>277</sup> In other words, *Misión Guicaipuro* acts as a “solution provider”, connecting the various ethnic communities with the services offered by its sister missions or government institutions. For instance, to support the *etnia Chaima* in October 2012, three different institutions converged, not only *Misión Guicaipuro*, but also the PSUV,<sup>278</sup> which is somewhat curious given that the PSUV is not a governmental institution, but rather the political party of President Chávez. The important pattern, however, is that *Guicaipuro* serves to connect the various indigenous communities with the social services available via other institutions, even if it itself doesn’t necessarily deliver the services. However, it is important to place this in context, because the function of connecting often-isolated indigenous communities with government services is itself a service, given the many geographic barriers that exist throughout Venezuela, especially the lack of services in the vast and sparsely populated south of the country. For example, although approximately 50 per cent of Venezuela’s land area lies south of the Orinoco River, this region is

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<sup>275</sup> Misión Guicaipuro.

<sup>276</sup> Felix, *Venezuela Hacia El Socialismo Del Siglo 21st*, 170

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 169

<sup>278</sup> Devis Benitez, “Gobierno Bolivariano Entrega Útiles Escolares a La Población Chaima Del Estado Monagas,” *Prensa MINPPPI*, <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/en/noticias/1610-np1490> (accessed March 14, 2013).

extremely sparsely populated, and this is the region where many of the indigenous communities that *Misión Guicaipuro* is charged with connecting to the rest of Venezuela reside.<sup>279</sup>

#### **D. RESOURCES AND CAPABILITIES: MISIÓN GUICAIPURO AS A MOBILIZATION STRUCTURE**

*Misión Guicaipuro* is an integral part of the Bolivarian mobilization structure, with its particular focus the indigenous population. A mobilization structure is, "...the most effective form of organization...based on partly autonomous and contextually rooted local units linked by connective structures, and coordinated by formal organizations."<sup>280</sup> Although generally speaking these types of structures are associated with pre-revolutionary processes, the Bolivarian government of Venezuela uses it [the Bolivarian mobilization structure] to perpetuate itself in power and to expand the revolutionary process beyond the Venezuelan borders. Likewise, the constant references to revolution by the Chávez regime, now the Maduro regime, imply that they see themselves as within the process of a revolution that is still ongoing, and therefore the need for a mobilization structure to mobilize their supporters.

Some political theorists concur that mobilization structures provide the basis for what is called a "social insurgency."<sup>281</sup> Three crucial traits of the mobilization structure are necessary in order to create a social insurgency: the level of organization or readiness, the collective assessment or insurgent consciousness, and the political alignment or structure of political opportunities.<sup>282</sup> Through the use of these factors, we arrive at an improved understanding of *Misión Guicaipuro*.

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<sup>279</sup> Venezuela: Population Density, 2000—Vendens.Pdf [Venezuela Population Density, 2000], <http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/downloads/maps/grump-v1/grump-v1-population-density/vendens.pdf> ed. (Palisades, NY: Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), Columbia University, 2009), 1.

<sup>280</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124.

<sup>281</sup> Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

## 1. Budget

The PDVSA website reports that it supported *Misión Guicaipuro* with 11 million dollars from its inception until 2009,<sup>283</sup> a relatively small amount compared with other missions published on the PDVSA website. However, given that the mission primarily operates as a coordinator between indigenous populations and other missions, the small budget is not necessarily a reflection of lesser importance of the mission, but rather a reflection of its role as a coordinator, and a smaller mission overall.

### E. MISSION ACTIVITIES

Despite the apparent small size of the mission and its budget, its capabilities should not be understated. Since the mission's founding through 2010, it has distributed: "710,635 ration kits; 151,336 school kits; 412,752 medical check-ups; 4,415 fishing kits, 3,220 agricultural kits and 189,766 kilos of seeds." In addition, 1,335 homes have been built through the Indigenous Community Councils, and 284 generators, 72 river transports, and 720 water tanks have been distributed."<sup>284</sup> The summary of achievements here suggests that much of the activity of *Misión Guicaipuro* is devoted to small-scale and achievable projects intended to improve the day-to-day life of the indigenous peoples. Given some of the immense geographic challenges associated with reaching much of the population, this is a prudent strategy.

According to the 2011 Venezuelan census, approximately 700,000 Venezuelans are classified as indigenous out of a population of approximately 28.9 million, or approximately 2.8 per cent of the population is classified as indigenous.<sup>285</sup> Although it is unknown how many of them are active electorally, we can assume that 60 percent of the indigenous population is of voting age, based on Venezuelan voting age

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<sup>283</sup> "PDVSA - Misión Guicaipuro," PDVSA, [http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenu.tpl.html&newsid\\_obj\\_id=469&newsid\\_temas=40](http://www.pdvsa.com/index.php?tpl=interface.sp/design/readmenu.tpl.html&newsid_obj_id=469&newsid_temas=40) (accessed March 14, 2013).

<sup>284</sup> "Venezuelan Embassy in Peru: Misión Guicaipuro," [http://peru.embajada.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=124:mision-guaicaipuro&catid=10:misiones-sociales&Itemid=100&lang=es](http://peru.embajada.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=124:mision-guaicaipuro&catid=10:misiones-sociales&Itemid=100&lang=es) (accessed March 14, 2013).

<sup>285</sup> Paul Dobson, "Census Figures show Reduction in Poverty in Venezuela over Last Decade | Venezuelanalysis.Com," Venezuelanalysis.com, <http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/7644> (accessed May 13, 2013).

demographics.<sup>286</sup> Using this estimate, 420,000 indigenous people are potential voters in Venezuela, a number roughly equal to five percent of the total votes that Chávez in the October 2012 presidential election.<sup>287</sup> This gives an idea of the size of the electoral bloc within the indigenous population, assuming that all votes are mobilized.

The aforementioned Bolivarian mobilization structure requires human and material resources; *Misión Guicaipuro*'s delivers these resources from within the indigenous population by convening, organizing, and mobilizing the indigenous population of Venezuela on behalf of the Bolivarian government. This mobilization is actually used by the Chávez regime to perpetuate itself in power, and subsequently to expand the Socialism of the 21st Century abroad, as we proceed to demonstrate.

### 1. Political Activities of Misión Guicaipuro

Domestically, the mission unabashedly posts political activities on its website, for example indigenous communities' "getting out the vote" on behalf of Chávez's political party, the PSUV.<sup>288</sup> Many of the "latest headlines" profile activities within the indigenous communities that refer to the presidential election on October 7th 2012 (nicknamed the "7-O Day"): "Indigenous Patrollers of the PSUV ready for 7-O;" "Indigenous Machinery Ready for the Battle of 7-O;" "Indigenous *Pueblos* in Bolívar State Celebrate Chávez Reelection."<sup>289</sup> The indigenous effort to support President Chávez by mobilizing voters during the elections is very similar—if not the same—as the effort described in the *Identidad* chapter (Chapter IV, Section F): "Red Dots," the "1 x 10 technique," and "patrollers" are core elements of this effort that are common to both *Misión Guicaipuro* and *Identidad*.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> "Voter Turnout Data for Venezuela (Parliamentary, Presidential) | Voter Turnout | International IDEA," International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=236#pres> (accessed May 16, 2013).

<sup>287</sup> Silvina Heguy, "Chávez Ganó Por Más De Un Millón De Votos," Clarín.Com, October 7, 2012.

<sup>288</sup> "Misión Guicaipuro—Últimas Noticias," <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/es/noticias> (accessed March 14, 2013).

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> "Patrulleros Indígenas Del PSUV Preparados Para El 7-O," <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/es/noticias/1600-np1480> (accessed March 15, /2013).

## 2. International Outreach and Conventions

In the international arena, *Guaicaipuro* extends its role beyond Venezuela through related organizations and events. Principal among these is the “Abya Yala” or “Abya Ayala” international convention of indigenous peoples. The word is an indigenous word that means “Latin America.” It is also a “multicultural convention founded on strong anti-imperialist and anti-hegemonic bases, which are recognized as actions and policies principally of the government of the United States.”<sup>291</sup> The movement defines its geographic scope as, “from Alaska to Patagonia,” and its principal role as defending indigenous peoples against the aggressive policies of the “North American empire.”<sup>292</sup> The Ministry for Indigenous Affairs (the ministry that *Misión Guicaipuro* is aligned with) sponsors the Congreso Gran Nación de Pueblos Indígenas Antiimperialistas del Abya Yala (International Congress of the Great Nation of the Anti-Imperialist Indigenous Peoples), an event that has taken place annually in Venezuela since 2007, with the participation not only of the Venezuelan *etnias*, but also of communities from several countries, notably Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States.<sup>293</sup>

Parallel to the Abya Ayala convention is the Bolivarian Congress of Indo-American Youth. This is an initiative implemented by the Bolivarian government since 2008 in order to solidify the revolutionary ideals and provide indigenous youth a means to participate in the development of Socialism of the 21st Century. This is a sizeable commitment by the Bolivarian government: the summits take place in Venezuela and, *Misión Guicaipuro* is the institution responsible for the organization of the event.<sup>294</sup> The

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<sup>291</sup> “¿Que Es El Abya Yala?” <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/es/gran-nacion/que-es> (accessed March 15, 2013).

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> “III Congreso De La Gran Nación De Pueblos Indígenas Antiimperialistas Del Abya Yala,” <http://www.minpi.gob.ve/minpi/es/gran-nacion/iii-congreso> (accessed March 15, 2013).

<sup>294</sup> Ibid.



congress enjoys international participation from multiple countries. For instance, the IV Congress that took place in Caracas in 2011 gathered more than 400 participants from Venezuela and seventeen other countries.<sup>295</sup>

***a. President Chávez and the Closing Ceremony of the First Bolivarian Congress of Indo-American Youth***

The Closing Ceremony of the First Bolivarian Congress of Indo-American Youth provides ample insight into the international aspirations and the overt purposes that *Misión Guaicaipuro* pursues through the Congress. The following key excerpts and quotes are from the transcripts of the closing speech by Hugo Chávez at the end of the First Congress.<sup>296</sup> The closing ceremony was attended by President Chávez and President Evo Morales of Bolivia, conferring a high level of significance on the event simply by their presence.

The ceremony begins with an invocation to the spirit of the buffalo by the Chief of the Cheyenne Tribe in South Dakota, Joseph Brint Plenting. He follows that with praises to Chávez, Evo Morales, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Following a presentation of traditional dances, President Chávez is introduced and in his opening remarks, praises Evo Morales, the indigenous Bolivian President who that very same day (August 11, 2008) won crucial elections in his country.

Later on during the closing ceremony, Manuel Mariña, President of the University Simon Rodriguez, reports on a project in Amazonas state (the southernmost state in Venezuela) and “home to 19 indigenous peoples,”<sup>297</sup> to establish an Indigenous People’s University there. Chávez replies that Latin America is a name arbitrarily imposed, because the continent’s real identity is Indo-America.<sup>298</sup> Chávez, citing the

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<sup>295</sup> “IV Congreso Bolivariano Indoamérica Joven Reunirá a Etnias De 18 Países Americanos | Correo Del Orinoco” Correo Del Orinoco, sec. 2013, May 13, 2011.

<sup>296</sup> “Clausura Del Primer Congreso Bolivariano Indoamérica Joven” (Teatro Municipal de Caracas, Caracas, Venezuelan Embassy to the United States, August, 11, 2008), <http://venezuela-us.org/es/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/11-AGO-2008%20CONGRESO%20BOLIVARIANO%20INDOAMERICA%20JOVEN.pdf>, (accessed March 15, 2013).

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

Latin American writer Señor Galeano, opines that indigenous communities are socialist by nature, and that they have a lot of to offer to the Socialism of the 21st Century.<sup>299</sup> He goes on to praise the relevance of *Misión Guaicaipuro* in its role of gathering these indigenous “warriors” against imperialism,<sup>300</sup> and before swearing in the participants of the congress, he exhorts the attendees to become the power behind the movement to achieve revolutionary transformation from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego.<sup>301</sup>

During his comments, President Chávez also invited the people to rebel against the cultural colonization imposed by foreign forces, demanding that the Congress become an annual event to renew the commitment to the fight against capitalism and imperialism.<sup>302</sup> He also suggests that the annual Youth Congress become a center of debate, “and although you will disperse today around the continent, maintain the links among yourselves, and establish permanent organizations,”<sup>303</sup> using all the technology and communication means available. The closing ceremony ends with an oath administered by President Chávez to the participants:

Do you swear not to rest your arms nor your souls until we have the Great Homeland, united and free, and socialist; Do you swear to keep the flame alive and growing from this Indo-American Bolivarian Congress of Warrior Youth against poverty and imperialism and for socialism, do you swear my fellow Indians, do you swear?<sup>304</sup>

The aforementioned activities—the partisan activities on the website, and the international outreach via conventions—suggest that *Misión Guaicaipuro* is a vehicle to promote Bolivarian regime’s power structure and ideology, and is perceived by the regime as a crucial instrument in promoting “social insurgency” among indigenous peoples. Going back to Tarrow’s definition of a mobilization structure previously

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<sup>299</sup> “Clausura Del Primer Congreso Bolivariano Indoamérica Joven.”

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

cited,<sup>305</sup> the indigenous communities dispersed in Venezuela and throughout Latin America comprise the “local units” of the structure; the Congress and associated organizations are the “connective structures;” and the “formal organization” coordinating all of it is *Misión Guicaipuro*, and through it the Bolivarian government.

In addition, the phases of social insurgency described by McAdams<sup>306</sup> previously referenced also apply to the case of *Misión Guicaipuro*. The congresses and the mission provide a level of organization and organizational readiness; an “insurgent consciousness” is created through the rhetoric of imperialism, poverty, oppression, and exclusion. In addition, the “American Empire” and its “lackey states” [read, Colombia] make for a convenient “ideal devil”<sup>307</sup> for President Chávez to present to all of the indigenous peoples, and presented to the *etnias* through Guaicaipuro, as the foreigner responsible for all the hardships of the indigenous peoples. The last necessary element in McAdam’s model to generate insurgency is the structure of political opportunities. Within Venezuela, each election is that political opportunity, but internationally, the political opportunities vary by country.

## **F. GUAICAIPURO: OVERT VERSUS COVERT PURPOSES**

### **1. Interviews**

Venezuela has always considered Colombia as a peer competitor, in fact its main rival, especially in military affairs. For planning purposes, virtually all of Venezuelan war plans are oriented against Colombia. Mission Guaicaipuro serves a strategic purpose in addition to a political-electoral purpose, because building a popular support base within Colombia via the mission is a component of Bolivarian military strategy *vis a vis* Colombia, as the below interviews demonstrate.

Isidro Perez, a retired Venezuelan Colonel exiled in Colombia, stated that throughout his time in the Venezuelan Armed Forces, all of the war games were planned against Colombia. However, it was only after the Bolivarian government of President

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<sup>305</sup> Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 124.

<sup>306</sup> McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*, 40.

<sup>307</sup> Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Perennial Modern Classics, 2010), 93.

Chávez assumed power, that a new concept to war plans against Colombia was added: “Chavismo imposed an ideological-political bias [on the war games] that called for using the FARC and ELN.”<sup>308</sup> Col (ret.) Perez stated that he personally observed several FARC members in Venezuela, which he understood as part of the normal expansionist revolutionary process wherein the FARC and ELN are the points of contact in Colombia for the Venezuelan government.<sup>309</sup> Perez’s arguments coincide, albeit unexpectedly, with the expression used by a member of the Venezuelan intelligence service who, despite vehemently defending the expansionist aims of Bolivarianism (this official rejected the term expansionism and recommended Latin Americanism, brotherhood, solidarity, etc. instead), referred to the relationship between the Venezuelan government and the FARC as, “something like alligators at the same well.”<sup>310</sup> The unexpected convergence of the comments, one from an exiled Venezuelan Colonel currently living in Bogota, and the other from a current official of the Venezuelan intelligence service, is worth noting here.

Doctor Carlos Sierra, Vice-President of Federación Verdad Colombia (Truth Colombia Federation), describes a similar relationship among the Venezuelan government, the terrorist groups FARC and ELN in Colombia, and the *etnias* that are served by *Misión Guicaipuro*. Dr. Sierra has been studying this issue for many years, and one of the organizations within Federación Verdad Colombia, Colombian Cultural Identity, conducted an investigation in La Guajira. Specifically, the investigation was with the Wayúu community, one of the Colombian *etnias* that has been benefited the most from *Misión Guicaipuro*.<sup>311</sup>

Sierra believes that *Misión Guicaipuro*’s efforts are facilitated by the pattern of neglect of the Wayúu population inside Colombia by the Colombian government, a

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<sup>308</sup> Isidro Perez, interview.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

<sup>310</sup> DIM Official, interview.

<sup>311</sup> For an engaging and recent look at life in La Guajira, see Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown: Colombia, 2013, directed by Sally Freeman (CNN, 2013), <http://www.cnn.com/video/shows/anthony-bourdain-parts-unknown/episode3>, which includes a segment on life in La Guajira Department among the Wayúu etnia.

situation that is wisely exploited by the Venezuelan regime through the missions.<sup>312</sup> Colombian Cultural Identity conducted interviews in the Wayúu community which were recorded, and which led Sierra to the conclusion that many of these citizens prefer to be Venezuelans rather than Colombians, apparently influenced by the Venezuelan government through the missions.<sup>313</sup>

Some of the videos are summarized in Sierra's book when he cites Maria Luisa Ruiz, cultural and ethnic coordinator of the Wayúu community in La Guajira. She acknowledges that the benefits received by the Wayúu from the Venezuelan government "have initiated a public consultation process within the community about whether or not Colombian Guajira becomes part of the Venezuelan Guajira."<sup>314</sup>

The videos encompass comments from several Wayúu who talk about the support received from the Venezuelan government, specifically through *Misión Guaicaipuro*. For instance, Maria Luisa speaks about scholarships and transportation subsidies received, and other Wayúu women talk about their feelings and gratitude toward President Chávez, labeling themselves as Chavistas. Another community leader describes how the Venezuelan government is going to provide the equipment for a Wayúu hospital, while another Wayúu woman explains how *Misión Robinson* provides literacy programs to her own family just across the border [in Venezuela] which is walking distance from her house.<sup>315</sup>

One of the videos shows a teenager talking about a project called *Wuayunakii*, which is described as a bi-national integration venture for the Wayúu community, and which has a publication with the same name. The project also has a website<sup>316</sup> and official locations in the Venezuelan state of Maracaibo and in the city of Maicao,

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<sup>312</sup> Carlos Sierra, interview.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Carlos Sierra, *Una Propuesta Estrategica Para Colombia Frente a La Politica Expansionista Del Socialismo Del Siglo XXI* (Bogotá: Centro de Análisis Sociopolíticos, 2008), 57.

<sup>315</sup> "Interviews with the Wayúu" (audiovisual interview, Fundación Verdad Colombia).

<sup>316</sup> "Wayúu naiki, El Periodico De Los Pueblos Indigenas," <http://www.Wayúu.naiki.org.ve/> (accessed May 1, 2013).

Colombia. The website includes links to *Wuayunakii* publications<sup>317</sup> which are generous in praise to the Bolivarian regime, including such rhetoric as “on our way to Indo-American Socialism,” “Indian Resistance,” “Indigenous pueblos in revolution,” “rebellion, independence, and revolution,” and so forth. In sum, the video interviews are evidence of the effects of the Venezuelan government’s outreach through the *Guaicaipuro* mission. Specifically, the overall effect is an increase in trust and allegiance by the Colombia Wayúu to the Venezuelan government, as a result of assistance provided to them, especially assistance through *Misión Guaicaipuro*.

Even though the Wayúu *etnia* seems to be the most influenced by the *Guaicaipuro* mission, the mission’s activities in Colombia are not limited to only the Wayúu . In an interview with a Colombian intelligence official, he mentioned that the indigenous people Motilón Bari, traditionally located along the border between the Venezuelan state of Táchira and the Colombian department of Norte de Santander, have also benefited from the mission.<sup>318</sup> This official asserts that the most important goal of the mission is to create a dependency loop, whereby the Motilón Bari community becomes dependent on the mission. In addition, credible reporting indicates that the ELN, a Colombian terrorist group, uses the mission for safe haven within the Motilón Bari *etnia* on the Venezuelan side of the border. In return for the safe haven, the insurgent group facilitates transportation for the mission’s personnel and for the Motilón Bari themselves, to access the remote locations of the Motilón Bari.<sup>319</sup>

Although we provide evidence that the covert purpose of the mission is to create a social insurgency using indigenous communities, other interviews suggest that other minority communities, beyond just indigenous communities, are also targeted by the mission. In 2007 Rafael Guarín, former Colombian Vice-Minister of Defense and at that time a political analyst, interviewed a man named Juan Efraín Mendoza Gamba who introduced himself as the Secretary General of Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria

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<sup>317</sup> “Wayúu naiki - Newsfeeds,” [http://www.Wayúunaiki.org.ve/index.php?option=com\\_newsfeeds&view=categories&Itemid=165](http://www.Wayúunaiki.org.ve/index.php?option=com_newsfeeds&view=categories&Itemid=165) (accessed May 2, 2013).

<sup>318</sup> ELN Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

Agropecuaria (Federation of National Agriculture Trade Unions or FENSUAGRO), an agrarian union association that advocates for small farmers and workers throughout Colombia. Guarín, who still has personal copies of that interview, was interested in learning about the mobilization processes in different parts of Colombia and he received Mendoza's statement about how the Bolivarian missions supported a "mobilization process" that consisted of organization, indoctrination, and training in the southern part of Colombia with a myriad of rural, indigenous, peasant, and minority groups.<sup>320</sup>

Two issues raised in the previous interview are worth highlighting. The first is that FENSUAGRO has a national profile and works with other organizations that work for minority interests, like Coordinacion Nacional Indigena y Campesina (National Indigenous and Peasant Coordination Committee or CONAIC) and the Consejo Nacional Campesino Negro e Indígena de Colombia (Black and Indian National Congress of Colombia or CNI).<sup>321</sup> Second is that the above mentioned Mendoza was captured by the Colombian Army in 2009, in an operation against one of the most notorious of the FARC's leaders, alias Negro Antonio, when Mendoza visited the FARC leader's camp on the outskirts of Bogota.<sup>322</sup> Although neither Mendoza nor Guarín use the specific name of *Misión Guaicaipuro* during the interview, the connection between FENSUAGRO via its Secretary General, Mendoza, and the FARC, and FENSUAGRO with the Bolivarian missions, raises suspicion that the missions are using these organizations to extend Venezuelan government influence throughout Colombia.

## G. CONCLUSIONS

*Misión Guaicaipuro* is the Venezuelan government's outreach mission to the indigenous *pueblos* within Venezuela, as well as its coordinating organization for outreach to international indigenous communities. The mission, although apparently

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<sup>320</sup> Rafael Guarín, interview.

<sup>321</sup> "Reseña Historica," FENSUAGRO, [http://fensuagro.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=18](http://fensuagro.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=18) (accessed May 1, 2013).

<sup>322</sup> "Gobierno Critica Presencia De Sindicalista En Campamento De Las Farc," *El Espectador*, March 2, 2009. <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/judicial/articulo123295-gobierno-critica-presencia-de-sindicalista-campamento-de-farc>.

smaller than other missions in terms of budget and size, occupies a unique niche role as a “point of contact” for the indigenous *pueblos* to connect with the other missions. Thus, the mission enjoys a relatively high profile, not only within Venezuela but also without, because in effect it is the “face” of the government to indigenous communities both domestically and internationally. The mission also reflects a high degree of politicization via its domestic and international activities. Examples of overt partisan activities abound in the press releases on the mission’s website, and the international outreach activities of the mission also reflect overt politicization.

We observe in *Misión Guacaipuro* a consistent pattern to create a strong social insurgency rooted in Venezuela, expanded to other parts of the region. The level of organization or readiness, its collective assessment or insurgent consciousness, and the political alignment or structure of political opportunities, are the necessary elements that enable this social insurgency, and which we have systematically described throughout the current chapter. Tarrow’s concept of a mobilization structure and McAdams’ concept of a social insurgency provide a framework to explain the organization and activities of the mission.

*Misión Guacaipuro* serves the interests of the Bolivarian Revolution by creating a sympathetic population in support of the Venezuelan government, out of a disparate group of indigenous *etnias* spread across expansive areas. The Venezuelan government employed the “national folk hero,” the Indian Freedom Fighter *Wayca Epuro* to create an indigenous identity that all of the groups could relate to. Moreover, this process of identity creation is not only applicable within Venezuela, but also in international situations. Another tool in the identity creation process that Chávez employed is the presentation of the United States as a common “ideal devil”<sup>323</sup> that serves as a device to unify the indigenous groups. To put this concept in other words, the U.S. served as a common enemy for Chávez to employ the principle of, “The enemy of my enemy, is my

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<sup>323</sup> Hoffer, *The True Believer*.



friend.” He exemplified this in his fiery rhetoric during the Closing Ceremony of the First Bolivarian Congress of Indo-American Youth, to the extent of leading the attendees to swear an oath “against imperialism, and for socialism.”

The comments made by Colonel (ret.) Perez demonstrate a new Chávez-era political-ideological bias to use the FARC in war planning against Colombia. This is an example of the strategic importance of developing an ideologically sympathetic population, not just a political or electoral importance. That his comments are reinforced by the Venezuelan intelligence official’s comments regarding Venezuela and the FARC is remarkable. The strategic importance of gaining a popular support base is reinforced by the series of videos produced by Colombian Cultural Identity, wherein Wayúu members speak of community debates about whether or not Colombian Guajira should become part of Venezuelan Guajira.

Within Colombia, the mission initially interacted with, targeted, and benefitted the Wayúu and Motilón Bari *etnias*, which stands to reason given that both those indigenous groups straddle the Colombian-Venezuelan border. Evidence presented in this chapter strongly suggests that efforts by the mission toward these two *etnias* were made easier by the Colombian government’s pattern of neglect toward these communities. Therefore, gaining the sympathy of these *etnias* via the missions became feasible for the Bolivarian regime. The influence of this mission is extended into other geographic areas of Colombia through social and radical movements and organizations such as the FENSUAGRO. These links are all the more interesting given that these organizations are usually located in regions with a complex security situation, where illegal groups like the FARC and ELN are also present. The case of Juan Efraín Mendoza Gamba mentioned previously in the chapter is a strong example of a link between the Bolivarian missions in Colombia, social organizations, and terrorist groups.

Chávez and his Bolivarian regime created *Guicaipuro* as a revolutionary response to fulfill the basic needs of the indigenous *pueblos* in Venezuela, historically neglected by the central government. This innovative mechanism provides the government opportunity to gain the electoral support of the indigenous communities in return. In addition, *Misión Guicaipuro* is a vehicle to invite indigenous communities in the region to join the

revolution, an invitation that has a significant influence in Colombia. *Misión Guicaipuro*, through its organization, capabilities, and activities, supports hypothesis two: The Venezuelan government of President Chávez used the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy.

## VIII. OVERT AND COVERT PURPOSES: THE MISSIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR COLOMBIA

*Misiones Identidad, Milagro, Robinson, and Guicaipuro* are the Bolivarian missions that are the specific case studies in this document. After an overview of the eclectic concepts of Bolivarianism, and an overview of the missions and their relevance in Venezuela, the case studies of these four missions constitute the body of this thesis. They are all active missions within Colombia, which is the focus of our thesis: the overt and/or covert nature of Bolivarian mission activity within Colombia.

The series of Bolivarian missions are fundamentally a component of Venezuela's domestic politics, and therefore are part of Venezuela's sovereign right to self-determination, or in other words are part of how Venezuela governs itself. This quality is regardless of their questionable methods of functioning, of funding, and their varying levels of performance.

However, because the Venezuelan government itself created the mechanisms and the institution to internationalize the missions, the missions are no longer solely part of domestic Venezuelan government, but rather are also a part of Venezuelan foreign policy. This "exporting" of the missions is carried out in multiple countries including Colombia. Thus, it is impossible to limit the scope of the missions merely to the internal policy-making of the Venezuelan government itself. The purpose of this chapter is to show that all four missions exhibit both legitimate and illegitimate state activity within Colombia, and that the activity is both Venezuelan and Colombian in origin. Furthermore, common to all four case study missions in Colombia are three main trends (or "themes"): political interference, ideological expansion, and affiliation with the insurgency.

This chapter is organized into sections that consist of a comparison of the missions' activities in Colombia in relation to the three hypotheses presented in the first chapter.

1. H1: The Bolivarian government of Venezuela uses the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for legitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy.

2. H2: The Bolivarian government of Venezuela uses the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan foreign policy.
3. H3: The Cuban and Venezuelan governments use the legitimate status of Bolivarian missions in Colombia for both legitimate and illegitimate state activities to support Venezuelan and Cuban foreign policy.

This section is followed by a section that examines the three main trends, or themes, mentioned above: political interference, ideological expansion, and affiliation with the insurgency in Colombia. Throughout this chapter, we report evidence that is not necessarily linked to any particular mission, but rather are part of a pattern common to all or most of them. The “boundary lines” between these trends is often blurry, but this uncertainty is inherent to Bolivarianism itself, an eclectic mix of ideologies and form of government, as described in Chapter II: Chávez’s Eclectic Ideology.

**A. MISSION ACTIVITY IN COLOMBIA: OVERT OR COVERT, VENEZUELAN OR CUBAN?**

Of the four missions in our case study, we determined that none of the four missions exhibit only legitimate activity within Colombia, two of them (Identidad and Guaicaipuro) exhibit Venezuelan activity that is legitimate and illegitimate in nature, and two of them (Milagro and Robinson) exhibit both Venezuelan and Cuban activity that is legitimate and illegitimate in nature. (See Table 2.)

| Case Study<br>Mission: | Hypothesis I:<br>Venezuelan<br>legitimate<br>activity | Hypothesis II:<br>Venezuelan<br>legitimate &<br>illegitimate<br>activity | Hypothesis III:<br>Venezuelan &<br>Cuban legitimate<br>& illegitimate<br>activity |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| Identidad              |   | X  |   |
| Milagro                |   |  | X   |
| Robinson               |   |  | X   |
| Guaicaipuro            |   | X  |   |

Table 2. Mission Alignment to Hypotheses Regarding Nature of Activity in Colombia

One common trait among all of the missions is their gradual transition from “device[s] for confronting political and economic adversity, to a mechanism for imposing institutional, political, and social control to advance the goals of the revolution.”<sup>324</sup> What all of the missions share is a trait of a parallel nature of government; that is, they are a component of the Venezuelan government “separate but equal” to the ministries they are affiliated with. This is or was apparently an attempt by President Chávez to bypass the bureaucratic and opposition obstacles within the traditional ministries, in order to more quickly implement his agenda of “participatory democracy.” The evidence we provide comports with that assessment of the missions as a whole, as the altruistic overt mission statements of the Bolivarian missions do not accurately describe the missions’ activity within Colombia.

What differentiates the mission activity in Colombia regarding which hypothesis they support is directly related to whether the mission requires Cuban support to implement. If the mission requires Cuban support due to the subject area, the mission’s activity in Colombia demonstrates Cuban, in addition to Venezuelan, covert and overt activity. These missions are Mission Milagro and Mission Robinson, which require

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<sup>324</sup> Yolanda D’Elia and Luis Francisco Cabezas, *Las Misiones Sociales En Venezuela* (Caracas: Instituto Latinoamericano de Investigaciones Sociales, 2008).

Cuban support because they are in technical fields, health and education, respectively. These missions are implemented or enabled by agreements between Cuba and Venezuela: the 2005 Sandino Pact for Mission Milagro, and the 2000 Convenio Integral de Cooperación” (“Integral Cooperation Accord”) between Cuba and Venezuela signed in 2000. Whereas, the Identidad and Guaicaipuro missions do not require outside support from Cuba, hence those missions do not demonstrate Cuban activity within Colombia.

## **B. TRENDS COMMON TO THE MISSIONS IN COLOMBIA**

### **1. Political Interference**

International relations are political in nature and they are generally managed through diplomatic channels. Political interference is defined here as one state circumventing normal and official diplomatic channels, in order to push their specific political interests on another country via unofficial channels. These interests are commonly contrary to the ones of the affected country. Our thesis provides evidence to suggest that one of the themes common to the four missions studied is political interference.

Within Colombia and Venezuela there are political parties and movements that stand for socialist ideas and defend ideologies traditionally labeled as leftist. On the Venezuelan side the PSUV, the governing party of Hugo Chávez, leads this political trend; on the Colombian side, the Polo Democrático (Democratic Pole) party is the most representative of the leftist parties. In the case of these two parties, evidence suggests that communication and relations between these two parties rises to the level of political interference within Colombia, and furthermore that one of the mechanisms for such interference is the Bolivarian missions. Solidarity between organizations which share common interests is to be expected and is logical, even natural. However, when such an alliance goes beyond simple solidarity and transcends to the imposition of political interests to the detriment of one of the countries, it calls into question Colombia’s ability to exercise effective sovereignty.

Señor Martínez, the Cúcuta citizen cited in previous chapters, gives an account of how this political interference is evident in his city. His testimony can be considered as

common knowledge shared by the average citizens that inhabit the region, as we corroborated during our visit. Mr. Martinez asserts that the missions are a mechanism of political support in the region, and that the beneficiaries of this support are the Colombian political party Polo Democrático and more specifically Ramon Eli Tamara, a Polo member who currently is a deputy in the departmental assembly (Colombian department, or state, of Norte de Santander).<sup>325</sup> He also said that the person behind the organization and funding of the missions' operations in Colombia is "Becerra," referring to Nelson Becerra, the mayor of the Venezuelan border town of Ureña directly across from Cúcuta, because "Ureña's mayor supports all that is in opposition to the Colombian government."<sup>326</sup> One more insight contributed by Mr. Martinez is that one of the largest, if not the largest, unions in Colombia, Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (Central Union of Workers or CUT), functions in Cúcuta as a political party rather than a workers' union. In sum, Mr. Martinez's observations draw links between the Bolivarian missions, the Venezuelan mayor of Ureña (a member of the PSUV), the leftist Colombian political party Polo Democrático, and the CUT workers' union.

This same line of thought is followed by a former FARC operative interviewed for this thesis, who stated that during her time in the FARC, the Bolivarian missions were effective in recruiting and convincing people to oppose then-President Uribe's government (of Colombia). She also stated that she received unambiguous guidance from Venezuela and from the FARC Secretariat to destabilize the government "by any means." She recalls that they were directed to campaign during the 2002 Colombian presidential elections for Luis "Lucho" Garzon, the leftist candidate that unsuccessfully opposed Uribe in those elections. Moreover, this demobilized FARC operative pointed out the significant role of the CUT in managing what she calls "border policies,"<sup>327</sup> even suggesting that Colombian authorities should more fully investigate workers unions and their links, apparently as a reference to organizations beyond what would be expected for a workers' union. Similar to the summary of links described by Mr. Martinez in the

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<sup>325</sup> Señor Martinez, interview.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Demobilized FARC Member, interview.

preceding paragraph, the former FARC operative's comments describe links between the Bolivarian missions, the FARC, the Venezuelan government, leftist political campaigns in Colombia, and the CUT, the workers' union in Colombia.

There is also evidence that suggests that the scope of Venezuelan political interference goes beyond the local and regional examples cited above, that are centered in and around Cúcuta. A series of videos posted in a news article at Periodismo Sin Fronteras (Journalism Without Borders) show a meeting between members of the Colombian political party Polo Democrático and Venezuelan officials (one of whom is Ureña's mayor Nelson Becerra), wherein the Colombian politicians are trying to gain support for the Polo party's candidates for the Colombian Senate, House of Representatives, and the Andean Parliament.<sup>328</sup> Ramon Eli Tamara, previously mentioned in Mr. Martinez's comments, is apparently the liaison that made the meeting possible. Much of the conversation was devoted to creating mechanisms to mobilize the people with double cédula (those with both Colombian and Venezuelan ID cards) living in Venezuela to cross the border in order to vote in the Colombian elections. According to the journalist who authored the article, Ricardo Puentes Melo, the politicians who attended the meeting are "emissaries of Gustavo Petro Urrego,"<sup>329</sup> the current mayor of Bogotá and one of the most prominent figures in Colombian leftist politics today.

This constitutes an example at the local level of political interference from Venezuela into Colombian domestic political affairs. Mr. Martinez's comments described links between the Bolivarian missions as a component of the Venezuelan government, Polo Democrático, and CUT, a prominent workers' union in Colombia. In a similar vein, the former FARC operative's comments describe links between the missions, the FARC, the Venezuelan government, leftist political campaigns in Colombia, and the CUT, the workers' union in Colombia. Finally, the journalist Ricardo Puentes Melo's article describes a lengthy meeting connecting Ramon Eli Tamara, a Polo Democrático party member in Cúcuta, to leftist political members in Bogotá, and the PSUV in Cúcuta. What

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<sup>328</sup> Ricardo Puentes Melo, "Las Reuniones Secretas Del Equipo De Petro Y El Psuv," Periodismo Sin Fronteras, <http://www.periodismosinfronteras.com/las-reuniones-petro-psuv.html> (accessed May 13, 2013).

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.



these connections demonstrate is that the Bolivarian missions are part of an active effort by the Venezuelan government and its governing party, the PSUV, to interfere with Colombian domestic politics. Although this evidence is drawn from a particular case, it does raise the question of the inability or unwillingness of the Colombian authorities to effectively oppose or at least object to such evident interference.

## **2. Ideological Expansion**

Advocates of Bolivarianism portray this ideology as a revolutionary political process, and that one of their primary foci is assisting the poor and the traditionally excluded classes of the Venezuelan population. The Bolivarian missions fit into this ideology as the “operational arm” of the government that executes the ideology, day-in and day-out. Under the aegis of humanitarian assistance provided by the missions in Colombia, there is also a subtle, accompanying process of sharing Bolivarian and socialist ideology. This process of indoctrination, or attempted indoctrination, is intended to benefit the Bolivarian regime and the FARC and ELN in Colombia. It is important to note that this behavior of sharing Bolivarian and socialist ideology is explicitly stated as part of the purpose of the Venezuelan Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Coordinating Commission for the Internationalization of Social [read: Bolivarian] Missions or CEIMS) office (see Chapter Two, Section B). The execution of the behavior suggests this process is not benign, but rather is intended to weaken the Colombian state, as we proceed to develop in the following paragraphs.

In Colombia, the missions combine with many associations and NGOs that characterize themselves as altruistic or humanitarian in nature, but which objectives go beyond simple charity. This thesis has described consistently the links between the missions and many of those organizations such as Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra (Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley or ACVC), Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region or ASCAMCAT), and Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria (Federation of National Agriculture Trade Unions or FENSUAGRO). These organizations provide easy access to various communities throughout Colombia. Despite their geographic

distribution, what these communities share is that they are generally in remote places of the country where Colombian state presence is scarce, and this situation makes the segments of the society that live in these communities particularly vulnerable to the instilling of radical ideas via the association and the missions, as there is less opportunity for counter-argument presented by either the state in deeds and words, or peers within the community with varying experiences.

Rafael Guarín, the former Colombian Vice-Minister of Defense interviewed for this thesis, argues that in Colombia the ultimate goal of the missions is to consolidate a social base through clandestine work that aims to delegitimize the state and break apart the legal frame of the nation.<sup>330</sup> Guarín regrets that the government does not see the missions as a [purposely] disruptive element in society.<sup>331</sup> Carlos Sierra, a reputable Colombian analyst, vehemently asserts that the “missions are a tool for continental expansion of the Socialism of the 21st Century.”<sup>332</sup> Similar views are shared by Fernando Londoño, former Colombian Minister of Defense and Interior, who sees the missions as a component of expansion of socialism and communism. He denounces the missions as having permeated social associations and non-governmental organizations to align the population with the Socialism of the 21st Century “which is the very same as Cuban communism.”<sup>333</sup> Londoño describes, for instance, the commitment of a couple of Jesuit priests—De Roux and Javier Giraldo—in using the missions to advance the indoctrination process within communities where they have influence.<sup>334</sup>

The NGO advisor interviewed for this research provided a clear opinion that, to her, the missions are an instrument of ideological expansion. This woman, who has first-hand experience with many of the rural and isolated communities in areas where the missions operate, asserts that the role of the missions is not necessarily destabilizing the state *per se*, but that they are effective as mechanisms for “ideological influence, change

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<sup>330</sup> Rafael Guarín, interview.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Carlos Sierra, interview.

<sup>333</sup> Fernando Londoño, interview.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

of thought, and psychological persuasion.”<sup>335</sup> Isidro Perez, Colonel (ret.) of the Venezuelan Army who was involved in the initial development of the missions, stated that all the missions have an intelligence component within them, with the specific task of enabling “the internationalization of the revolutionary process.”<sup>336</sup>

Another topic of shared concern among some of the interviewees is the link between the Bolivarian missions and the current FARC peace talks, especially the proposed Peasant Reserve Zones (in Spanish, Zonas de Reserva de Campesinos or ZRCs).<sup>337</sup> Guarín, Londoño, and Sierra share the opinion that the missions are effective in persuading vulnerable Colombian populations to support the Peasant Reserve Zones. The missions operate in many remote places of Colombia, and part of their message is intended to convince the inhabitants of those regions that the central government is illegitimate and incapable of assisting its own citizens, an absence that has been filled by the missions. Given this state absence, some of the peasant associations and the missions supporting them, advocate for an increase in the number of Peasant Reserve Zones, seeking a protected status, land rights, and administrative autonomy. According to Londoño “the [additional proposed] zones represent more than 9.5 million hectares [roughly 37,000 square miles, or the area of Indiana] in more than 50 places of Colombia.”<sup>338</sup>

The reasonable and justified concern of the interviewees is that the Peasant Reserve Zones may substantially increase the number and land area of the PRCs, and therefore increases the land area vulnerable to becoming co-opted by anti-Colombian organizations, such as FARC or the Bolivarian missions. This is reminiscent of the Switzerland-sized area FARC enjoyed autonomy in from 1998 to 2002, as a result of previous peace talks with the Colombian government. It also calls to mind Che Guevara’s

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<sup>335</sup> NGO Consultant, interview.

<sup>336</sup> Isidro Perez, interview.

<sup>337</sup> For a concise overview of the issue of Peasant Reserve Zones in the FARC peace talks, see “Land in Colombia: Reserved for Whom?” *The Economist*, April 6, 2013, <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21575801-peasant-farmers-and-peace-talks-reserved-whom> (accessed May 3, 2013).

<sup>338</sup> Fernando Londoño, interview.

insurgency concept—*focos*—to perpetuate violence against the state. In addition, another concern was raised by Rafael Guarín, who mentioned how the current spokesman of Asociación Nacional de Zonas de Reserva Campesina (National Association of Peasants Reserve Zones or ANZORC), Cesar Jerez, is simultaneously the international representative of ACVC, the peasant association that has raised suspicions because of its links with the FARC.<sup>339</sup> It seems that the indoctrination process has been very effective within these communities to the extent that many of the communities have mobilized—whether voluntarily or through coercion—to support the creation of the zones.

The missions in Colombia serve as platforms for promoting Bolivarian ideology. This section described relationships with Colombian associations that assist the missions “extend their reach” within Colombia. It also described concerns by interviewees for this thesis that characterize the missions as platforms for advancement of socialism and communism. Finally, there is concern that the missions are, in conjunction with some peasant associations, attempting to build support for expansion of Peasant Reserve Zones in the current peace talks with the FARC, which could potentially be used to “advance the Bolivarian revolution” within Colombia. The evidence presented suggests that the missions, although providing education, literacy programs, health, and other services within Colombia, do so, at least in part, in order to influence vulnerable populations within Colombia to identify with the values of the Bolivarian revolution, and ultimately, against the Colombian government. As Venezuelan Colonel (ret.) Perez stated, the missions are in Colombia to “advance the revolutionary process.”<sup>340</sup>

### **3. The Missions and their Relationship to Insurgency**

We have consistently described the links between every one of the missions studied as case studies and the terrorist groups in Colombia, either the FARC or the ELN. This raises a quandary: what are the implications of the seemingly paradoxical

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<sup>339</sup> Rafael Guarín, interview.

<sup>340</sup> Isidro Perez, interview.

relationship between the missions, apparently humanitarian in nature, and terrorist groups that are inherently violent? And furthermore, what does this this phenomenon bring to Colombia as a sovereign state?

One proposed explanation is given by Venezuelan Colonel (ret.) Isidro Perez, who describes the missions as a “transnational project which has in Colombia a point of contact: the FARC.”<sup>341</sup> Perez also asserts that this is not an isolated phenomenon, but is the Colombian manifestation of an international terrorism network that the FARC has connections to, from Iran and Syria, and lamenting that in his opinion, both Santos (the current Colombian President) and Obama are blind to this emerging threat.<sup>342</sup>

The persistent pattern that we observe throughout our research shows a relationship of reciprocity and mutual interest between the Venezuelan government via the Bolivarian missions, and the insurgent groups FARC and ELN. On the one hand, the missions support the insurgency by providing them with services and necessary supplies, including health care, for the FARC and ELN operatives. The missions are also helpful in an ongoing process to legitimize the insurgency and delegitimize the state, as Rafael Guarín describes,<sup>343</sup> particularly in rural areas where Colombian state absence is high. On the other hand, the missions receive easy access to regions and people traditionally influenced by the insurgency, opportunity that gives to the missions—and to the Venezuelan government—public recognition, admiration, sympathy, and and support.

The lynchpin of this symbiotic relationship is the shared ideology, as the Venezuelan intelligence official asserted: “the Bolivarian project is mutually shared,”<sup>344</sup> between the Venezuelan government and the Colombian insurgency. The missions, introduced as Bolivarian, fit perfectly into the rhetoric of these two actors. One Colombian intelligence official, an expert on the ELN, says that the missions equally

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<sup>341</sup> Isidro Perez, interview.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid.

<sup>343</sup> Rafael Guarín, interview.

<sup>344</sup> DIM Official, interview.

benefit honest people and terrorists, highlighting that his analysis has led him to the conclusion that the Venezuelan government project is utterly essential and necessary to the ELN's campaign plan.<sup>345</sup>

In addition to the shared ideology, some have argued that there is also a material commitment between the two parties, one example of which is the aforementioned material support from the missions to the insurgent groups. However, the missions have apparently received some monetary funding from the Colombian insurgency, money that is likely part of the revenue from the “300 metric tons of cocaine that pass through Venezuela to be exported to the U.S and Europe, money that supports the FARC and a corrupt military leadership in Venezuela.”<sup>346</sup> This bold hypothesis was posited by the former Colombian Defense Minister Fernando Londoño during his interview with us. However, additional analysis of this potential revenue source and its origin is beyond the scope of this thesis.

### **C. CONCLUSIONS**

Common to all four missions studied in this thesis was evidence of both covert and overt activities within Colombia. However, what differentiates whether or not the missions are associated with only Venezuelan activity, or Venezuelan and Cuban activity, is the status of a formal agreement between Cuba and Venezuela for assistance within the subject area of the particular mission. Both the missions with Cuban influence required Cuban expertise in order to implement them. Mission Milagro requires Cuban medical professionals to implement, to the extent that the program is known colloquially in Cúcuta as “lost Cubanos” rather than as a Venezuelan mission. This mission is facilitated by the 2005 Sandino Pact between Cuba and Venezuela. Mission Robinson requires Cuban literacy professionals, and employs a literacy program developed in Cuba. This mission is facilitated by the Convenio Integral de Cooperación (Integral Cooperation Accord) between Cuba and Venezuela instituted in 2000.

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<sup>345</sup> ELN Intelligence Analyst, interview.

<sup>346</sup> Fernando Londoño, interview.

The Bolivarian missions bring to Colombia more than just the scope of their overt mission statements suggest, more than just cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and solidarity between the sister nations of Colombia and Venezuela. Consistent evidence from fieldwork in Colombia lead us to the conclusion that there are three core themes common to the missions' activities in Colombia: first, clear political interference that aims to intervene directly and improperly in Colombian politics by sponsoring candidates and creating electoral maneuvers on behalf of candidates aligned with the socialist and revolutionary Venezuelan process. Second, an ideological expansion aimed at co-opting citizens to favor the revolutionary cause, a goal that may be achieved through the educational and literacy programs as well as "revolutionary talks." This ideological expansion is larger than just Venezuelan-based Bolivarianism, but also includes Cuban-based programs that advance Cuban interests. Third, the support to the insurgency with different resources has enabled these groups to survive the Colombian government offensive during the Uribe regime. Currently, support to the insurgency is ostensibly through the peace process, which is seeking an agreement favorable to the insurgent groups, in order to maintain the insurgents as a viable partner for the Venezuelan and Cuban regimes, thus facilitating all of their interests in weakening their traditional rival, Colombia.

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## **IX. CONCLUSIONS**

The Bolivarian missions are a grand experiment in an alternative system of governance and providing services to a population on a national scale. They also represent the promotion of a top-down change in structure of government. Chávez sought to bypass the existing bureaucracy of the Venezuelan ministries, and install the missions as a “parallel form of government” which he could more directly control and thus consolidate power in the presidential office. They are a component of an eclectic and ambitious “Socialism of the 21st Century” that in Chávez’s mind was a vision for a completely new form of government, a “participatory democracy.” As such, the missions’ role in this new vision is the execution of delivery of services to the population, the day-to-day provision of government services necessary for government function. The scope of the missions, then, is comprehensive, and in a sense is equal to the scope of Venezuelan federal government, as the parallel structure of the missions seems intended to gradually replace the ministries within the government.

### **A. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH AND FINDINGS**

This thesis has focused on Bolivarian missions in Colombia that are sponsored by the Venezuelan government. Bolivarian missions, often referred to as “social missions” as well, are essentially a series of social assistance programs established by the Venezuelan government beginning in 2003, in order to confront poverty within the country, and to provide basic services and support to Venezuelans, especially the “traditionally excluded” classes. Beginning in 2005, the Venezuelan government began to establish the missions internationally as a component of its foreign policy through the Comisión de Enlace para la Internacionalización de las Misiones Sociales (Coordinating Commission for Internationalization of Social [read: Bolivarian] Missions, CEIMS), a part of the Venezuelan Ministry of Foreign Relations.

Through the execution of the research, we sought to understand the purpose and scope of the Bolivarian missions conducting activities within Colombia. While the missions have clear and overt mission statements that focus on activities and subject

areas in civil society, a debate exists as to their true nature. Do the missions act only within the parameters defined by their mission statements, providing social services within Colombia, or are they acting in other ways as well, such as legal covers for Venezuelan government-sponsored illicit or illegal activities? The thesis, then, addresses the following question: what is the purpose of the Bolivarian missions in Colombia sponsored by the Venezuelan government? We found through our research that the Venezuelan-sponsored Bolivarian missions in Colombia engage in both legitimate and illegitimate activity in Colombia.

This research employed the comparative case study methodology, and was augmented by fieldwork that consists of interviews of people with direct and indirect contact with the missions, conducted in Bogotá and Cúcuta, Colombia, which is the main border-crossing city on the Venezuelan-Colombian border. The four Bolivarian missions selected as case studies for this research are as follows: *Misión Identidad* (provision of cédulas, or Venezuelan ID cards), *Misión Milagro* (ocular health care), *Misión Robinson* (literacy programs), and *Misión Guaicaipuro* (support to indigenous peoples). Of the approximately 40 missions created since the inception of the Bolivarian missions in 2003, at least seven are active in Colombia. Of those, we selected the four most active missions in Colombia as case studies for this thesis. In addition, these four missions are representative of four different “areas of action” within the Bolivarian missions: government / administrative services, health services, education, and social services.

The case studies were also augmented by Chapter II which examined the particular phenomenon of Hugo Chávez’s eclectic ideology of Bolivarianism, because it became clear that a thorough understanding of the missions is not possible without an understanding of the unique ideology that informs and underpins them. Thus, in the chapter that explained the ideology of Bolivarianism, we found that one of its principal components are Socialism of the 21st Century, a Chávez-developed “new socialism” that seeks to install a “participatory democracy” where Venezuelans have a direct hand in self-government rather than a representative democracy. Chavismo is the promotion of Hugo Chávez by individuals, supporters, organizations, and movements to near-mythic proportions, as a larger-than-life leader. The other essential components are a devotion to

a Simón Bolívar-inspired ideal of Latin American unity, and a transition from a capitalist based economy to a socialist based economy that consciously promotes the well-being of the “traditionally excluded” classes of Venezuela. The ideology inspires an active foreign policy that seeks to develop Bolivarianism beyond Venezuela’s borders, and the missions are a component of Venezuela’s foreign policy.

Chapter III studied the phenomenon of the missions as a comprehensive program, in order to arrive at an improved understanding of the missions selected for case studies and provide context for them. The chapter addressed the conditions in Venezuela at the time of their initial establishment, the political pressures Chávez faced at the time, and how the missions constituted part of his response to those pressures, in order to assure himself victory in the 2004 presidential referendum election. In addition, the chapter examined financing of the missions, provided an overview of all of the missions, as well as a review of how some of the missions were incorporated into the foreign policy of Venezuela and exported throughout the region, including Colombia.

Perhaps the most instructive insight into the origin and development of the missions came from Chávez himself, when he explained that the missions were developed in response to polling indicating he would lose in the upcoming presidential referendum of August 2004. Therefore he developed the missions in order to “attack from the bottom,” and in so doing, enlisted the help of his staunch ally, Fidel Castro, who provided resources for the missions, primarily doctors, teachers, and other experts necessary for development and implementation of the missions. The funding of the missions is accomplished primarily through funds from PDVSA, via a variety of national funds that are essentially non-budgetary mechanisms tightly controlled by the executive branch of government. Thus, accurate funding figures are difficult to ascertain.

## **B. SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

In Chapter IV, *Misión Identidad*, we studied the mission responsible for issuance of the Venezuelan national ID cards, the cédula, and its activities in Colombia. Although there is a legitimate reason for Colombians to be issued Venezuelan cédulas due to both countries allowing for dual citizenship, the findings demonstrate the mission is

manipulated by the Bolivarian regime in order to increase the electorate of pro-Chávez voters. We documented via first-hand research manipulation of the Venezuelan-Colombian border to ensure pro-Chávez voters were able to cross prior to the April 2013 election, but not anti-Chávez voters. In addition, the mission supports terrorist groups in Colombia, principally FARC and ELN, by provision of cédulas to them in order to provide them safe haven in Venezuela. The groups are also granted influence over other Colombians through their role as an intermediary between the mission and other Colombians who desire Venezuelan cédulas; in exchange for their help, they are able to “ask” for assistance from the recipient of the cédula.

Chapter V examined *Misión Milagro*. We determined that the mission rests on three principles: Cuban support, government affiliation, and party affiliation with Chávez’s party of the PSUV. We also found that the mission is enabled by Cuban support, to the extent that the mission is colloquially known in Colombia as *los Cubanos*, Spanish for “the Cubans.” This stands to reason, as the mission was formalized by the Sandino Pact of 2005 between Venezuela and Cuba, which specifically calls for cooperation between the two countries to address ocular health care, not only in Venezuela, but throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. We also found a relationship between the mission and the FARC and ELN, wherein the mission provides health care to members of these organizations, in return for increased access to rural areas within Colombia with heavy FARC presence. As with *Identidad*, we see a role for the FARC and ELN wherein they increase their influence over populations in Colombia due to their ability to choose who may receive medical care from the missions. This influence is in conjunction with Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra (Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley or ACVC), and Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region or ASCAMCAT).

In Chapter VI, we studied the activities of *Misión Robinson*, the literacy mission, in Colombia. We found that the mission’s literacy programs are based on a Cuban literacy program developed by Instituto Pedagógico Latinoamericano y Caribeño (Pedagogic Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean or IPLAC), a component of the Cuban Ministry of Education. We also found that the mission is popular and well-known

in and around Cúcuta. The Cuban literacy program is also instituted throughout Colombia via an NGO that has Cuban support: the Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana or Latin American Pedagogic Foundation. The mission's activities in Colombia fit into a larger pattern of Venezuelan and Cuban interference in Colombian politics, to include public media reporting on incidents in which Cuban and Venezuelan diplomats in Colombia were found to be "politically proselytizing" together at the Central American and Caribbean Games that took place in Cartagena, Colombia, in 2006. Another instance is of a 2007 incident in which two Venezuelan officials were expelled from Colombia due to interference in domestic politics in the Barranquilla suburb of Baranoa.

In Chapter VII, *Misión Guaicaipuro*, we studied the mission responsible for support to indigenous peoples, and its activities in Colombia. We conclude that the mission operates as a mobilization structure, intended to mobilize the indigenous peoples within Colombia as supporters, and thus voters, for the Bolivarian government of Hugo Chávez. We also found that the mission serves to "internationalize the Bolivarian revolution" by sponsoring and hosting international congresses for indigenous peoples from across the Americas, to include the United States, interestingly enough. These congresses, such as the Bolivarian Congress of Indo-American Youth and the International Congress of the Great Nation of the Anti-Imperialist Indigenous Peoples enable Chávez an avenue from which to communicate his views to an international audience.

Within Colombia, the mission serves a strategic function as well as a political-electoral function. The mission not only engages with indigenous peoples within Colombia in order to try and gain their votes via provision of Venezuelan cédulas, but through the mission attempts to gain their sympathy and thus create an ideologically-aligned population. In Colombia, the mission's primary involvement is with the Wayúu people in the La Guajira peninsula in northern Colombia, and the Motilón Bari people further south along the Colombian-Venezuelan border, in the vicinity of the Venezuelan state of Táchira and the Colombian department of Norte de Santander. We also found extension of *Misión Guaicaipuro's* influence beyond the border region through

association with groups such as Federación Nacional Sindical Unitaria Agropecuaria (Federation of National Agriculture Trade Unions or FENSUAGRO).

### **C. SUMMARY OF COMMON TRENDS ACROSS CASE STUDIES**

Common to all of the missions' activities in Colombia is a combination of both overt and covert activity. Whereas all of the missions execute activities based on their respective mission statements, our fieldwork which consisted of firsthand research and experience demonstrates that the missions are involved in promoting the "Bolivarian Revolution" in Colombia through covert activities. The main themes or trends that are common to all of the studied missions in Colombia are: political interference, ideological expansion, and cooperation with insurgent groups FARC and ELN.

In addition, there is also evidence of Cuban-sponsored legitimate and illegitimate activity in Colombia through the missions in Colombia. This is due to the direct Cuban involvement in two of the four missions, *Misión Milagro* and *Misión Robinson*. *Misión Identidad* and *Misión Guacaipuro* do not have a need for Cuban expertise in order to operate, and thus they do not demonstrate in Cuban-sponsored activity.

### **D. AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Areas for further study are based on the identification of links, networks, and relationships between the Bolivarian missions in Colombia, the FARC and ELN, and peasant associations. Possible areas for further study include network analysis on the Bolivarian mission—Colombian insurgent group—peasant association linkages shown in this research.

Another area for further study is the analysis of public policy in areas where insurgent groups and peasant associations are both present, principally areas where two peasant associations in particular are active: the Asociación Campesina del Valle del Cimitarra (Peasant Association of the Cimitarra Valley or ACVC), and Asociación Campesina del Catatumbo (Peasant Association of the Catatumbo Region or ASCAMCAT). These areas are the Cimitarra river valley and the Catatumbo region in

the north of the Department of Norte de Santander. Study should focus on what public policies in these areas would promote development and reduce conditions that create a need for services provided by the Bolivarian missions.

We recommend for the mechanism of the Comisión Binacional de Fronteras (Bi-National Border Commission between Colombia and Venezuela or COMBIFRON) to establish rules and limitations on the activities of the Bolivarian missions in Colombia to act only in accordance with their explicit mission statements. The COMBIFRON was established in 1994 by Colombia and Venezuela in order to coordinate for the sharing of military intelligence between the two countries' militaries, and since then has functioned off and on as a coordinating mechanism, often dependent on the status of diplomatic relations between Colombia and Venezuela. Our recommendation is for a more formal agreement to be implemented with a regular meeting schedule, in order to implement each government's authorized activities within the other country. With respect to the Bolivarian missions, the COMBIFRON could be used as a legal mechanism to ensure the missions are operating solely within the intent of their overt mission statements. This would alleviate concern regarding their connections to the FARC and ELN, and would have the added benefit of incorporating Venezuelan government agreement on such management of the missions' activities in Colombia.

Concomitant with the need for a renewed military coordination mechanism, a need exists for the Colombian government to better understand the behavior, attitudes, and objectives of civic associations and NGOs. Currently, the Colombian Constitution is extremely protective of civil rights and liberties, so any interference in these associations' activities from the government could be seen as intrusive violations of constitutional rights, and rightly so. However, the Colombian government at the same time has an obligation to protect its citizens and its sovereignty from international political interference. Hence, the implementation of a trusted and transparent process is necessary in order to exert Colombian sovereignty over domestic issues and prevent political interference and external support to insurgent groups, principally FARC and ELN. This includes mis-use or co-option of NGOs for self-serving means.

The government of Colombia should pay special attention to traditionally ignored regions of the country and specific populations in order to mitigate risk that such neglect could lead to continued insurgency. Specifically, special attention and additional resources and programs should be developed toward the remote, rural areas of the Catatumbo region and the Cimitarra river valley. Additional resources and programs should be developed towards the Wayúu and Motilón Bari indigenous peoples.

With respect to Cuba and its participation in the missions, specifically *Misión Milagro* and *Misión Robinson*, in-depth analysis and investigation of the nature of continued Cuban involvement in the missions in Colombia should be conducted. The point of such research is to determine whether Cuban involvement in the missions follows proper diplomatic protocol, and whether such involvement is beneficial to Colombia. Colombian Ministry of Education experts could undertake a study of the value of the literacy programs offered within Colombia by the Cuban-sponsored NGO Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana or Latin American Pedagogic Foundation, in order to determine the educational value of their activities and whether or not such literacy programs could best be executed by Colombian institutions (to include Colombian NGOs), instead. Realistically, Colombian capacity for literacy programs already exists domestically; therefore we submit that programs literacy programs run by the Fundación Pedagógica Latinoamericana that have a Cuban-developed content should be replaced with domestic programs. One such program with a proven track record is the Integral School Literacy Program,<sup>347</sup> an NGO-government partnership.

Finally, the Colombian government is currently in the midst of peace negotiations with the FARC in Cuba, a process wherein the countries of Cuba and Venezuela are moderators. The government should undertake a thoughtful evaluation of the role of these two countries and their objectivity in the peace process. Different moderators not ideologically aligned with the FARC nor with the government of Colombia should be sought. An impartial, recognized organization such as the OAS is an ideal moderator for the next phases of the FARC peace talks.





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<sup>347</sup> “Effective Literacy Programmes > I,” UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, <http://www.unesco.org/uii/litbase/?menu=16&programme=123> (accessed May 28, 2013).



## APPENDIX A. SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE BOLIVARIAN MISSIONS<sup>348</sup>

Table 3. List of Missions in Chronological Order of Establishment: Mission Logo and Brief Summary Description





| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description   |
|---|--|
|    | <p>Barrio Adentro I / Inside the Neighborhood I: This mission is the first of the missions established in Venezuela. It is a health care mission and its mission is to provide basic health care clinics throughout Venezuela. Primarily staffed by Cuban medical professionals.</p>   |
|   | <p>Robinson I: This mission is the first of the education missions, and is one of the best known of the missions. The primary mission of Robinson I is to provide basic literacy education to all Venezuelans, with the primary aim to eliminate illiteracy in Venezuela.</p>  |
|  | <p>Sucre: This mission is the second of the educations. It is named after Antonio José de Sucre, one of the leaders for Venezuelan independence, and one of Simon Bolivar's closest peers. The mission's primary purpose is to provide an alternative path to university-level education, especially aimed at those students who are not otherwise able to afford it.</p>            |
|  | <p>Robinson II: This mission is the third education mission established, and the second in the Robinson series. The primary aim of Robinson II is to provide primary education to all Venezuelans, especially to non-traditional students who for whatever reason never had access to, or never finished, their primary education (defined as a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade education).</p> |

<sup>348</sup> Mission images and information compiled primarily from “Gobierno De Venezuela: Misiones,” Centro Nacional de Tecnologías de Información, <http://www.gobiernoenlinea.ve/home/misiones.dot> (accessed April 15, 2013), and also, Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, “Misiones Bolivarianas,” Gobierno Bolivariano de Venezuela, [http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=527&Itemid=66](http://ceims.mppre.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=527&Itemid=66) (accessed September 9, 2012).

| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description   |
|---|--|
|    | <p>Frente Francisco de Miranda, or the Francisco de Miranda Front, is named after a Venezuelan revolutionary figure. It is a militia composed of Venezuelans who receive training in Cuba. Estimates range from 10,000 to 15,000 members. The members support the activities of other missions by providing personnel to support their work. The Miranda Front reports to the Office of the President, and not the Venezuelan Armed Forces.</p>  |
|    | <p>Ribas: This mission is named after Venezuelan independence hero José Félix Ribas. The main objective of the mission is to provide remedial high school education to Venezuelans who for whatever reason, were unable to complete high school education through normal channels.</p>   |
|   | <p>Mission Miracle is intended to provide ocular health care services, free of charge, to all Venezuelans regardless of socio-economic background. The mission is made possible through the Sandino Pact of 2005, signed by Presidents Chávez and Castro, which enabled for Cuban health professionals to travel to Venezuela to staff clinics to conduct minor eye surgeries, as well as for Venezuelans to travel to Cuba for such services. Also, probably the most high-profile mission internationally.</p> |
|  | <p>Mission Market aims to provide subsidized food and basic goods to Venezuelans, especially Venezuelans of the lower socio-economic classes. This mission traces its roots to the government response to the national and oil strike of 2002, when the government used the military to assure supplies of basic foodstuffs after most food companies joined the strike.</p>   |
|  | <p>Mission Identity's primary aim is to provide national identification cards (<i>cédulas</i>) to all Venezuelans, as well as foreign legal residents residing within Venezuela. Part of the mission's aim is accomplished through mobile ID card units to provide coverage to isolated regions of the country.</p>  |

| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description  |
|---|---|
|    | <p>Misión About Face was intended to encourage domestic sustainable local development via cooperatives and “endogenous development nuclei.” Its purpose is to transform the basic economic structure of the country from purely a capitalist-based system, to one that is “nationalist and Bolivarian,” all with the aim of providing a dignified quality of life for Venezuelans, through “the participation of the creative force of the people in the production of goods and services.”</p> |
|    | <p>Misión Habitat is a housing mission under the Ministry of Housing. Its focus is on new housing construction. The mission also takes advantage of Venezuela’s wealth in petroleum products by building homes using petroleum-based building products. This mission is apparently only active within Venezuela, as it is not listed on the CEIMS website.</p>  |
|   | <p>Misión Guaicaipuro is the mission dedicated to the development of the indigenous peoples of Venezuela, as well as to the inclusion of the indigenous peoples into the rest of Venezuela, as historically they had been excluded and discriminated against. Guaicaipuro functions as a “solutions provider,” connecting the indigenous peoples with the services of the other missions, and the rest of the Venezuelan government.</p>  |
|  | <p>Misión Piar is one of the smaller missions. Its aim is to “include the small-scale miner in the 5 planned axes of the National Economic and Social Development Plan: economic, social, political, territorial, and international...with the final aim of elevating the civic, social, and political conscience [of the small-scale miner].”<sup>349</sup></p>  |

<sup>349</sup> *Gobierno De Venezuela: Misiones.*

| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description  |
|---|---|
|    | <p>Misión Zamora’s primary subject area is land redistribution within Venezuela. “The objective is to reorganize the tenancy and use of idle agricultural lands in order to eradicate large estates, promote rural development in the strategic axes of the nation, and guarantee agricultural and food security of the population through development of sustainable agriculture.”<sup>350</sup></p>   |
|    | <p>Misión Inside the Neighborhood II. Phase II of this mission takes the activity of Phase I a step further by moving beyond the provision of basic health care in neighborhood health clinics. Phase II provides Centers of Advanced [Medical] Technology, Comprehensive Diagnostic Centers, and Comprehensive Rehabilitation Clinics.</p>   |
|   | <p>Misión Culture is intended to provide the resources for Venezuelans to exercise their creative rights through development of their creative spirit. The idea is to offer the necessary legal protections and other necessary measure to develop, protect and preserve the culture, the tangible and intangible national legacy, and the collective memory of the nation.</p>   |
|  | <p>Inside the Neighborhood III provides modernization and updating to the national hospital system in Venezuela. Unlike the two primary phases which are outside the traditional medical system in Venezuela, Phase III consciously seeks to bring this system into the mission. The first component of Phase III is updating medical equipment within hospitals, and second is the improvement of the hospital buildings themselves through remodeling and new construction.</p> |

<sup>350</sup> *Gobierno De Venezuela: Misiones.*

| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description  |
|---|---|
|    | <p>Robinson III: Reading Circles. This mission is the extension of Robinson I and II, and is intended to provide a medium through which graduates of I and II may continue in the habit of reading and education. The Reading Circles are primarily focused on “political, economic, social, and cultural readings of national interest.”<sup>351</sup></p> |
|    | <p>Ribas Technical and Social. This mission is based on the original Mission Ribas, but this particular iteration of it is intended to provide technical high school equivalent education for development of skills that are applicable for employment in the petroleum industry within Venezuela.</p>  |
|   | <p>Mission Negra Hipolita. This mission is named after “Negra Hipolita,” a slave of the Simon Bolivar family who personally cared for the young Bolivar and thus became a mother figure to him. The mission is focused on providing services to homeless Venezuelans and those in “extreme poverty,” to include those Venezuelans who are drug addicts.</p> |
|  | <p>Mission Science. The aim of the mission is to model a new scientific and technological culture for Venezuela that supports collective organization of the sciences, scientific dialogue, and participation of diverse actors in the scientific-technological arena, with the ultimate aim of arriving at higher levels of knowledge.</p>                 |
|  | <p>Mothers of the Barrio. This mission is directed at supporting mothers, especially mothers who are heads of household, and classified as living in poverty. The mission consists of cash disbursements, but also programs designed to assist the mothers to prepare for moving beyond poverty.</p>  |

<sup>351</sup> Fundación Samuel Robinson, “Fundación Samuel Robinson—Misión Robinson,” [http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=45](http://www.misionrobinson.me.gob.ve/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=45) (accessed February 2, 2013).



| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description   |
|---|--|
|    | <p>Mission Tree. This mission is an environmental mission that has as its principal aim the protection of the Venezuelan environment. The Bolivarian influence with this mission is the use of the mission as a new model of development that takes into account participation of the community in the recuperation, conservation, and sustainable use of the Venezuelan forests.</p>              |
|    | <p>Inside the Neighborhood IV. This mission is for advanced and specialized health care, especially for health care specialties for which there is a shortfall in Venezuela. For example, the mission kicked off with the inauguration of the Pediatric Cardiologic Hospital “Gilberto Rodríguez Ochoa” in August of 2006.</p>   |
|   | <p>Revolutionary Energy. This mission is focused on promoting the efficient use of energy in daily life in Venezuela. The most well publicized activity of the mission is replacement of incandescent bulbs with fluorescent bulbs on a national scale.</p>  |
|  | <p>Mission Smile. This mission is focused on correcting dental problems, especially those problems that require oral surgery, or dental prostheses.</p>  |
|  | <p>Villanueva. This mission is named in honor of Venezuelan architect Carlos Raúl Villanueva. The mission is focused on urban planning with an emphasis on the problems in the poorer barrios of Venezuelan cities. It is intended to complement Mission Habitat and Mission Housing, which have achieved poor results in the housing sector, due to problems with bureaucracy and corruption.</p> |

| Mission Logo   | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description  |
|--|---|
|  <p>MISIÓN<br/>Alma Mater</p>   | <p>Misión Alma Mater. This mission is focused on creation of new universities in Venezuela, with the vision of transforming the Venezuelan university system in line with the National Project Simon Bolivar, thus guaranteeing the right of higher education for all.<sup>352</sup></p>  |
|  <p>Misión<br/>Música</p>   | <p>Misión Music. Mission Music has a history that predates the creation of the Bolivarian missions as a comprehensive program. The mission incorporated what was previously known as <i>El Sistema</i>, or “The System.” The roots of the program go back to 1975, when José Antonio Abreu established a youth orchestra. Today, <i>El Sistema</i> has inspired similar programs worldwide, including the U.S.</p>  |
|  <p>Che<br/>GUEVARA<br/>MISIÓN SOCIALISTA</p>  | <p>Che Guevara. This mission replaced Mission About Face, and its subject area is essentially the same as Mission About Face. Essentially, the mission is to transform the national economic model in Venezuela from one based on capitalism, to one of socialism, and in so doing, guarantee the social well-being and labor of the participants in the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2007-2013, as a part of the supreme objective of achieving “Mission Christ: Zero Poverty by 2021.”</p> |
|  <p>batalla<br/>por la<br/>felicidad<br/>MISIÓN<br/>JOSÉ<br/>GREGORIO<br/>HERNÁNDEZ</p> | <p>Misión José Gregorio Hernández is focused on providing services to Venezuelans with disabilities. It is named for José Gregorio Hernández, a pioneer of medicine and public health in Venezuela. The mission, as with most of the missions, is offered at no charge for those who qualify for the mission’s services.</p>  |

<sup>352</sup> Misión Alma Mater: Educación Universitaria Bolivariana Y Socialista (Caracas: Ministerio Del Poder Popular Para La Educación Universitaria, 2009), [http://www.mppeu.gob.ve/web/uploads/documentos/documentosVarios/pdf21-12-2009\\_07:30:40.pdf](http://www.mppeu.gob.ve/web/uploads/documentos/documentosVarios/pdf21-12-2009_07:30:40.pdf) (accessed March 15, 2013).

| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description   |
|---|--|
|    | <p>13<sup>th</sup> of April. The objective of 13<sup>th</sup> of April Mission is to strengthen popular power through the creation of social communes. The mission is named in honor of the date in 2002 when Chávez returned to power after the short-lived coup against him. The first stage is to make “superhuman” efforts to improve the lives of those living in the barrio, and the second stage is to construct entirely new communes and “socialist cities” that guarantee quality of life.</p> |
|    | <p>Great Mission AgroVenezuela’s vision stems from President Chávez’s call for a fight against global hunger. The mission consists in support to small- and medium-scale farmers to enable them to harvest, with the idea that ultimately, the overall output will increase.</p>   |
|   | <p>Baby Jesus. Mission Baby Jesus was categorized as a “sacred” mission by President Chávez upon its founding in 2009. The mission is aimed at improving maternal health and infant health, from pre-natal stages through to pediatric health.</p>   |
|  | <p>Great Mission Venezuela Housing. The ultimate aim of this mission is to end the housing shortage in Venezuela. The mission offers financing programs for middle-class Venezuelan families to purchase their own homes. The three avenues to participate are: home purchase, purchase in a new development, or financing for construction on land already owned.</p>   |
|  | <p>Great Mission Love for the Elderly Venezuela. This mission is roughly equivalent to social security in the United States. It is intended to provide for those Venezuelans who don’t have Venezuelan social security, or otherwise didn’t qualify for it. The mission is open to women 55 or older, men 60 or older, and foreign citizens with at least 10 years of legal residence within Venezuela.</p>  |



| Mission Logo  | Mission Name & Brief Summary Description   |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Great Mission Children of Venezuela. The vision of this mission is to assist children in extreme poverty. There are four categories of youth it is intended to assist: pregnant teenagers in poverty; pregnant women in poverty; children under 17 living in poverty; and people with disabilities, without any age limit.</p>  |
|  | <p>Great Mission Knowledge and Work. This mission is intended to combat unemployment and underemployment, with a particular emphasis on youth and women. There are four components to the mission: 1) a system of registration of needs, and offers of employment; 2) a new revolutionary legal and institutional framework; 3) system of formation for production based on three axes: early education, technical education, university education; and 4) a new socially oriented model of production</p> |

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## APPENDIX B. REFERENCE MAP: KEY FEATURES, COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA

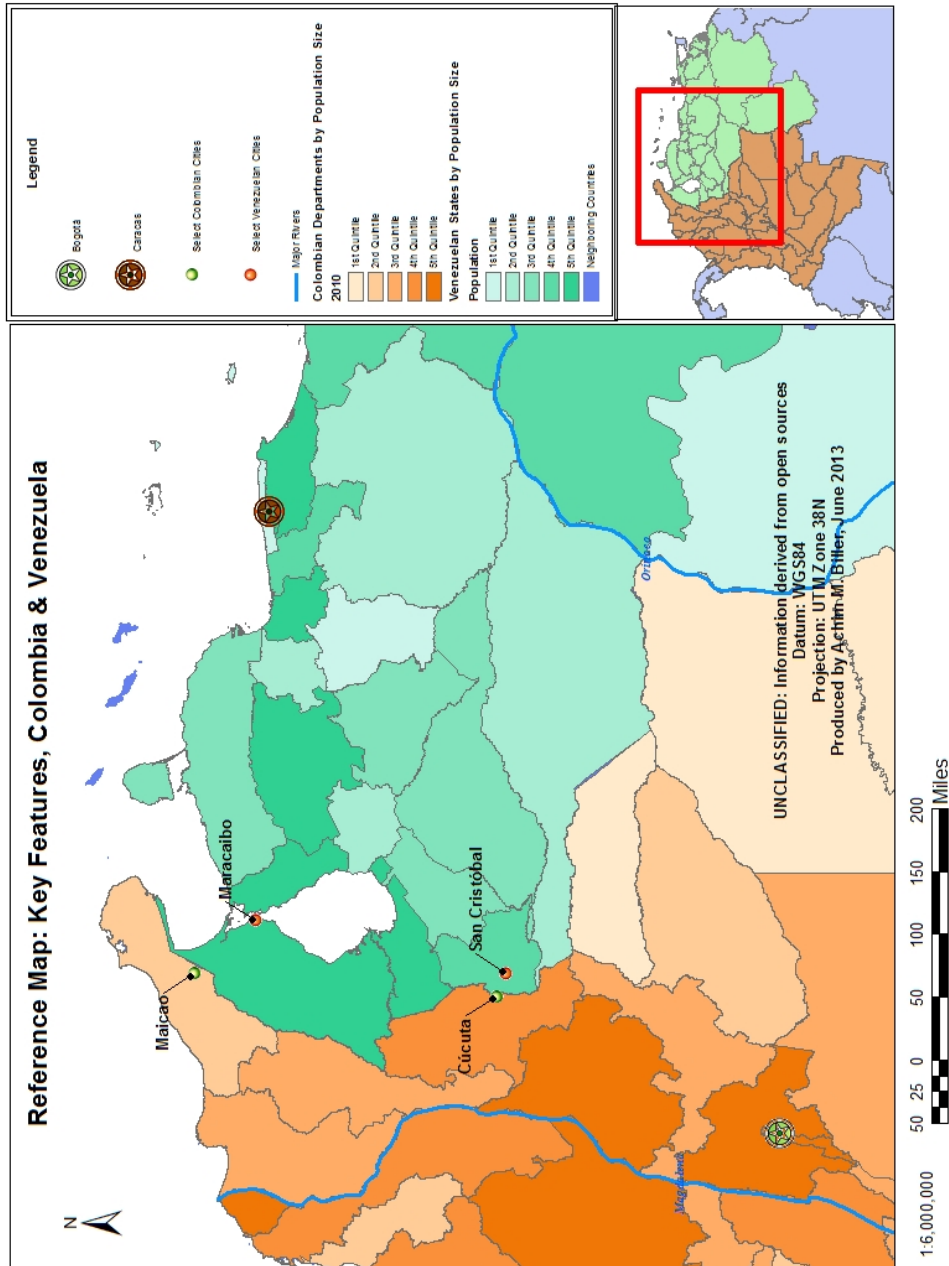


Figure 5. Reference Map: Key Features, Colombia and Venezuela

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