The Advance of Radical Populist Doctrine in Latin America

How The Bolivarian Alliance is Remaking Militaries, Dismantling Democracy and Combating the Empire

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Introduction

There is growing concern in policy circles across the political spectrum over the declining ability of the United States to effectively influence events in faraway places such as the Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Nigeria and elsewhere. Yet far less attention has been paid to the significant loss of influence much closer to home – Latin America, where there is a concerted effort by radical self-proclaimed socialist and populist governments to erase any trace of U.S. military and security doctrine, weaken economic and cultural ties, and portray any and all U.S. policy decisions as seeking to recolonize Latin America.

U.S. influence is being replaced by a lethal doctrine of asymmetrical warfare, inspired by authoritarian governments seeking perpetual power and nurtured by Iran. Through an interlocking and rapidly expanding network of official websites, publishing houses, think tanks and military academies, the governments of Argentina, Cuba and Venezuela have created a dominant narrative that identifies the United States as the primary threat to Latin America.

A constant in the narrative, and a particular favorite of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, is that a U.S. invasion is imminent and unavoidable. This is because the alleged United States policy is based on pillaging the region’s natural resources, toppling the revolutionary regimes leading the march to Latin American independence, and subjugating its citizens.

This narrative has long been a part of the Latin American landscape, shaped by mass movements, armed insurgencies and Marxist ideologies, and based on the turbulent history of relations between the United States and the region. What is different now is the overt multi-government sponsorship of the effort and the official adoption of these positions as policy and doctrine. This gives the current campaign deeper roots and access to levers of state power.

Throughout the Cold War and the 15 years after, only Cuba sponsored a sustained propaganda war against the United States, democratic values, and U.S. “hegemony.” With virtually no resources and largely isolated from the Internet revolution in its early years, the efforts had little impact and were widely ignored or unknown.

This has changed dramatically over the past decade with the financial sponsorship of Venezuela and its allies. Flush with oil revenues at a time when U.S. attention was focused on two hot wars, the radical populist governments have rapidly reshaped the battle of ideas against the United States in Latin America.

The 8-member Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA), espousing “Socialism for the 21st Century”, is replacing U.S. influence with a toxic mix of anti-
democratic values, massive corruption, and a doctrine that draws on terrorism and totalitarian models, including the justification of the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States. In an indication of the organization’s inclination, Iran and Syria are the only two countries that have been granted observer status in ALBA. In addition to the eight nations formally in ALBA, Argentina has become a de facto member of the alliance under the government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner and her government has become one of the leading state sponsors of the new ideology.

Under the banner of the “Bolivarian Revolution,” named for South American liberator Simón Bolivar, the group has tried to forge a new economic, political and military model that is completely untethered from Western democratic values and models. Rather, the bloc looks to Cuba, Iran, Hezbollah, China and Russia as anti-imperialist bulwarks to be emulated. Alliances with Zimbabwe, Angola, Syria and other repressive regimes are viewed as beneficial to the revolution.

As one prominent Bolivarian website stated, “Every U.S. military base in Our America is not only a terrible threat, but an attack on the dignity of the people and an intolerable humiliation.”

The Bolivarian revolution is not a significant military threat to the United States. Rather, the primary threat lies in the willingness of the alliance to offer sanctuary, support, and infrastructure to those with an overtly hostile, multifaceted agenda toward the United States (Iran, Russia), or countries like China who have both strategic, intelligence and economic designs in the region. The ALBA axis acts as a gateway and secure entry point for these nations, and for hostile non-state actors and proxies such as Hezbollah, the Basque ETA, transnational organized crime groups linked to Russian and Chinese state presence, and other actors.

Visits by Russian naval ships and long-range bombers, and Chinese military sales and scholarships for regional military officers are portrayed as examples of international solidarity with the Bolivarian revolution, and therefore beneficial.

In contrast, in the Bolivarian conception, everything from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to USAID and U.S.-based non-governmental organizations form part of this alleged assault on Latin America. Thus the expulsion of the DEA, USAID and civil society support groups – as carried out by the governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador – is justified and necessary.

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1 The Alianza Bolivariana Para los Pueblos de Nuestra America was founded in 2004 by the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez and then Cuban President Fidel Castro. Since then it has grown to include Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Saint Vincent and Grenadines. Iran and Syria were granted observer status in 2007. Suriname, whose president, Desi Bouterse, is a convicted cocaine trafficker, and Salvador Sánchez Cerén, the recently elected president of El Salvador and former Marxist guerrilla leader have announced their intention to join in 2014.

As described below, in the Bolivarian structure a strong president is identified as the representative of the revolution, which in turn represents the will of the people. Therefore anything against the president is counter-revolutionary, against the people, and deserving of censure and punishment. If the judiciary, the media or civil society organizations do not align with the revolution, they must be eradicated as a cancer spreading counter-revolutionary values at the bidding of the “Empire,” as the United States is routinely called. Because the revolution holds itself up as a paragon of virtue in contrast to the corrupt traditional order, any reporting of the massive corruption and incompetence that inevitably ensues has to be silenced and its authors discredited as agents of the Empire’s interests.

It is necessary to remember that during the Cold War the United States, in its effort to counter Soviet sponsorship of leftists parties, guerilla movements and terrorist groups, often supported governments in the region whose leaders were human rights abusers, including brutal military dictatorships. During this period the standing of many Latin militaries were compromised and Left was able to cast the United States as a supporter of dictators. Increasingly over the past four decades U.S. diplomatic and military doctrine and training have focused on human rights training, respect for civilian governments and the rule of law. This process helped transform Latin American countries and militaries away from their coup-prone and authoritarian past into national defense institutions under civilian control. Colombia and Chile are vibrant examples of the success the changes have brought.

Now those engagement efforts are being scaled back dramatically, leaving a vacuum being filled by extra-regional actors and a growing group of political leaders who hope for the collapse of the United States. At the same time, U.S. interest and resources in the region are waning. Beginning in 2010 overall U.S. aid, both civilian and security assistance, began to drop dramatically and the regional initiatives are among the hardest hit by the ongoing budget austerity and sequestration. 3

As an ‘economy of force’ combatant command designed to have a light footprint, such cuts have had an enormous impact on SOUTHCOM’s ability to operate in the region and defend the southern approaches to the United States.

Gen. John Kelly, commander of the U.S. Southern Command responsible for Latin

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America, in an unusually blunt posture statement to Congress in February 2014, said his shrinking budget had forced a significant retreat from Latin America and the Caribbean:

> Ultimately, the cumulative impact of our reduced engagement will be measured in terms of U.S. influence, leadership, and relationships in the Western Hemisphere. Severe budget constraints have serious implications for all three, at a time in which regional security issues warrant greater attention.

> Budget cuts are having a direct and detrimental effect on our security cooperation activities, the principal way we engage and promote defense cooperation in the region. The cumulative effect of our reduced engagement is a relative but accelerated decline of trust in our reliability and commitment to the region. Our relationships, our leadership, and our influence in the Western Hemisphere are paying the price.

> Severe budget constraints are significantly degrading our ability to defend the southern approaches to the United States.\(^4\)

In this growing vacuum it is increasingly easy for extra-regional actors to capitalize on the new military doctrine to displace the United States and create new opportunities to gain significant military, political and economic influence.

Rather than building militaries under civilian control and subject to the rule of law, the Bolivarian leaders are building militaries in the Cuban and Iranian molds — as instruments of increasingly authoritarian revolutions, to be used against any “counter-revolutionary” dissent. The military hierarchy has been repeatedly breached to purge senior officers trained in the United States or Europe. Elite units of the military and police have been disbanded and those loyal to the revolution have been placed in leadership positions, regardless of their qualifications.\(^5\)

Like Cuba and Iran, most ALBA nations are creating well-armed militias which respond directly to the president, not the military hierarchy. These groups are used primarily as shock troops to suppress street protests.

As the paramilitary Basij in Iran showed in 2009, and the Colectivos in Venezuela show today, the model is highly successful in stifling internal dissent and its members can carry out their brutality with impunity. The loyalty of these groups lies with the revolution and its leader who embodies that revolution — not the rule of law, democracy with alternating parties in power, or civilian leaders viewed as disloyal to the revolution.

The emerging military doctrine is only one part of multi-pronged “war of ideas” waged by the ALBA nations and their allies at a time when the United States is much less

\(^4\) Posture Statement of General John F. Kelly, United States Marine Corps, Commander, United States Southern Command, Before the 113th Congress, House Armed Services Committee, February 26, 2014.

\(^5\) The most recent example was in Argentina, where in June 2013 the president purged more than 30 senior officers and named Gen. César Milani, a loyal former head of army intelligence.
engaged in this theater of action. As shown below, this multi-faceted campaign is coordinated, consistent in its messaging, and unrelenting in its narrative that the values, doctrine, economic model and political system of the United States and Western democracies have failed.

“The U.S. military expansion and strengthening of the Latin American militaries are the primary threats to the growth of democracy and stability in the region,” said one policy statement. “However, the militaries see the consequences to this domination and exploitation – popular opposition – and see these U.S. actions as the main threat to Latin America.”

This paper looks at the origins and growth of the network that has grown up around ALBA doctrine, now being taught as military doctrine in the member nations. The government-sponsored interlocking wheels of teaching, narrative and blatant fabrications and misrepresentations have real implications for the future security of the United States and democracy in Latin America.

The new ALBA model posits that Soviet-style socialism and Marxism did not fail conceptually, but in their implementation. Hence the end of the Cold War was simply an historical pause, which is now ending. The new 21st Century Socialism is a mixture of radical populism, the cult of personality, and all-encompassing revolution that puts its members in constant conflict with all those who oppose their vision of the future – most often the “Empire.”

The Cuban revolution under the Castro brothers, whose demise has often been predicted and long on the margins of regional thinking, is ironically now viewed as a sustainable model for the Bolivarian revolution. The new mantra is now progresismo (progressivism), often shortened to progres or nac y pop (national and popular) in the revolutionary vernacular, based on the unity of the people with the revolution and, by extension, the revolutionary leader embodying the revolution.

It is not as if the new revolutionary model has been broadly successful. It has largely been built on the two pillars of populism and caudillismo, or a strong, authoritarian leader, and focuses on immediate goals with little long term planning. As one Argentine analyst noted, in an apt description of the Bolivarian system, “populism arrives to destroy politics and take away all its symbolic and true power. Where one leader has a monopoly on power, there are no politics, there is only obedience and pseudo-religious militarism.”

Venezuela under Hugo Chávez initially, and under Nicolás Maduro currently, has

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become the second most violent country in the world, after Honduras. The Venezuelan economy is in a free fall, with shortages of everything from basic foodstuffs to toilet paper. Cuba’s economy remains almost entirely dependent on virtually free Venezuelan oil.

Argentina is facing a deep recession and steep inflation, and Nicaragua and Bolivia remain among the poorest nations in the world. All the main Bolivarian countries have greatly restricted freedom of expression, shut down independent media, ravaged the fragile and weak judicial systems, and tampered with the electoral process. In every Bolivarian nation senior officials have been credibly linked to transnational organized criminal activity, particularly cocaine trafficking and weapons sales. The levels of corruption, by every measure, are greater under the Bolivarian governments in South America than in previous times.

While the revolutionary model, financed by Venezuela’s extensive oil revenues, began as “bread and circus,” with promises to do everything for everyone, noted one economist, as the model collapsed, it “became only circus, and in its last phase, the clowns abandon the circus and all that is left is a razed field.”

Yet, as Gen. Kelly notes, there is no counter-narrative being told and little awareness of the deep reversals the United States has suffered in the battle of ideas in the region. While many new volumes have been written on the new military, security and social doctrines being spread across the region, few outside are even aware of the sea change, much less have studied it and tried to understand it.

Given the multiple failures of the Bolivarian system, the progres narrative is not insurmountable. There are significant and exploitable vulnerabilities, both political and economic given the massive failure of the model. However, as resources diminish and Latin America remains a low priority region for policy makers, these opportunities are seldom recognized and even less often acted on.

This paper is intended to outline the new regional doctrine that espouses terrorism and justifies the use of WMD against the United States and to spark a wider policy debate. It will look at two main areas: the military structures and doctrine and the cultural war being waged.

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The New Military Structure

Since at least 2004, the Bolivarian axis has been working to create a set of regional organizations that explicitly exclude the United States and often Canada. The fundamental premise is that anything in which the United States participates will be subservient to the “Empire.” So, in addition to creating new entities – with an emphasis on military training – it is necessary to withdraw or weaken those institutions where the United States does participate, including the Organization of American States (OAS) and its affiliated groups such as the Inter-American Defense Board and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The Doctrine of Asymmetrical Warfare and WMD

As with most Bolivarian structures, there are different levels to the effort, with the most radical being closest to the ALBA core, and showing a less militant face when seeking to expand its influence beyond that core.

The initial foray into Bolivarian military doctrine came from Chávez in 2005, when he officially adopted teachings which explicitly embrace a radical Islamist model of asymmetrical or "fourth generation warfare," with its heavy reliance on suicide bombings and different types of terrorism, including the use of nuclear weapons and other WMD.

This was occurring at a time when Hezbollah’s presence in Latin America was growing and becoming more identifiable, and when Chávez had announced the successful completion of a project to build drones in Venezuela with Iranian help.

Chávez adopted as his military doctrine the concepts and strategies articulated in Peripheral Warfare and Revolutionary Islam: Origins, Rules and Ethics of Asymmetrical Warfare (Guerra Periférica y el Islam Revolucionario: Orígenes, Reglas y Ética de la Guerra Asimétrica), by the Spanish politician and ideologue Jorge Verstrynge. Verstrynge argues for the destruction of United States through series

10 In addition to Operation Titan there have been numerous incidents in the past 18 months of operatives being directly linked to Hezbollah who have been identified or arrested in Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Aruba, and elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean.
12 Verstrynge, born in Morocco to Belgian and Spanish parents, began his political career on the far right of the Spanish political spectrum as a disciple of Manuel Fraga, and served as a national and several senior party posts with the Alianza Popular. By his own admission he then migrated to the
of asymmetrical attacks, like those of 9-11, in the belief that the United States will simply crumble when its vast military strength cannot be used to combat its enemies.

Although he is not a Muslim, and the book was not written directly in relation to the Venezuelan experience, Verstrynge moves beyond previous strategies articulated by Carlos Ilich Sánchez Ramirez to embrace all strands of radical Islam for helping to expand the parameters of what irregular warfare should encompass, including the use of biological and nuclear weapons, along with the correlated civilian casualties among the enemy.  

Central to Verstrynge’s idealized view of terrorists is the belief in the sacredness of the willingness of the fighters to sacrifice their lives in pursuit of their goals. Before writing extensively on how to make chemical weapons and listing helpful places to find information on the manufacture of rudimentary nuclear bombs that "someone with a high school education could make," Verstrynge writes:

_We already know it is incorrect to limit asymmetrical warfare to guerrilla warfare, although it is important. However, it is not a mistake to also use things that are classified as terrorism and use them in asymmetrical warfare. And we have super terrorism, divided into chemical terrorism, bioterrorism (which uses biological and bacteriological methods), and nuclear terrorism, which means "the type of terrorism uses the threat of nuclear attack to achieve its goals."_  

In a December 12, 2008 interview with Venezuelan state television, Verstrynge lauded Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda for creating a new type of warfare that is "de-territorialized, de-stateized and de-nationalized," a war where suicide bombers act as "atomic bombs for the poor." In his interview with Univisión, Verstrynge said his model was specifically drawn from Hezbollah’s experience.

Chávez liked the Verstrynge book so well that he had a special pocket-sized edition printed and distributed to the armed forces officer corps with express orders that it be read cover to cover. It has since been adopted as official Venezuelan military doctrine.

_Socialist Party, but never rose through the ranks. He is widely associated with radical anti-globalization views and anti-U.S. rhetoric, repeatedly stating that the United States is creating a new global empire and must be defeated. Although he has no military training or experience, he has written extensively on asymmetrical warfare._

13 For a more comprehensive look at the role and seminal writings of Sánchez Ramirez, the convicted terrorist known as "The Jackal," see: Farah, op cit.

14 Verstrynge, op cit., pp. 56-57.

Jorge Verstrynge

LA GUERRA PERIFÉRICA Y
EL ISLAM REVOLUCIONARIO

Orígenes, reglas y ética de la guerra asimétrica

El Viejo Topo
The Proliferation of Bolivarian Military Academies

The military institution most explicitly designed to eradicate any vestiges of U.S. military doctrine in the region is the ALBA Defense and Sovereignty School, established in 2011 with the support of Iran, near the city of Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

ALBA’S STRUCTURE

ALBA "Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América"

Members: Santa Lucia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Saint Vicent and the Granadines, Antigua y Barbuda, Santa Lucia, Surinam.
Observers: Haiti, Iran, Siria.

Escuela de defensa del ALBA (ALBA Defense School) Based in Bolivia. Built with Iranian financial support.

Bolivian President Morales, speaking at the inauguration of the facility, said the School would prepare the peoples of the region to defend against "imperialist threats, which seek to divide us." He said that the “Peoples of ALBA are being besieged, sanctioned and punished by the imperial arrogance just because we are exerting the right of being decent and sovereign.” He added that, “We must not allow the history of colonization to be repeated or our resources to become the loot of the Empire.”

Speaking before the assembled heads of state from the ALBA countries, Morales articulated the ALBA position by saying,

The Empire seeks to divide us, make us fight with our brother nations, in order to benefit from the conflicts. But we have decided to live in peace. The most profitable business of the empire is armed conflict among brother nations. War has one winner: Capitalism. And war has one loser: less developed nations.

17 ALBA School of Defense and Sovereignty Opens,” op cit
Iran’s interest in the project, which it supports financially, was made clear when Iranian defense minister Ahmad Vahidi arrived in Bolivia for the school’s inauguration, despite having an Interpol Red Notice issued for his arrest as a result of his alleged participation in the 1994 AMIA bombing in Buenos Aires.

When his public appearance at a military ceremony the day before the school’s inauguration set off an international scandal Vahidi quietly slipped out of Bolivia.  

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Since the Vahidi embarrassment, the ALBA nations have softened their tone. As they seek a broader membership in their new wave of regional organizations and military centers they have been careful to make the ties to Iran less overt and publicly mute some of the harshest anti-imperialist rhetoric. Rather, in the broader arenas, they have adopted a narrative that a new defense doctrine is imperative to build the mythical Latin American unity in order to defend the region’s natural resources.

One of the most prominent of the new groups is the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which was specifically founded in 2010 to exclude the United States. As Bolivian President Evo Morales said, “it is important to identify those responsible for the poverty, inequality and injustice, and to debate, analyze and create unity of the American countries, without the United States, in order to liberate our people.”

ALBA was careful to differentiate itself from CELAC, saying that it supported the group

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but would maintain a “clear, progressive, transformative posture in regards to the structures of the countries of the region and those who have dominated relations with Latin America.”

Prior to the formation of CELAC, and not couched in as explicitly anti-U.S. terms, was the Union of South American Countries (Unión de Naciones Sudamericanas – UNASUR), founded in 2008. One of the first group’s first actions was to form the South American Defense Council (Consejo de Defensa Sudamericano), as a counterpart to the IADB. It also set up what has become one of the premiere anti-U.S. think tanks in terms of military policy, the Center for Strategic Defense Studies (Centro de Estudio Estratégicos de la Defensa – CEED), based in Buenos Aires and led by Alfredo Forti, a former Argentine defense official. At the inauguration of the Center, Forti repeated the Bolivarian mantra that coming conflicts would be over Latin America’s abundant natural resources, which outside forces, meaning the United States, would seek to expropriate.

In a February 2014 meeting of the Defense Council in Suriname, UNASUR agreed to establish the South American Defense School (Escuela Suramericana de Defensa), to be located in Quito, Ecuador. The purpose is to promote a regional defense strategy to “protect natural resources, reduce technological dependency and face possible current threats.”

All of these structures are closely tied to the Bolivarian Military University of the Republic of Venezuela (Universidad Militar Bolivariana de Venezuela) in Caracas, Venezuela. The university describes its mission as inculcating “ethical, moral spiritual and socialist values” in its students.

In keeping with the veneration of the heroes of the Bolivarian revolution, the university recently created a Nestor Kirchner-Hugo Chávez chair to study the teaching of both

22 http://www.umbv.edu.ve/index.php/mision
deceased leaders. The announcement of the chair came during a recent visit of the Argentine minister of defense Agustín Rossi with his Venezuelan counterpart Carmen Meléndez. The two also signed a series of agreements on joint training and the exchange of scientific and technological knowledge.23

It is worth noting that staunch U.S. allies in the regions, such as Colombia, joined these groups in large part to avoid deep regional isolation. These countries have quietly tried to blunt some of the more radical efforts of the ALBA nations and have used the UNASUR platform to demand more transparency in the region’s defense budgets, a move aimed at Venezuela. Overall the countries have been muted in their disagreements.

The Support Structures

These interlocking institutions of higher military learning are supported by an extensive network of intellectuals who have written dozens of books now being taught as the new military theory, as well as dozens of websites which provide content, updates, and forums for discussion. The vast majority of the content is sharply anti-U.S. and offers an interpretation of history that, at best, is riddled with half-truths, lies and leaps of the imagination and intellect.

While few in the U.S. military or policy community have read these authors and websites, they are among the most influential in the Bolivarian bloc, particularly in the armed forces, and are the heralds of the next generation of radical doctrine.

Some Principal Authors and Their Writings

Atilio Boron

Atilio Boron is an Argentine political scientist and sociologist with a Ph.D. from Harvard who currently teaches at the University of Buenos Aires and the Floreal Gorini Cultural Center in Buenos Aires.

His work often appears on websites like www.rebelion.org, with links in Argentina, Cuba, Bolivia, Venezuela, Spain and Colombia; www.en.cubadebate.cu, www.alainet.org, which stands for Latin America in Movement (“America Latina en Movimiento”), www.contrainjerencia.com; and the Floreal Gorini Cultural Center, (Centro Cultural de la Cooperación Floreal Gorini) www.centrocultural.coop, which is his main headquarters. These links will be discussed in more detail below.

The Argentine government’s support for Boron’s work can be seen by his appointment to the National Council of Scientific and Technical Investigations (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas – CONICET), which is directly dependent on the presidency.

Boron’s two most influential works are *Latin America in the Geopolitics of Imperialism* (*America Latina en la Geopolitica del Imperialismo*); *The Military Strategy of the United States in Latin America* (*Estrategia Militar de Estados Unidos en America Latina*); and *Socialism of the XXIst Century: Is There Life After Neoliberalism?* (*Socialism Siglo XXI: Hay vida después del neoliberalismo?).

In his works he argues that establishing military control over Latin America is a key policy of the “Empire.” The evidence for this is what he describes as the enormous U.S. deployment of troops, the construction of dozens of bases and “support” programs for the U.S. military in almost every country in the region. Among those he cites are a proposed disaster relief coordination center in Paraguay and other humanitarian programs.

Boron portrays each of these as a facet of a new U.S. military doctrine in which the “war on terrorism” morphs into a “war on drug trafficking” into what has now become a doctrine of “eternal warfare.”

Boron writes that, in addition to the threat of military bases, the U.S. reactivation of the Navy’s 4th Fleet, something he claims was not done even at the height of the Cuban missile crisis. In his construct, the Fleet was reactivated in mid-2008, just as the Brazilian government announced a huge offshore oil discovery, and that the “mobilization of the fleet” took place without any discussion with regional leaders.”24 The reason for this “unbridled military expansion south of the Rio Bravo” is that the U.S. hunt for natural resources requires it.25

The reactivation of the 4th Fleet is a favorite trope of the Bolivarian movement. Venezuela’s Chávez, accompanied by Morales, told a roaring crowd that “there is a revolution in Latin America that goes from the Caribbean to Patagonia, which no one can stop, not even the 4th Fleet, with which the Empire seeks to intimidate us.”26

What Boron and others don’t say is that the 4th Fleet has no ships assigned to it, unlike any other fleet in the U.S. Navy. It is a command structure that assumes command of ships in its Area of Responsibility, but has to request ships from other fleets to carry out any deployments of its own.

24 Boron, Atilio. Op Cit p.85
Telma Luzzani

Telma Luzzani is an Argentine journalist who works for the government-financed Vision 7 Internacional and Radio Nacional. Her most recent book, *Territories Under Surveillance: How the Network of U.S. Military Bases Operates in South America* (*Territorios Vigilados: Como opera la red de bases militares norteamericanas en sudamérica*) with U.S. soldier wearing a Nazi helmet on the cover, is a Bolivarian best seller. It is being touted on multiple Bolivarian websites as a visionary work that explains the “massive surveillance” of the U.S. Southern Command over Latin America.

As most Argentine authors, she describes the British Falkland Islands (*Islas Malvinas* to Argentina, who claims ownership of the southern isles near Antarctica) as a strategically important outpost that is key to U.S. regional hegemony.

While the justification for the bases may change over time, Luzzani said, “what won’t change is the physical presence and strategic objectives” of the bases.

In an interview touting her book Luzzani states as fact that

> After studying Pentagon documents and interviewing several specialists I have been able to able to draw a clearer map of the U.S. military bases in the Southern Cone. I was able to draw two maps: one of the presence of the Marines in Central America and one that shows, in more detail the Southern Command’s bases in South America. . . The bases have always been a vital link in the existence of any empire, and they are more efficient if one can keep them, like spies, wrapped in secrecy. . . They may be smaller, have few personnel assigned to them, be more well hidden, but they provide the necessary logistics to deploy troops on a vast scale.27

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Stella Calloni

Stella Calloni is widely regarded as one of the journalists closest to Fidel Castro and Hugo Chávez and a model journalist within the Bolivarian structure. An Argentine, she lived abroad during Argentina’s military dictatorship. Fidel Castro wrote the prologue to a recent very flattering biography of Calloni titled Stella Calloni: Intimate (Stella Calloni: íntima).

Calloni’s recent emphasis, publicized on the Bolivarian website, is on what she calls “soft coups” (golpes de estado suaves) in which the Empire uses proxies such as police strikes and unrest in the military to try to topple the revolutionary governments. The strategy consists of illegal ways of creating a situation of chaos, organized by the Empire. It occurs whenever governments take popular measures and provoke the CIA to attack them.
Calloni describes a police strike for higher wages, and the subsequent unrest in Argentina in December 2013, which led to numerous incidents of lootings as part of the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy to topple unfriendly governments. Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner echoed Calloni’s analysis in statements on the strike.

Rather than acknowledge that inflation of more than 30 percent had eroded the low salaries for police, then averaging about $600 a month, the government attacked the strike as an act of treason. From Calloni’s perspective the police and criminal groups controlled by the police were implementing a counterinsurgency strategy through “coup vandalism” and “undemocratic chaos.”

Calloni supports her hypothesis in similar events in Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras and Paraguay, where, she says, one can lay the responsibility for seditious actions at the feet of U.S. agencies and foundations often use as fronts for U.S. agencies. Nothing in any of these cases, as in the case of Argentina, could be the result of legitimate grievances against revolutionary governments, which are one with the people.

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One of the hubs for the counterinsurgency police training, according to Calloni, is the International Law Enforcement Academy, based in San Salvador, El Salvador. The academy teaches policemen how to create conflict very quickly through an alliance with criminals, an alliance that also permits the police to calm the situation very quickly when they choose to.31

Horacio Verbitsky

Horacio Verbitsky, a former Montonero guerrilla, has emerged as one of Argentine President de Kirchner’s closet advisers and rabid defenders through his regular column in the government-controlled Página 12 newspaper and his position in the official Center for Legal and Social Studies (Centro de Esudios Legales y Sociales – CELS).

While once regarded as an independent investigative journalist who broke numerous stories of corruption in the government of Carlos Menem, he is now primarily a defender of the increasingly authoritarian Fernández de Kirchner government. He often attacks investigative journalists who report on corruption in the current government.

Verbitsky, a controversial figure in Argentina, writes frequently on the impending U.S. invasion, arguing that the troops being redeployed from Iraq and Afghanistan must have a mission to fulfill, and are already carrying out deployments that allow them to become “familiar with the terrain and culture and get to know key officials in countries where they may someday operate.”32

He has also regularly attacks the IADB, Southcom and other U.S.-supported military organizations, arguing that U.S. policy toward Latin America has been almost entirely “militarized” and argues that defense issues should be left up to regional institutions like UNASUR to address.

The Interlocking Web

None of these writers or policymakers operates in a vacuum. They and their work are linked through an extensive web of cyber hubs that aggregate material, link to and promote each other, and are featured on the official websites of the governments of Cuba, Venezuela, Argentina and elsewhere. Those outlined below represent only a small fraction of the network, selected to show how they operate, rather than to exhaustively diagram the network itself.

31 La invasion silenciosa, op cit.
In Argentina, one of the most sophisticated centers for bringing the various streams of thought together is the Floreal Gorini Cultural Center, with an impressive new building in downtown Buenos Aires. The first floor is largely a library and bookstore devoted almost entirely to the works of Fidel Castro, Ché Guevara, Karl Marx, and many of the authors mentioned above.

The center also runs Latin American Long Distance Learning Program, (*Programa Latinoamericano de Educacion a Distancia – PLED*) that offers training programs online or in person.\(^{33}\)

One example of the overlap is the courses offered is one called “Latin America, the Caribbean and Imperial Geopolitics” (*America Latina y el Caribe en la geopolítica imperial*), taught by Atilio Boron. The center, in turn, is connected to numerous publishing houses, bookstores, universities and websites.

Another important hub is called **Mopassol**, which regularly features Stella Calloni and targets Southcom for criticism. It is also linked to a series of books, speakers and conferences that promote her work and those of likeminded individuals.
Another very active hub is called *Contrainjerencia* or Against Interference, referring to the imperialist interference in the hemisphere. Note the connection with multiple Cuban directed sites, as with the Bolivarians, and the Argentine government news agency Telam.
Contrainjerencia in turn jointly promotes different Bolivarian training courses with another web hub, www.manuelugarte.org.
Another hub that ties into the networks above is the Cuba-based Alternative Visions (Visiones Alternativas) website, established following a 2001 journalism conference in Havana. The site focuses heavily on Militarización Made in USA, ([http://pl-vaprensa-latina.cu/militarizacion/](http://pl-vaprensa-latina.cu/militarizacion/)) which in turn extols the need to attack and defeat U.S. geostrategic plans to extend it hegemonic reach over the entire hemisphere ([http://pl-vaprensa-latina.cu/militarizacion/geoestrategia/geoestrat.htm](http://pl-vaprensa-latina.cu/militarizacion/geoestrategia/geoestrat.htm).)
Another important piece of the network is the Argentina-based La Poderosa, (www.lapoderosa.org.ar) meaning the powerful revolutionary movement sweeping Latin America. The site, featuring Ché Guevara in his trademark beret and his famous motorcycle on its homepage, declares itself part of “a Latin American revolutionary movement, a part of the battle of ideas, with Ché’s motorcycle and the light of the Cuban lighthouse.”

The website goes out of its way to say its contributors and hosts are anonymous, arguing that it is truly a collective work of different members who are working toward “recuperating the concept of ‘power’ and ‘politics’ because that is how a new
history will be written. So we fight their ‘power,’ their ‘politics,’ their ‘democracy’ with poverty, illiteracy and infant mortality.”

But as with the other sites, it is not a stand-alone enterprise. It owns a magazine and links to a host of other Bolivarian websites, primarily Cuban in this case.
Conclusions

U.S. influence in Latin America, particularly as it relates to military and security doctrine with the region’s armed forces is waning quickly and dangerously. What is filling the vacuum is a particularly noxious new doctrine of asymmetrical warfare and permanent confrontation with the United States that has serious but little understood consequences for U.S. national security.

While U.S. historic influence has not always been beneficial, since the final decade of the Cold War a consistent policy of support for democracy, the rule of law, civilian control of the military and human rights has reshaped the political landscape in Latin America. Militaries became increasingly institutionalized under civilian control; the entire region except for Cuba returned to democratic government; freedom of expression and the media were almost unfettered; judicial structures were strengthened; and, statist, populist policies largely fell into disrepute.

But that dynamic was relatively short-lived. Over the past decade since the birth of the Bolivarian Revolution – financed by Venezuelan oil, Chinese loans, and Cuban intellectual capital, and supported by Iran – authoritarianism, radical populism, and a disdain for the rule of law and human rights are again on the rise.

Rather than the 20th Century ideological warfare by Cuba and disparate revolutionary movements in the hemisphere against Yankee Imperialism, the new radical populism encompasses multiple nations working in concert, each providing significant contributions to the project. This includes Iran, Russia, China and other extra-regional actors whose commitment to strong authoritarian structures, disdain for independent media, and a belief that the armed forces primarily serve the revolution, and strong antipathy toward the U.S. make them natural allies of the Bolivarian Revolution.

What has gone largely undetected and unstudied are the significant moves this bloc and its allies have made to eradicate U.S. military doctrine, economic influence, and political thought. The military doctrine in particular has been replaced by a dangerous new set of tenets advocating and justifying the use of WMD against the United States, and citing as models Hezbollah and al Qaeda. U.S.- trained officials have been forcibly retired, U.S.-trained units disbanded, and ongoing contact with the U.S. military and security structure has been sharply curtailed.

Undergirding the overall ideological and methodological thrust is an extensive network of intellectuals, journalists, and academics whose work is promoted, praised, and amplified through an interlocking grid of websites, bookstores, online
university courses, printed media and academic journals. All have strong ties to the
governments of Argentina, Venezuela, and Cuba; and, extensive links to Iran, China,
and Russia.

There is little question that this network uses extensive state resources to advance
its ideology and doctrine. The narrative being created, while not yet dominant, is far
more advanced in the military and intellectual centers of learning that is generally
acknowledged by U.S. policy makers.

While railing against foreign interference in their internal affairs, the Bolivarian
nations never discuss the vast Cuban military or intelligence presence in their
homelands, the significant amount of influence Venezuela has purchased through
extensive economic subsidies, the growing presence of Chinese and Russian
military personnel, or the disproportionately large Iranian “diplomatic” presence in
the region.

DNI Director James Clapper noted the danger in 2012, stating that “some Iranian
officials – probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei – have changed their
calculus and are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in
response to real or perceived US actions that threaten the regime. We are also
concerned about Iranian plotting against US or allied interests overseas.”

The absence of a strong U.S. counter narrative and more active presence has made
its remaining allies far more reticent to publicly engage the Bolivarians. In
discussions with leaders across the region, there is a growing feeling that the United
States has abandoned the battlefield and will not stand with them in a crisis.
Therefore it may be considered better to acquiesce to Bolivarian demands, fight
from within UNASUR and other structures, and hope for the best.

Gen. Kelly is correct in warning that the U.S. loss of influence is real and dangerous.
There is still time to engage in the battle of ideas, doctrine and ideology. Until the
United States chooses to do so, the field is open to those who wish it harm.

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34 James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, “Unclassified Statement for the Record:
Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on
Intelligence,” January 31, 2012, p. 6. For a broader look at Iranian activities in Latin America see:
Douglas Farah testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Terrorism,
Nonproliferation and Trade, “Terrorist Groups in Latin America: The Changing Landscape,” February
4, 2014.