

**Testimony by Frank C. Urbancic**

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**House Committee on International Relations**

**Subcommittee on International Terrorism and Nonproliferation**

**“Venezuela: Terrorism Hub of South America?”**

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Chairman Royce, Congressman Sherman, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Venezuela’s behavior with regard to international terrorism today.

**Venezuela: “Not Cooperating Fully”**

Section 40A of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, prohibits the sale or license for export of certain defense articles or defense services to any country determined to be not cooperating fully with U.S. antiterrorism efforts. The authority to make such determination has been delegated to the Secretary of State. This year the Secretary of State determined that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela demonstrated a near complete lack of cooperation with U.S. Government efforts to fight terrorism. This determination reflected a review of Venezuela’s overall actions against terrorism, the Venezuelan Government’s public statements in international fora addressing terrorism, Venezuela’s conduct toward terrorist organizations, and the Venezuelan Government’s relations with state sponsors of terror. On all fronts, the behavior of the Venezuelan Government is wanting.

The Government of Venezuela has stated that it regards the U.S.-led war on terrorism as a ruse for U.S. imperial ambitions. It has refused to condemn narco-terrorist organizations based in Colombia, and has publicly championed the cause of terrorists in Iraq. Although it is unclear how they were obtained, some weapons seized from Colombian narco-terrorists have come from official Venezuelan stocks

and facilities. And the Venezuelan Government has done little to improve the security of travel and identity documents it issues.

In the diplomatic arena, Venezuela has also been unhelpful. At the Organization of American States' Committee Against Terrorism (CICTE) 6<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting in Bogotá last March, the Venezuelan delegation disputed the validity of UN Security Council Resolutions 1373 and 1540, two pillars of the legal foundation for international counterterrorism efforts. Venezuela went so far as to insist on the inclusion of footnotes that opposed portions of the meeting's declaration reaffirming the counterterrorism and counter-proliferation obligations imposed on all States by the UN Security Council. Another Venezuelan footnote disputed the assertion that the prospect of terrorists obtaining WMD is a threat to the Western Hemisphere. The Venezuelan delegation at CICTE, asserted that the United States is the biggest security threat to the region. Venezuela, alone, even objected to language stating that transnational crime could be used by terrorist groups to finance their activities.

Venezuela has fomented close relations -- including intelligence cooperation -- with state sponsors of terrorism Iran and Cuba. Consistent with such behavior, earlier this year Venezuela, Cuba and Syria were the only countries in the International Atomic Energy Agency to vote against referring Iran to the UN Security Council to account for its efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. And just last week, the Venezuelan Government said it supports North Korea's development of its missile program.

Closer to home, narco-terrorists of the Colombian terrorist organization *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC) and the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN) continue to use Venezuelan territory for safe haven and transit of drugs, people and arms. The Venezuelan Government's efforts to pursue and deny safe haven to these terrorists are, at best, anemic. While it remains unclear to what extent the Government of Venezuela provides material support to Colombian terrorists, it is difficult to believe that the Chavez government is unaware of, or helpless to prevent such activity. Over the past year we have seen published reports of official Venezuelan support for terrorists and subversives. In February 2005, an ex-ELN guerrilla told the press that a non-aggression pact existed between the ELN and Venezuelan authorities; he alleged that the Venezuelan National Guard allowed the terrorist group to kidnap ranchers. Separately, the Ecuadorian press, citing Ecuadorian intelligence, has reported that Venezuela has provided training in small arms, intelligence, urban operations, and explosives to radical leftists from Ecuador.

With the Committee's permission, I will elaborate on some of these issues.

### **Venezuelan Travel and ID Documents**

Venezuelan travel and identification documents are extremely easy to obtain by persons not entitled to them, including non-Venezuelans. Passports and national ID cards are available for sale in the requester's identity, or another, if so desired. The systems and processes for issuing these documents are corrupted on various levels: alien smuggling rings use confederates in the issuing entities to make documents available in large numbers to their clients; freelancers in those entities capitalize on lax or non-existent controls to sell documents for personal gain; forgers alter passports with child-like ease; and most worrisome, Venezuelan Government officials direct the issuance of documents to ineligible individuals to advance political and foreign policy agendas.

We are detaining at our borders increasing numbers of third-country aliens carrying falsified or fraudulently issued Venezuelan documents. The so-called Foreign Minister of the FARC, Rodrigo Granda, was living openly in Caracas and possessed Venezuelan identity and travel documents when he was arrested in 2004.

In light of these developments, the Administration is evaluating steps to ensure that persons seeking entry into the United States bearing Venezuelan documents are in fact who they say they are, and seek entry to the U.S. for legitimate purposes.

### **Relations with State Sponsors of Terrorism**

The Chavez government has sought, over the last two or three years, ties with unusual allies. A glance at the State Sponsors of Terrorism listed in the State Department's *Country Reports on Terrorism* for 2005 provides a good idea of Chavez' new friends.

At the top of his list is Iran. The Chavez government has concluded a number of agreements with Iran, ranging from investment pacts, to cultural exchanges, to pledges of support against military aggression – ostensibly by the United States. In March, Chavez defended Iran's quest to develop nuclear energy without any oversight by the UN or the International Atomic Energy Agency, dismissing the concerns of the international community.

Chavez' courting of radical, rogue regimes is not new. He fawned over Saddam Hussein during a visit in 2000, even as that brutal dictator tortured his own citizens, stole Oil-For-Food funds, and sent terror teams abroad to murder Iraqis who opposed him. Today, Chavez roots for the terrorists who weekly bomb innocent Iraqis in a perverse bid to frustrate the will of the Iraqi people to live in peace and freedom.

Chavez recently announced he will soon visit Iran, Syria, North Korea and, interestingly, "North Vietnam" to cement "strategic alliances" with those countries. On his return, he will continue his close relationship with Cuba's dictator Fidel Castro. Castro has a long history of fomenting subversion in Latin America and elsewhere. Under Castro, Cuba -- also a state sponsor of terrorism -- has hosted and provided sanctuary to members of the FARC and the ELN, as well as to militants of the Basque terrorist group ETA. Castro and Chavez are using a variety of means to try to help individuals who share their worldview come to power via the electoral route.

It is clear that in the case of Chavez' Venezuela, the old adage "Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are" is one we would be wise to heed.

### **Relations with Terrorists, Islamic Radicals and Insurgents**

Hizballah has been implicated in the bombing of the Israeli Embassy and the Israeli-Argentine Mutual Association in Buenos Aires in 1992 and 1994, respectively. Over 100 people died in the attacks apparently launched in retaliation for Israel's killing of high-ranking Hizballah members. Without question, U.S. interests are put at risk by the decision of a virulently anti-American Venezuelan regime assiduously courting a nation -- Iran -- that so prominently sponsors a surrogate terror group implicated in a murderous attack in this hemisphere against our friends and allies.

As regards Chavez' relations with Colombian-based narco-terrorist organizations, I have noted already the ease with which narco-terrorists move into and through Venezuelan territory. Increasingly, the FARC and ELN use routes through Venezuela to import weapons, cash, and war material, and to export drugs. It is difficult to believe that the Chavez Administration is oblivious to this ongoing encroachment on its national territory by Colombian narco-terrorists.

The Committee requested information on Venezuelan Government links to Hakim Mamad al Diab Fatah and to Rahaman Alan Hazil Mohammad, who was

arrested in February 2003 in the U.K. for smuggling an explosive device aboard an airliner. Regrettably, there is little I can offer in an unclassified hearing.

## **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, today in Venezuela we see a regime that is increasingly out of step with the world. Its irresponsible rhetoric and behavior have drawn rebukes from several neighbors resentful of Chavez' meddling in their internal political affairs. The negative impact of Venezuela's behavior would be amplified if it wins a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, where it would have voice in various sub-committees on terrorism. In sum, in the international community's fight against terrorism, Venezuela is a liability.

We have tried to engage the Venezuelan Government in constructive discussions for addressing serious security problems that should concern us both, including narcotics trafficking and terrorism. Unfortunately the Venezuelan Government has taken steps to limit dialogue and cooperation on these important issues. In keeping with our responsibilities under U.S. law, we therefore conducted the review I mentioned at the beginning of my statement. As a result of our finding of "not cooperating fully," as of October 1 we will cut off military equipment sales to Venezuela. We are also increasing efforts to expose Venezuela's out-of-step rhetoric and actions, and are reviewing the integrity of Venezuelan travel documents for purposes of admission to the United States.

Since Venezuela has given no indications that it will change its behavior in the near future, it is all the more vital that we continue to work with our other partners in the Western Hemisphere, on a bilateral and multilateral basis. The United States cannot fight terrorism alone. We must use all tools of statecraft, in cooperation with our growing network of partners, to construct enduring solutions that transcend violence.

In doing so, we must focus our efforts on replacing an ideology of hatred with one of hope. Over the long term, our most important task in the War on Terror may not prove to be that of eradicating enemy networks, but the constructive task of building legitimacy, good governance, trust, prosperity, tolerance, and the rule of law in our respective societies. Social and governmental systems that are characterized by choices, transparent governance, economic opportunities and personal freedoms are keys to victory. These are enduring solutions, which we know will achieve positive results.

In the coming decades, the War on Terror, waged in a rapidly evolving global society, will defy our best predictions despite our best intelligence and law enforcement efforts. We must mitigate this uncertainty by building bonds of understanding and trust through a variety of partnerships. Together we will win this fight, for the benefit of all the citizens of this Hemisphere and the world.

This completes the formal part of my remarks and I welcome your questions and comments.