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## The São Paulo Forum's Armed Forces Agenda: Examining Venezuela and Brazil


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**THE SÃO PAULO FORUM'S ARMED FORCES AGENDA: EXAMINING  
VENEZUELA AND BRAZIL**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of  
Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science, Defense & Strategic Studies

By

David José Guenni Bravo

May 2022

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# **THE SÃO PAULO FORUM’S ARMED FORCES AGENDA: EXAMINING VENEZUELA AND BRAZIL**

Defense & Strategic Studies

Missouri State University, May 2022

Master of Science

David José Guenni Bravo

## **ABSTRACT**

The São Paulo Forum (SPF) is a resilient ideological alliance that provides extremist public policy recommendations to formal political parties, social movements, and insurgent groups throughout the Western Hemisphere. Based on substantial evidence, this research project asserts that the SPF has successfully influenced the national security and defense policies of states in the Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) region. Analysis of two significant cases in South America shows that, after being elected to high office, SPF affiliates and their political parties/platforms sought transformation of their countries’ national security and defense sectors to conform to SPF positions. Given its extensive influence and stated goal, the Forum’s support for malign, extra-hemispheric actors, rogue states within the LAC region, and “endogenous” violent non-state actors portends serious obstacles for the United States’ political, strategic, and operational objectives regarding hemispheric security and stability in the Americas. Critical examination of official SPF declarations, public statements, and resolutions; subject-matter-expert commentary; and available literature on the organization’s guidelines, are combined with case-study reviews of defense-policy modifications under Chávez’s MVR/PSUV (*Movimiento V República / Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela*) and under Lula’s PT (*Partido dos Trabalhadores - Brazil*) administrations, respectively.

**KEYWORDS:** USSOUTHCOM, Foro de São Paulo, defense policy, grand strategy, Brazil, Venezuela, world revolution, asymmetric warfare

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis, in memory of Óscar Pérez, to the Venezuelan resistance heroes: those destroyed, those imprisoned, and those who are still fighting – *AVT LIBERTAS AVT NIHIL*.

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## INTRODUCTION

This research endeavor set out to compile evidence suggesting significant/substantial connection/correlation between a three-decade-old hemispheric ideological alliance's prescriptions [*independent variable*] and one aspect of the policy agendas [*dependent variable*] of that alliance's member organizations' respective administrations, once national-state control is attained by such members. The common name given to this entity is: São Paulo Forum (SPF).

In light of the alliance's radically anti-Western stance, and given such an entity's scope and reach, an examination of its impact, from a more concrete defense and security perspective, beyond the rather abstract notions about it found in most of the available literature, is justified and merited. The cases in which member parties have implemented -successfully or not- SPF-inspired national security policy changes, particularly during their tenure in (national) executive power, suggest that there is value in studying whether or not the alliance poses a direct threat to the U.S.' vision for partnership throughout the Western Hemisphere.

### **Thesis Statement**

The United States Department of Defense should consider the SPF a threat, because the SPF has had success in changing regional defense and security policies in ways antithetical to U.S. objectives.

### **Research Design Road Map**

The *first stage* of the following thesis paper consisted of finding (general) SPF national security directives and/or policy guidelines. The *second stage* included performing separate

analyses of two distinct country cases (Venezuela and Brazil) in which SPF member organizations have become / became ruling parties. The *third stage* entailed determining, separately, if the grand-strategic and/or national defense transformations that each respective party has striven / strove to implement, by way of their respective administrations, resembles or responds to the SPF's agenda. Through critical reading of secondary sources, the *fourth stage* allowed for the establishment of conclusions, following the correspondence analyses derived from the two separate cases, and of such conclusions' broader implications vis-a-vis the U.S.' policy vision for the Western Hemisphere – particularly regarding USSOUTHCOM (United States Southern Command). Further-research and policy implications, approaches, and recommendations are finally provided at the end of the results of that fourth stage.

### **Research Objectives**

General: To prove correspondence -or lack thereof, or contrast- between (X) SPF prescriptions and (Y) individual members' attempts to transform national-security policy.

Specific: To describe SPF guidelines regarding national/regional security and defense policy/strategy. To compare such guidelines to President Hugo Rafael Chávez's MVR/PSUV (V Republic Movement / United Socialist Party of Venezuela) administration (1999-2012) [attempted] changes made to the Venezuelan defense sector. To compare such guidelines to President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva's PT (Workers' Party) administration (2003-2010) [attempted] changes made to the Brazilian defense sector. To hypothesize about the level of control/sway that the SPF has over its members' policy agendas upon their reaching national power.

## Research Design Rationale and Limitations

The decision to study the São Paulo Forum derives from the author's familiarity with the structure and the almost decade-long monitoring of the Forum's suspected actions and most conspicuous protagonists. That decision is also a function of the growing availability of material, including first- and second-hand testimony and also "hard" data, now in the open source, about the SPF. Such surfacing of primary- and secondary-source material seems to have exponentially increased during the second decade of the present century. Once largely ignored -or, at the very least, overlooked- by the news media, the SPF has itself now published a sufficient corpus of information on its thinking and intellectual foundations, which allows for such field-specific research (i.e., defense and security affairs) to be conducted fairly well.

That being said, it is important to recognize that the general, summarizing nature of much of the unclassified primary-source material gathered has probably implied eschewing substantial details, or specifics, about what the Forum is up to and what it has decided upon – items that one can speculate would be available in a classified setting. On the other hand, the chosen focus on the São Paulo Forum has, as is likely the case with any standalone-research-product's focus requirements, methodologically forced the author of this thesis paper to reduce and/or subordinate the importance of other such organisms, networks, alliances, *fora...* of which there is certainly no shortage throughout the Latin America & Caribbean (LAC) region.

The decision to select Venezuela and Brazil as the case-study objects for this thesis project, is not only connected to the author's tacit proximity to both countries' recent historical developments. The decision is also based on the scientific value of both cases. The SPF was born in Brazil, although of clearly trans-regional parents. The PT party, as perhaps the most notorious of the Forum's founding members, attained high office after many years of SPF activity and

consolidation, and it did so by way of its most important leader to date: Lula, whose administration constitutes the Brazilian case study matter. Therefore, one can reasonably expect this case study to be primordial -seminal, almost- in a larger casuistic research program within this line of work. Chávez's political platform was indeed a very young SPF member when it achieved its breakthrough electoral victory in 1998. Yet, this victory was the Forum's first major/national executive-level electoral triumph that we know of, and resulted in, or brought about, the most resounding impact upon a Western Hemisphere country perhaps since the days of the Cold War's end. The well-known ideological alignment of the Chávez administration with the Castro regime and the Communist Party of Cuba (the other notorious SPF founding member), given the aforementioned particularities at play, made Chávez's Venezuela an almost irresistible choice for a case study, whose importance/priority seemed to parallel that of the Brazilian case.

At the same time, given the absolute importance of Brazil in the LAC region, its specific weight, and, in its own right, the dramatic nature of the Chavista regime in Venezuela, as well as the consequences of its years in power, there is ample documentation and commentary available in the public domain about both cases, also in the English language. The years of the administrations of both Chávez and Lula, respectively, have already been studied and analyzed and commented on from diverse angles and perspectives and disciplines, despite constituting very recent world history.

Lastly, both cases are somewhat comparable on many dimensions that are usually geopolitical and/or historical. But perhaps the most pertinent commonality of note to our academic interests is the proximity to the United States government that both countries' defense establishments had up until the end of the XX century. As USSOUTHCOM partners nations, the Brazilian and Venezuelan militaries -and, for that matter, defense and security sectors writ large-

enjoyed the fruits of cooperation and good relationships with the U.S. armed services and other components of the interagency, for many years in recent memory – and even excelled as partner forces.

While time and space prevented the author of this paper from doing so, it would have been useful to analyze additional cases – other than Venezuela and Brazil. Particularly useful would have been those in which SPF individual members who became president in their countries did not institute reforms that correspond to the SPF agenda, because of the explanatory power and heuristic value afforded to the hypothesis by the inclusion of such additional case studies, and because of the increase in scientific validity that the quantitative and qualitative expansion of this research project would have yielded. The problem with limiting the project to only Chávez’s Venezuela and Lula’s Brazil, for the purpose of providing exemplary case studies to give support to the thesis statement, is that such a decision impedes the development of a significant cross-sectional analysis, as well as that of a significant longitudinal analysis. In other words, it is very difficult, from running the chosen research design as it stands, to extract superior generalizations, because the dynamic between the dependent and the independent variables will not be based on a data set and/or sample large enough (in terms of the number of case-study countries), nor prolonged enough (in terms of timeframes), to warrant an inductive analysis that can yield such major abstractions.

And given the fact that a full-fledged comparative analysis between the two chosen historical cases (Venezuela during the Chávez administration and Brazil during the Lula administration) is not the method of study employed in this project, it is safe to say that this thesis paper relies on an exploratory research design, in strictly methodological terms.

Finally, a comment is needed regarding the sectorial boundaries picked out for the focus of this study. The affairs of national security encompass, within the responsibilities and burdens of the modern nation-state, a much-larger field than that covered or tackled by the defense sector alone. Focusing on the defense dimension, of course, made the thesis project manageable, proportional, and a good disciplinary fit for a thesis paper at the level required for this academic degree. However, it diffculted and therefore limited the understanding and comprehension of the complexity at play between the dependent and independent variables. Differentiating sectors, in cases such as the Venezuela study, seemed tough and arbitrary in and of itself. This holds true - not to mention the amount of nuances and interesting facts lost- to both case studies, in the need to put aside the much-larger national security picture, and, worse still, the greater foreign-policy panorama, without which many factors and forces shaping defense policy get an unfair/insufficient amount of attention.

Nevertheless, the research design paid off intellectual dividends that have the potential to constitute themselves as breakthroughs for the understanding of contemporary and emerging strategic/security challenges in the Americas. It is the author's sincere belief that without grasping the theory and *praxis* of the São Paulo Forum, many phenomena and trends taking hold -for decades now- in the LAC region will remain alien even to the most trained observer.

### **The Vision Behind U.S. Policy for the Americas**

While U.S. policy and strategy regarding Latin America and the Caribbean entails economic (commercial/trade, financial, etc.), political, diplomatic, and social components (Mora and Fonseca 2016), in addition to security and defense interests, this thesis paper focuses on USSOUTHCOM's strategy toward LAC, as an analytic tool, because: it is a thesis paper

completed within the field of defense and strategic studies, it is a thesis paper bound by the limitations and requirements and criteria set forth in a graduate department which focuses almost exclusively on defense and security affairs which affect the United States of America and its global interests and commitments, and the United States Southern Command is the premier organizational structure and interagency hub through which the United States Department of Defense and other key organs/components of the United States government make its defense-and-security-sector presence felt in the LAC region.

The United States military divides its coverage of the Western Hemisphere into two areas of responsibility (AOR), each assigned to a different unified geographic combatant command (COCOM). The first of those AORs is covered by the Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) and the second is covered by the Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). The latter's AOR comprises most of what one could label as Latin America and the Caribbean (the LAC region), with exceptions: Mexico, Puerto Rico, Bahamas, Turks & Caicos... In fact, it «[...] encompasses 31 countries and 16 dependencies and areas of special sovereignty.» (SOUTHCOM's Area of Responsibility n.d.).

Strategic thinking about USSOUTHCOM's AOR has changed quite a bit since the days in which this COCOM was established (Stavridis 2010). This sub-section of the thesis will provide a brief summary of what the current vision for the LAC region is, from the perspective of the U.S. Armed Forces. The purpose here is to provide a basis for understanding how the São Paulo Forum's (SPF) agenda contrasts with this vision, as we move forward into understanding what this alliance wants.

The U.S. military in this region performs predominantly non-traditional missions (Ellis 2019). Security cooperation and assistance, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and countering

illicit drug flows constitute the bulk of such missions at USSOUTHCOM (Faller 2020). They strive to provide the nations of the Hemisphere with the best means and ways to fend for themselves, in a strategic environment normally bereft of conventional, state-on-state military threats. The United States seeks a secure, stable, and prosperous LAC by way of «minimum deployment footprint» (S. De la Peña, personal communication, March 25, 2020).

Policy and grand strategy for the southern approaches to the U.S. have openly veered away from creating a sphere of influence to establishing an «arc of confidence» (Schechter 2019, p. 18). This translates into viewing the Western Hemisphere as a *neighborhood*, in which the nations of the Americas can coexist and collaborate as good neighbors, instead of North America viewing the rest of the continent as its *backyard*.

The emphasis, at least since the end of the 1990s, has therefore been on partnering with the willing states of the region to: mutually build capacity and expand force capabilities, institutionalize and professionalize partner-nation defense and security, and tackle threats to democratic governance, economic development, and to basic liberties (Faller 2019; Tidd 2017). Such a partnership is to be pursued without the implication of U.S. continental hegemony, tacit in concepts of late XIX century Pan-American projects (Rangel 1977).

Of course, such an approach still contemplates the implicit leadership of the United States Government (USG) (Farah and Babineau 2019). Indeed, the corollaries of the aforementioned strategy appear to sprout from, at least, the following four axioms: Strategic economic, financial, military, and/or political-ideological penetration of the region by hostile extra-hemispheric state actors will be the exception -and not the norm- in the foreseeable future. Organized crime will be considered a threat to LAC states' national security and will hence be combated (*SOUTHCOM Enhanced Counter Narcotics Operations* n.d.). Violent extremists will be considered antithetical



to state sovereignty and will hence be combated (Oxford 2019). Governments in the LAC region will consider economic development and individual prosperity to be national priorities.

These assumptions beg the question: what are the implications of an absence of such a consensus among the governments of the Western Hemisphere? And, further: what are the consequences of an opposing view, or even an opposing consensus, existing among a significant portion of the political forces that can hold, have held, or hold power across the region? Let's take a look.

### **What is the São Paulo Forum?**

The *Foro de São Paulo* (São Paulo Forum - SPF) is an alliance of political and para-political organizations from 27 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (Foro de São Paulo Partidos n.d.), and, less prominently, some extra-regional countries. It functions as both a sort of think tank and as a periodic, recurrent meeting platform or gathering for the region's far-Left forces and movements (Mojena Milián 2018a; Redacción 2019). Researchers have summarized the strategic logic underlying the foundation of the SPF, as follows: «[it was created] with the goal of regaining in Latin America what had been lost in Eastern Europe» (Newman 2010, para. 8).

The São Paulo Forum is a resilient ideological alliance that provides extremist public policy recommendations to formal political parties, social movements, and insurgent groups throughout the Western Hemisphere (Mojena Milián 2018b). One truly promising approach (Boccanera 2019) to understanding the Forum has defined it as a political-ideological *lodge* that, on a regular basis, bears resemblance to the operation of the infamous, now-extinct P2 [Propaganda Due] lodge in Italy: in other words, a society which aims to connect -and be a

communications/resources vessel between- public figures in government, prominent private-sector individuals/interests, and the criminal underworld.

Although the SPF managed to evade significant media exposure for many years since its inception (Guenni 2013), the last decade has hosted the debate on whether or not this alliance commands any real *policy* influence over its members. The debate is twofold: on one hand, it is about the actual structure -if it has such a thing- of the SPF; on the other hand, it is about the SPF's actual power and control. Given the specific connotation that the word alliance has in defense and security studies, the word *club* might do as a more precise term for encapsulating the idea of what the SPF is.

Even though, allegedly, conversations on the matter began in January 1989, the inauguration of the club is officially situated on July 3rd, 1990. It all took place in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. On the fourth, the *Encontro de Partidos e Organizações de Esquerda da América Latina e Caribe* (Meeting of [48] Left-wing Parties and Organizations of Latin America and the Caribbean) came up with its manifesto or joint declaration. The message was essentially negative and the content was kept at the level of broad policy statements: the Left shall strive to oppose what they called «neo-Liberalism».

The event took place under the auspices of the Workers' Party (PT) of Brazil, headquartered in São Paulo, and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC). Another important convener was the Mexican PRD (Democratic Revolution Party). The two main figures politically sponsoring the move were Brazilian unionist leader Luis Da Silva and Cuban ruler Fidel Castro, respectively. Three points stand out from what is known: It is said that the SPF was launched to provide a substitute beacon to the far-Left in the LAC region, given the dissolution of the USSR. However, the Soviet Union didn't officially dissolve until December 1991 – three years after the

initial talks that served as prelude to the announcement of the Forum. The confluence of the Cuban Revolution's Marxist-Leninist variant -Guevarism- with tendencies like Laborism and Trotskyism, signals the beginning of an era of greater ideological and operational flexibility and pragmatism for the revolutionary Left in the sub-continent. Armed struggle was not to be regarded as the top approach any longer. A major willingness to play by democratic rules and to adapt to country-specific political frameworks, in order to attain national power, became more evident. Brazil was to become an important player in this shift. Direct connections to, and participation of, violent extremist organizations (VOEs) like the Colombian FARC and the ELN, the Chilean MIR, and the Peruvian *Shining Path*, were to be carefully concealed later on, in light of the previous point and in an overt effort to present the SPF as a legitimate political gathering – a re-branding of sorts was therefore accomplished. Chief among the issues thus buried, would be the links to organized crime. It is perhaps worth recalling the critical events that took place in Nicaragua that very year<sup>1</sup>.

As a political coalition, the SPF members list totals the largest number of presidencies in the history of the Western Hemisphere. Not looking into the Cuban example, over the years that list includes, at minimum, 20 major electoral successes [not in order and discounting reelections]: Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela), Rafael Correa (Ecuador), Lenín Moreno (Ecuador), Evo Morales (Bolivia), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Tabaré Vázquez (Uruguay), José Mujica (Uruguay), A.M. López Obrador (Mexico), Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (Argentina), Alberto Fernández (Argentina), Michelle Bachelet (Chile), Laurentino Cortizo

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1 “El Chamorrozo” was the name given to the surprising electoral victory by social-democrat candidate Violeta de Chamorro, during the 1990 presidential elections, against the incumbent Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega [see <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/nu.html> for a brief timeline (CIA n.d.)]. Many commentators have argued that this event inaugurated a period which, in essence, allowed the Sandinistas back to power in 2006. On a different level, such an event guaranteed amnesty and impunity for a political force -the FSLN (*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*)- deeply involved in drugs and narcotics trafficking, organized crime, and in subversive activity – all under the tutelage of Castro's Cuba (Douglass 2001, Chapter 8; Fuentes 2002).

(Panama), Danilo Medina (Dominican Republic), Mauricio Funes (El Salvador), Salvador Sánchez Cerén (El Salvador), Luiz Inácio da Silva (Brazil), Dilma Rousseff (Brazil), and Ollanta Humala (Peru).

### **The Forum's Roots**

The origins of the SPF can be traced back, at least intellectually, to the short-lived LAC section [OLAS - Latin American Solidarity Organization] of the OSPAAAL: the Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This alliance was convened at the first Tricontinental Conference – an event held in Havana, in January 1966, under the auspices of the Soviet Union. The first leader of this sub-section was Chilean Senator Salvador Allende, who would later on become President of Chile (Douglass 2001).

OLAS had the outspoken mission of coordinating the socialist revolutionaries and the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America (Calvo González 2018). Its life span was rather short, but the experience served as inspiration to the far-Left founders and organizers of the SPF (García Ponce 2016). In the absence of an ideological and strategic *center of gravity* or metropolis, the strongest elements of the sub-continental Marxist current had been preparing a way to transition into the post-Soviet era:

During a meeting, which took place on January 8, 1989, Castro and leaders of the Brazilian Workers' Party decided that if Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva did not win the Brazilian presidential elections at the end of the year, they would establish an international organization to spearhead and coordinate the whole Latin American left and bring the United States to its knees, which was Castro's life purpose, as he himself had stated many times.

The Inter American Institute 2013, p. 2

The *pan-Leftist* power agenda promoted by the SPF [i.e. the unification of as many regional Left-wing currents as possible, under one banner, towards the goal of attaining national, transnational, and multilateral power], finds its ancestry in the meetings of the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920). According to Rangel (1977), it was during this seminal event that the first articulate, congruent policy declarations for socialist revolution in the Third World were drafted. The event's *Proceedings*<sup>2</sup> issued initial guidance provisions on the application of Marxist-Leninist maxims to the struggle for World Revolution rising from the "periphery" (non-industrialized areas).

On the other hand, the first intellectual articulation of what became the doctrine of the Forum had already been fully essayed, in 1922, by Argentine Socialist Party member Manuel Ugarte, in *La patria grande*. Having supposedly coined the term -the great fatherland- himself, for this context, the book lays out the groundwork for the ideal that has been publicly espoused by so many of the SPF's leaders who have made it to their countries' presidency and have used that term. Chief among them: Cristina Kirchner (Argentina), Rafael Correa (Ecuador), "Lula" (Brazil), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), and Hugo Chávez (Venezuela). As hinted above, the ideal can be grasped by looking, for instance, at the main event of the 24th annual gathering of the São Paulo Forum, entitled: «For the Unity and Integration of Latin America and the Caribbean». That edition took place in Havana, in 2018.

### **The Forum's Modus Operandi**

A brief look at this aspect of the SPF must take individuals and individual connections into account. The "club" is composed of member organizations, yes, but the key personalities of

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2 An open access, complete English translation of the minutes is fully available with this online version: <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/>

the club share a common history, which unites them through and beyond ideology and diplomatic courtesy. For example: when the Forum was convened, it was done so at the *personal* request of Fidel Castro to “Lula” (Boyd 2009). Fidel had a very personal relationship with Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, a man whose policies will be examined in this work and whose Minister of Exterior and subsequent heir in power, Nicolás Maduro, was trained in Cuba. Leaders like Nicaragua’s Daniel Ortega and Humberto Ortega have had a working relationship with Raul Castro that goes back many decades (Douglass 2001). Chávez had a personal relationship with Argentina’s Cristina Kirchner... and so on.

This club has been construed by some researchers as essentially a PCC - PT - FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] triad -or «trilogy»- of power (F. Boccanera, personal communication, April 7, 2020, para. 3). In this light, the Forum is not a political organization as such, it is not a new Internationale. Rather, it constitutes a «power system» (Boccanera 2019, para. 5), functioning more like a network of services and favors than a league of parties.

The SPF now openly boasts having an Executive Secretariat, domiciled in the city of São Paulo, flaunted on social media since 2013<sup>3</sup>. It has an affiliated review journal or intellectual outlet called *América Libre* (Peña Esclusa 2010). Although it hasn’t been able to assemble every single year since 1990, the Forum celebrates its annual meeting in a different city each time, inside the countries where it counts upon a member organization. Apart from the annual gatherings, its policy-guiding continuity is ensured by the regularity of the Work Groups, «[...] that hold meetings almost every month in many capital cities of Latin America» (Boyd 2009, p. 2). These are also itinerant: they take place in different host cities each time.

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3 A closer look at <https://twitter.com/forodesaopaulo> will reveal an overview of the SPF’s strategic messaging online.

Many other structures, groups, sub-groups, and entities, some known and some less known, sympathize with -and are at the disposal of- the SPF. In tandem, these pieces constitute real organizational means whereby the club behaves as a kind of conglomerate. Nevertheless, anatomy of this web is less pertinent here than an observation regarding the end result of such a synergy: the creation of *consensus*. And by this we don't mean philosophical, theoretical, or even political [which they might never need] – we mean *policy* consensus.

### **The Forum's Scope and Ramifications**

With a total of at least 121 members (Foro de São Paulo Partidos n.d.), i.e. officially acknowledged affiliate organizations<sup>4</sup>, the SPF is the vastest and most diverse ideologically-exclusive power club in the entire LAC region (Boyd 2009). As evidenced before, it has reached or has come very close to 14-15 of the highest public offices on the land. This is no small feat, if one analyzes it from a qualitative, more than quantitative, viewpoint. For example, the relative importance of countries like Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina, Panama, or Chile, geoeconomically and/or politically speaking, is enormous for the region (Peña Esclusa 2010).

Because of its weight and power, and given the coherence and cohesiveness among its members, and thanks to the relentless, cumulative nature of its efforts and projects over time and space, the club has survived – overcoming major setbacks like exposure or the loss of power in crucial countries. It is still very much alive today, after 30 years of continuous operation. The Forum manages to exert a great deal of control over/within many multilateral bodies, continental or regional blocs, and integration mechanisms throughout the Western Hemisphere (The Inter American Institute 2013).

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4 One important thing to remember is that the list of delegates invited to each SPF (quasi) annual meeting is not circumscribed to the list of SPF members. More countries and more represented organizations take part in the gatherings regularly, although non-members have a limited say in the official results of the events.

The list of closely-aligned entities that, in many respects, have come to mirror the ambitions of the SPF's founders includes: UNASUR (Union of South American Nations). CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States). ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America). PetroCaribe.

The list of entities over which the SPF has come to hold great sway includes: MERCOSUR (Southern Common Market). CAN (Andean Community of Nations). OEA (Organization of American States - OAS). CARICOM (Caribbean Community). SICA (Central American Integration System).

On a final note for this section, it is essential to point out that the SPF maintains a worldwide set of connections to and relationships with other ideologically-motivated networks, institutions, and platforms, many of them have similar traits to the Forum. Of recent media worthiness, one can mention the emergence of the *Grupo de Puebla* (Puebla Group), which appears to be a more formal, permanent political device that brings together salient elements of the SPF with decisive operatives from the Socialist International, like Spain's Rodríguez Zapatero (José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero Llama a Poner a Estados Unidos En "Una Situación Imposible" 2020).

To a certain type of observer, more noteworthy could be the working relationship that the club maintains with the ruling parties of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK): the Chinese Communist Party and the Workers' Party of Korea, respectively. Both were invited to the 2019 SPF gathering, that took place in Caracas – its 25<sup>th</sup> edition. It is no accident, then, that Venezuela's ruling party (PSUV - United Socialist Party of Venezuela) keeps close ties with both forces, as the Bolivarian



Republic holds good -some would say *vital*- diplomatic relations with both East Asian states (Rodrigues 2019).

## CHAPTER 1: POLICY GUIDANCE À LA SÃO PAULO FORUM

It's not possible to separate the thinking that comes out of the São Paulo Forum, on regional policy issues, from the works and opinions of the LAC's far-Left *intelligentsia*. Some of these public intellectuals have even been ideologues of, and/or advisers to, governing figureheads in the region. Given the limited access to the more-detailed documentation that comes out of each gathering of the Forum, as well as from its quasi-permanent Working Group, a brief look at some influential sympathetic voices was granted here. However, it was mostly from a critical reading of official [final] SPF statements, called *Declarations*, that a summary reconstruction of the club's major "party lines" on the chosen topic was attempted.

### **Understanding Defense and National Security Topics in Context**

The underlying assumption regarding national security and the state, is that the defense and security sectors of the LAC nations have historically served the interests of international capitalism and have been a conduit of imperialism (Rajland et al. 2003) – to the extent that these two are considered separate categories. Among the intellectual circles of the SPF, the corollary on the matter seems to be that so long as the Left and the Progressives do not manage to align the foundation and conduct of the military to the revolutionary agenda, the defense and security sectors of the region will remain instruments *against* that which the Left considers the sovereignty of the people(s).

One of the issues diagnosed as a core tenet of that tradition which these intellectuals deem perverse, and contrary to the revolutionary program, is the "artificial" separation of the defense establishment from civil society. The axiom then is that such a separation, cultivated

through multiple generations of military professionals, results in the alienation of the armed forces from the rest of the nation-state.

This identified common trait is problematic, in the view of these analysts, in at least three related ways: it generates a certain degree of excessive autonomy for the defense establishment, giving rise to all sorts of abuses within a context of unaccountability; it shields and armors the military politically, placing it out of the easy reach of the revolutionary agenda, once the Left takes over the government; and it cements the perpetual risk of military backlash and reactionary activity for every opportunity in which the military “caste” feels that it is being threatened, or it is being excessively controlled, or it is losing its role of tutelage over the state.

The phrase *take over the government* is used here accordingly. Daniel Ortega (2003), the Nicaraguan leader and veteran revolutionary figure, succinctly explains why holding office is different from holding power. For a revolutionary force, making it to the government -electorally or not- does not mean having the power. In order to enact and execute deep societal changes, a Left-wing program, according to Ortega, must see to it that its revolutionaries are willing, ready, and able to not only seize all means or instruments of state power, but also to accrue all factors of power that are active nation-wide<sup>5</sup>. In other words, having (some) power does not amount to having *the* power. Or, in short, government power is not total power – and what is needed in order to accomplish revolutionary transformations is, ultimately, the latter.<sup>6</sup>

The recipe that these analysts have encountered in order to reverse or deconstruct the (perceived) common problem of the alienation of the defense and security apparatus, within the region’s countries, rests upon the doctrine known as *civil-military union*. According to

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5 It might be worthwhile to note that Ortega has been true to his word: his administration is essentially carrying out today in Nicaragua what he proposed back in 2003.

6 «*El objetivo no es meramente llegar al gobierno, sino llegar para transformar la sociedad.*» – *Mexico Declaration*, 1998, p. 7 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013). [This quote roughly translates to: The objective is not merely to reach high office, but to reach it in order to transform society.]

intellectuals close to the SPF, a newly-formed Left-wing/Progressive Government ought to strive towards establishing policies and policy concepts that seek to blur the line between the armed forces and the rest of national society (Rajland et al. 2003).

This could be interpreted as a reform program for “civilianizing” the military and militarizing the civilian population, following perhaps some doctrine like that of *integral defense*, but, as indicated above, it goes beyond that idea. The vision-objective stretches to the point of realigning or re-prioritizing the very function of the defense establishment, in order to make such a function consonant with the projects of the Revolution.

### **Defense and Security Policy in the LAC: an Anti-U.S. Rewrite**

The fight against transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), the War on Drugs, and the War on Terror, including the campaigns to combat the further spread and threat of narco-terrorism, are dismissed as subsequent excuses for the military and paramilitary expansion of Imperialism, in the absence of the Soviet menace, which, paraphrasing the Forum, cannot be exploited anymore by the U.S. to justify intervention(ism)<sup>7</sup>. The SPF alleges that the main victims of the War on Drugs have been the farmers [*Mexico Declaration*, 1998, p. 10 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. As for the War on Terror, there’s a good snapshot of the Forum’s thinking on this in the 2005 *São Paulo Declaration* – which reads [p. 1 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]: «Bush [43] utilized the rhetoric of the fight against terrorism and the proclamation of preventive war as background for trying to criminalize the popular struggles in Latin America and the Caribbean.»<sup>8</sup> Such criminalization, it is claimed, extends to politics, and to the social and

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7 By 2011, the Forum had bluntly stated that drug trafficking and organized crime are threats and tragedies caused by the policies of «Imperialism and the Right» [*Managua Declaration*, p. 1 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)].

8 The author’s translation of: *Bush utilizaba la retórica de la lucha contra el terrorismo y la proclamación de la guerra preventiva como trasfondo para intentar criminalizar las luchas populares en América Latina y el Caribe.*

political movements struggling for the «transformation of our peoples» [*Montevideo Declaration*, 2008, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. The Forum officially expresses rejection towards all forms of terrorism, but also towards the use of terrorism as an “excuse” to criminalize social protest and as scaremongering. In the countries where its members haven’t reached high office or have been displaced from power, the SPF is particularly concerned about “the Right” using the fight against organized crime as pretext to promote security-sector policies which «militarize societies», leverage scaremongering among the population in order to favor ever-more repressive actions, and «reduce the political-action space for the Left» [*Mexico Declaration*, 2009, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)].

The Forum has usually portrayed both the invocation of the Organization of American States’ ‘Democratic Charter’ and the reactivation of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance as mere instruments of U.S. interventionism<sup>9</sup>. Within the context of the War on Terror, these mechanisms serve as constraints against progressive change agendas throughout the LAC, according to the SPF [*Havana Declaration*, 2001, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)].

The presence of any and all U.S. military forces in the region<sup>10</sup> is construed as an affront to national sovereignty and to the integral, autonomous development of the peoples and countries of the Western Hemisphere. This includes, among other demands, a call for the restitution (cessation) of the territory of Guantanamo to the Cuban state, and even for the departure of all U.S. military presence from Puerto Rico. The U.S. military footprint is denounced as a constant threat to the region’s anti-imperialist regimes; decried as a repressive «occupation» army that

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9 Absolute rejection of OAS, by the Forum, has morphed into heavy criticism over the years – if one compares early depictions of the Organization, with the current stance. This change in “declaratory policy” is most likely due to the ability of the SPF to influence and/or conquer spaces within the OAS system, over time. However, as with any political entity and reality, one should always be ready to distinguish between what is publicly stated and what is actually carried out in practice.

10 The United States of America is labeled an extra-regional actor on page 5 of the 2010 *Buenos Aires Declaration* (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013).

contributes to sustaining the economic and social policies which the SPF opposes [*Havana Declaration*, 2001, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. It claims that such footprint affects «the stability and peaceful coexistence of the entire Latin American and Caribbean region» [*Mexico Declaration*, 2009, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. The Forum specifically denounces the United States' defense and security actions and cooperation efforts regarding counterinsurgency<sup>11</sup>. The SPF has alleged that the U.S. seeks to develop its hegemonic aspiration by way of the preemptive-war policy, with the shorter-term goal of stalling «the processes of unity and integration» that allow the LAC region «a better defense of its natural riches.» [*Montevideo Declaration*, 2008, p. 1 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]

### **Military as Stigma**

Use of the armed forces in national security functions, and for purposes other than defense, is considered a remnant of the National Security Doctrine and of the militarism of the XX-century dictatorships that arose all throughout Latin America and beyond. Early SPF declarations<sup>12</sup> denounce any law & order use of the armed forces in the region as: illegitimate, curtailing democracy, and abusing the military to be guarantors of the «imposed» neoliberal

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11 «*La estrategia contrainsurgente de los Estados Unidos ha generado la intervención militar y la militarización de la seguridad pública en los países de América Latina bajo el argumento de la lucha contra la real acción y violencia de las bandas delincuenciales y del narcotráfico que han puesto en crisis humanitaria a nuestros países y que son protegidas, política y financieramente, por las propias elites dominantes a las que sirven.*» – Reads: «The United States' counterinsurgency strategy has generated the military intervention and the militarization of public security in the countries of Latin America, under the argument of the fight against the real action and violence of the criminal gangs and of the narcotics-trafficking entities, which have put our countries under humanitarian crisis and which are protected, politically and financially, by the very dominant elites whom they serve.» [*Buenos Aires Declaration*, 2010, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] Here the Forum doesn't limit itself to the familiar comment about the U.S. -fomenting and/or implementing- militarism and militarization under the guise of security and criminal justice cooperation, throughout the LAC. The SPF admits that malign and violent non-state actors have triggered a massive regional problem, but the admission comes with a twist from class-domination power theory: the hemisphere's ruling classes [whom the Forum opposes] are to blame for organized crime, since the violence and the criminal entities themselves are ultimately beneficial to the elites' self-serving structure.

12 See, for instance: *Montevideo Declaration*, 1995, p. 2 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013). [Fifth gathering of the *Foro de São Paulo*, May 25-28, 1995.]

model/system. Throughout the 1990s (that is, before they had reached any high office in the LAC region), the Forum consistently condemned what they viewed as «militarized», «tutored», or «cropped» democracies in the sub-continent. The states which, according to the SPF, still espoused those kinds of political systems were deemed authoritarian in nature.

The issues of security and narcotics trafficking<sup>13</sup> are deemed to be in need of profound reinterpretation and reshaping, both intellectually and in the realm of policy. The SPF has sometimes referred to this as «the construction of an integral regional anti-drug policy» [*Buenos Aires Declaration*, 2010, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. Axiomatically, any need -real or hypothetical- for military support in order to tackle this problem-set meets the Forum's outright denial. That is so, despite widely-recognized, endemic regional vulnerabilities, directly related to those issues, such as: law-enforcement and judicial-system weaknesses or inadequacies, systemic corruption at multiple levels, the tactical disadvantages of civilian police forces against many violent transnational criminal organizations and their local branches, the inability of the state to secure its monopoly of force and its legitimacy across large areas or ungoverned territories within many countries, etc. As described further below, the professional armed forces are given their place rather somewhere else in this agenda.

### **Integrating the Block – Also in Uniform**

There was a plan for a phased military integration of the Latin American countries' armed forces; it was formally presented to the IV Meeting of Defense Ministers of the Americas, in Brasilia, Brazil, by Chávez's then-minister of defense, Gen. Ismael Eliécer Hurtado Soucre,

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13 *La lucha contra el narcotráfico y sus redes requiere de nueva mirada más integral que incluya la corresponsabilidad de los grandes países consumidores, en enfoque de salud pública, y la no criminalización de los cultivos.* [A clearer posture, as seen in the *Montevideo Declaration* [2008, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]: «The fight against narcotics-trafficking and its networks requires a more integral look that includes the co-responsibility of the big consumer countries, in a public-health perspective, and the non-criminalization of the crops.»]

back in October of 2000 (Dieterich 2004, Chapter 1). Years later, again in the 2005 *São Paulo Declaration* [p. 5, point 22 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)], the SPF briefly hints at its member parties' commitment to working for the «articulation in defense matters» – this time covering the scope of the entire LAC region. The 2008 *Montevideo Declaration* [p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] has a positive recognition of the existing proposal to create a South American Defense Council (under the UNASUR integrative structure, mentioned in the previous chapter). By 2010, the creation of this instance/entity was already being celebrated on page 5 of the *Buenos Aires Declaration* (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013).

The strategic end-goal of this envisioned military integration, coupled with the total withdrawal of any and all «foreign military bases» and forces from the LAC region, is, in the words of the Forum, to turn the subcontinent into a «peace zone»<sup>14</sup> [«zona de paz» – a favorite term of the SPF-linked intellectuals and political figureheads] [*Buenos Aires Declaration*, 2010, p. 5 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. In the cited document, a certain revelation is made: the Forum had been quietly pushing for its member-controlled governments to “renovate” (i.e. revolutionize, transform) their respective nation-states' strategic doctrines, in order to make these doctrines compatible with, and supportive of, the «[...] assertion of an autochthonous geopolitical thought» [p. 5 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] within the context of UNASUR – a very SPF-friendly multilateral structure. This renovation finally happened... and was formally acknowledged in 2010.

### **The Agenda: a Snapshot**

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Caracas Declaration*, 2012, this concept seems to include the idea of an LAC region «free of nuclear armament» [p. 2 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] – an issue which will be briefly discussed below.



From the outset, the club has expressed its utmost repulsion towards any U.S. government initiative aimed at achieving greater economic or security cooperation, coordination, and/or integration with countries in the LAC sub-continent. The Forum's founding document, the 1990 *São Paulo Declaration*, states the following seminal paragraph about the G.H.W. Bush administration's plans to consolidate its LAC policy:

And so, then, these proposals are alien to the genuine interests of social and economic development of our region and go hand in hand with the restriction of our national sovereignties and with the trimming and tutelage of our democratic rights. They, in reality, aim at impeding an autonomous integration of our Latin America directed towards satisfying its most vital needs.<sup>15</sup>

Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013, p. 2

This *Patria Grande* [Great Fatherland] conception is consonant with Manuel Ugarte's (2010) 1920s dream of a socialist integration of Hispanic America – following a Bolivarian (Dieterich 2004), rather than Pan-American, doctrine.

Integration compatible with the interests and vision of the United State's Western Hemisphere policy is deemed a form of «subordinate» integration; hence, an «integration from below» [*Managua Declaration*, 1992, p. 5 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] is the only acceptable way forward for the LAC states – an «alternative» integration. In other words, regional integration must take place in a networked fashion, without a regional hegemon dictating the format from above. Therefore, when the Forum talks of *sovereignty* and of integration immediately afterwards, it is not being oxymoronic: its official documents are referring to the sovereignty of the desired, future LAC regional power bloc integrated as one.

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15 The current work's author's English translation of: «*Así pues, estas propuestas son ajenas a los genuinos intereses de desarrollo económico y social de nuestra región y van combinadas con la restricción de nuestras soberanías nacionales y con el recorte y tutelaje de nuestros derechos democráticos. Ellas, en realidad, apuntan a impedir una integración autónoma de nuestra América Latina dirigida a satisfacer sus más vitales necesidades.*»

Elsewhere, the SPF also hints that such a project is a phase of the work towards forging a «new South-South integration» [*São Paulo Declaration*, 2005, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)], with the aim of achieving a «different globalization» – sometimes dubbed the “Global South”.

The Forum wants complete withdrawal of all U.S. and NATO-allied forces from any and all territories in the LAC, including from Puerto Rico and from the Falklands – even peace-keeping and HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) missions. This translates to the complete absence of forward presence from USSOUTHCOM components<sup>16</sup>, especially land forces, with the virtual erasure of the U.S. deployment footprint in the region – except for international waters and neutral air space.

The SPF wants impunity and free circulation of narco-terrorist networks and organizations in the key territories and points deemed strategic. Even the U.S. policy of reaching out to assist in the fight against transnational organized crime is viewed as an excuse for intervention and interventionism, under the guise of -in the Forum’s own terms- the imperialist doctrine of «hemispheric security» [*São Paulo Declaration*, 2005, p. 4 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. At some point, the SPF has reiterated its commitment to the «head-on fight against the free enterprise of narcotics» [*Mexico Declaration*, 1998, p. 10 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]; however, its concrete call to action demands a «peaceful and concerted» solution to this «world problem». The hemispheric security doctrine<sup>17</sup> «promotes [and/or augments] militarization» [*San Salvador Declaration*, 2007, p. 1 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)], rather.

In turn, the mere presence of active USSOUTHCOM components -like the IV Fleet [U.S. Navy Forces South]- is considered, from time to time, a symptom of the progressive

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16 At some moments, this even includes U.S.-government or allied civilian components: «[...] the presence of the intelligence and police services, under varied pretexts.» [*Buenos Aires Declaration*, 2010, p. 5 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]

17 The SPF claims that such a geostrategic «doctrine» provides the United States with the intellectual scaffolding to support its «system of continental domination» [*San Salvador Declaration*, 2007, p.3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)].

militarization of the region. In other words, military presence is equated with a policy of militarization. More widely, any Western-allied [they talk about «extra-regional»] military presence in the LAC is considered, by the Forum, a threat to the security, peace, human rights, and democracy of the entire region.

In multiple declarations throughout its years of existence, the SPF makes a point against border security, which is viewed as a component of the U.S. concept of hemispheric security. The Forum argues that its position opposes the criminalization of Latin-American migration, which is done, according to the argument, by equating it to the fight against narco-trafficking and terrorism. In 2008, the SPF essentially declared itself to be in favor of open-borders policies worldwide.

There has been a push for the non-military resolution of the Colombian insurgency conflict for many years now, preferably by negotiation with external mediation, a humanitarian agenda, and the exclusion of «the presence of extra-regional military forces.»<sup>18</sup> [*São Paulo Declaration*, 2013, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)] The political solution to the narco-terrorism activity was emphasized by the SPF long before the 2016 Peace Accords<sup>19</sup> between the FARC-EP and the Santos administration, that originated in Cuba. The language traditionally employed by the SPF, in reference to violent extremist organizations in Colombia, some of which have been involved in narco-terrorism, is revealing: the *Niquinohomo Declaration* [2000, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)], for instance, calls them «military political movements».

Accordingly, the U.S.-sponsored ‘Plan Colombia’ defense and security cooperation program received continuous condemnation by the SPF, who labeled it an interventionist and neo-colonialist initiative functional only to U.S. global strategy [*Havana Declaration*, 2001, p. 3

<sup>18</sup> Mainly alluding to the U.S. armed forces.

<sup>19</sup> When the so-called Havana Peace Dialogues kicked off, the Forum then went on to advocate for «the insertion of other insurgent forces into the peace process.» [*São Paulo Declaration*, 2013, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]

(Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. The same applied to ‘Plan Patriota’, a U.S.-supported offensive against the insurgents in the southern part of Colombia (Vieira 2004), during the Uribe administration. This initiative provoked a particularly intense reaction from the Forum, especially in 2005<sup>20</sup>, when it declared that such U.S.-backed programs and actions revealed the intention of using Colombia as a beachhead and command base to «regionalize» the «war» against the Andean peoples, as well as to promote the undermining of the Revolution in Venezuela and in Cuba [*São Paulo Declaration*, 2005, p. 3 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)]. Consequently, the SPF also condemned and denounced the Bush [43] administration’s ‘Andean Regional Initiative’, or ARI.<sup>21</sup> Other U.S.-sponsored defense- and national-security-related items/projects that the Forum has publicly rejected, and voiced opposition towards, include the so-called “Plan Balboa”<sup>22</sup> and the ‘Mérida Initiative’<sup>23</sup>. These plans and initiatives are labeled the «tip of the spear» of not only U.S. military intervention in the region, but also of political interference [*Montevideo Declaration*, 2008, p. 2 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)].

The São Paulo Forum has a special place in its analyses for Colombia, for it has repeatedly identified the Colombian government as a political-military beachhead, or «bridgehead» [*Montevideo Declaration*, 2008, p. 2 (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013)], of U.S.

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20 Insidious and revealing, the cited document goes back to the issue of the War on Terror as pretext for interventionism, imperialism, and domination of the LAC region, but it does so briefly mentioning Paraguay, Paraguayan national security policy, and the transnational terrorist threat that has long operated from and out of the tri-border area over there. We know today that Hezbollah and malign Iranian influence are of great concern precisely in that very same area.

21 ARI was a fiscal year 2002 U.S.-government program aimed at funding, and assisting with, a multi-dimensional array of measures and actions to prepare Colombia’s neighboring countries to better absorb and withstand the negative impacts that the Colombian conflict’s escalation could predictably bring to those countries. The hope back then was that ARI would be a well-rounded initiative, helping with: the fight against organized crime, national and regional alternative-development efforts, and the strengthening of liberal-democratic institutions and systems (Office of the Press Secretary - The White House 2002).

22 For a quick and succinct reference to this controversy, access GlobalSecurity.org 2017, for their article on the topic (details in bibliography).

23 Initially signed into effect by Presidents Felipe Calderón (Mexico) and George W. Bush (USA), and later continued by Presidents Peña Nieto and Obama, this ‘Initiative’ sought to formulate, design, plan, and implement a comprehensive strategy to jointly deal with the causes and consequences of narcotics-trafficking-related violence, and to elevate such a strategy to the more-permanent policy level of the bilateral security relationship between the two bordering countries. (U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Mexico n.d.)

intimidation, interventionism, militarism, and imperialism toward the wider region's governments and peoples. Examples of this include, but are not limited to: deployments of U.S. Naval Forces South (or U.S. Navy IV Fleet), the 2008 U.S.-supported military raids -against FARC encampments- that took place across the southern Colombian border into Ecuadorian territory, the presence of U.S. military advisers and training personnel in any LAC country, etc. Particular outrage came from the SPF upon the Colombian government's request to be incorporated into NATO, something deemed a grave threat to peace in the LAC.

As such, the Forum has reaffirmed its support for the political solution to the region's armed conflicts, while simultaneously expressing the legitimacy of insurgent responses to the governments and authorities it opposes. The immediate conclusion here is that this club will continue showing its sympathy towards ideologically-biased impunity for like-minded armed groups, alleging the principles of non-intervention and the self-determination of the peoples.

The SPF continuously advocates for the resolution of armed conflict through the United Nations (UN) and other international *fora*, despite condemning the policies of most multilateral organisms such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and even the Organization of American States (OAS) or the UN itself. However, the SPF has consistently expressed its repulsion towards unilateralism in matters of global security of peoples and nation-states.

On a brief note about the Forum's declared WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) stance: The support towards the free and unrestricted use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, in the context of underdeveloped nations (including Iran)<sup>24</sup>, is simultaneously voiced with the condemnation of the existence of all nuclear arsenals worldwide – calling for their dismantling and elimination.

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24 Explicit support for the May 17, 2010, joint [Brazil, Iran, and Turkey] 'Tehran Nuclear Declaration' even appears on page 4 of the Forum's 2010 *Buenos Aires Declaration* (Foro de São Paulo 1990-2013). «International norms» are said to give support for the right to nuclear-energy technology.

Lastly, it's fair to say that the SPF doesn't believe in keeping the military, or any other defense-and-security-sector state institution for that matter, strictly apolitical – while not openly advocating for partisanship. Active members of the military who have historically shown decisive support towards -or sympathy for- the Left-wing agenda, within the countries in which the SPF did not have a member party in high office, are called «democratic military»<sup>25</sup>. This implies an understanding that holds, essentially, that being politically motivated towards the Left is equivalent to the desired institutional attitude [mandate] of the armed forces: in other words, respect towards the democratic process and defense of the constitutional republican system.

### **Bottom Line**

Each and every one of the São Paulo Forum's Final Declarations considered for this project [1990-2013] treats the issue of national security, defense, and/or the armed forces: in the most recent documents of the analyzed period, it had dedicated permanent sections, whose paragraphs were conclusions emanating from the themed «workshops» -functioning within each gathering- that specialized on these topics and themselves emitted further in-depth statements. These thematic workshops were established later on in the Forum's history, and are like congressional committees and subcommittees at the working level of the SPF and of its gatherings, parallel to the plenary sessions. They highlight the importance that some policy areas have acquired over time.

The Forum has at least four non-negotiable points in this agenda: Total and absolute decolonization of the LAC sub-continent, in order to guarantee the absence of NATO forces and/or infrastructure in the region, as well as the political perviousness of the newly-independent

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25 So it has been expressed and presented, not just in the official SPF *declarations* that are produced at the end of each one of the large, quasi-annual gatherings, but also in other documents pertaining to conferences and debates of a more intellectual/academic nature that are closely linked with the SPF's activity. The papers on the topic of national defense and security presented in *América Libre* are one example of the latter.

nation-states. Complete decoupling of the LAC's defense and security sectors from any form of commitment, cooperation, or coordination with any United States government entity. This includes doing away with the so-called Good Neighbor Policy, the concept of hemispheric security, and the choosing of the U.S. as the "partner of choice" in these matters. Fast demilitarization of the solutions to the narco-terrorism problem in the region, including insurgencies and the fight against transnational criminal organizations. Intra-regional, political, negotiated solutions are taken as the ideal. A drastic change in national strategic culture and grand strategy must take place throughout the entire region. This shall happen in order to accommodate for an anti-imperialistic and revolutionary set of strategic and operational doctrines, and for a foreign policy dictated by the geostrategic imperative of social, economic, political, and military integration of the LAC into a single regional power bloc (Dieterich 2004).

## CHAPTER 2: CHÁVEZ TRANSFORMS VENEZUELA'S MILITARY

In December 1998, Hugo Chávez won the Venezuelan presidential elections, assuming office in February 1999. He was the country's first military president in almost four decades. He had campaigned without a formal political party, no real political trajectory, and on a vindictive platform of punishment against the status quo. More significant, however, was the event that would launch Chávez's public career after being released from prison (for leading a failed military coup d'état against the Carlos Andrés Pérez administration in 1992): the 1994 visit to Havana, where Fidel Castro received Chávez with the equivalent honors of a head of state.

From the start of his presidency, Chávez made sure that his admiration for -and will to emulate- the Castro regime in Cuba became notorious. Even the Chávez administration's (1999-2012) earlier Defense Ministers acknowledged this public reality, however "neutral" or rationalizing their stance would be, facing the media, regarding the defense and security implications of Chávez's stated vision and desire (Arena 2000).

Any claim of political-ideological ambiguity from Chávez and his entourage, before 2009 [when, finally, he publicly declared himself a Marxist (Chávez: "Soy socialista, bolivariano, cristiano y también marxista." 2009 - Cuba Hoy)], can be dismissed upon a quick review of: his government's "special relationship" with Castro's Cuba, his 1994 speech at the University of Havana, and his upholding of Bolivarian socialism as the overarching doctrine for his project. This doctrine represented nothing new: it merely was a re-branding and relaunching of the classic Venezuelan Left's own bid for a "socialism with Venezuelan characteristics" [very much like the Chinese Communist Party's version]. Such an interpretation of the more Jacobin portions of Simon Bolivar's thought and deeds stemmed from a long tradition of Left-wing ideologues



and intellectuals, stretching all the way back to the early 1920s with the works of Manuel Ugarte (previously mentioned as the author of *The Great Fatherland*) and others. It can be summed up as a Leninist reading of Bolívar's geopolitical and grand-strategic reflections, especially regarding Empire and the geostrategic situation of the newly-formed Western Hemispheric republics. More importantly, the interpretation helped the Chavista project to legitimize and make digestible, from the beginning, a large aspect of the adoption of the Cuban military doctrine (Dieterich 2004, Chapter 3). Little reasonable doubt was left about the totalitarian nature of the state that Chavez's government was constructing – least of all regarding the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

### **Civil-Military Union (Plan Bolívar 2000 and Beyond)**

One of Chávez's earliest and most controversial advisers/ideologues, Argentine sociologist Norberto Ceresole, characterized the need for implementing the doctrine of a civil-military union, or "alliance", as falling within the set of imperatives dictated by the popular mandate bestowed upon the figure of Chávez -as *caudillo* of the new Venezuela that he was leading the nation into-: the mandate to achieve as much centralization of power as possible, in order to effectively lead such a transition (Ceresole 1999).

Plan Bolivar 2000 was to be the first major policy manifestation of that doctrine. Launched on 27 February 1999, it set very flexible management parameters for military units to directly aid in the execution of, and logistical support for, so-called national- and social-development programs, projects, and actions: anything from food distribution, to school and hospital construction, to delivering civilian transportation routes (Strønen 2016). This Plan fell under the direction of then-Army Commander General Víctor Cruz Weffer, and initially

mobilized 70,000 military personnel, along with materiel and equipment from the service components involved (Redacción El Estímulo 2018). It constituted the first of the many *ad hoc* / discretionary government initiatives for social aid and assistance, which later-on would adopt the official name of *Misiones* (“missions”).

Normatively speaking, Plan Bolívar 2000 was a natural consequence of the newly-imposed Bolivarian Constitution of the Venezuelan Republic, which augmented and added new roles and missions for the Armed Forces -writ large-, in order to foment their hands-on involvement in state-sponsored national-development policy items. Doctrinally speaking, the said plan, and the subsequent expansive presence of high-ranking military officers in public administration and high-level government positions, was meant to be a two-way street: it would bring down the social and psychological barriers erected between the civilian population and the Venezuelan military, eventually closing the historical gaps that existed between them, and it would provide the civilian world -especially in public policy and management- with the discipline, professionalism, and effectiveness that characterized military life. The doctrine of a civic-military union/alliance is perhaps best defined, in one sentence, by the regime’s own propaganda: «the fusion between the Armed Forces and the People» (Redacción El Universo 2009, para. 5).

### **Revolutionizing the Armed Forces’ Legal and Judicial Frameworks**

The Chávez administration imposed deeper changes on the Venezuelan military and defense sector, and at a faster pace, after the failed attempt to remove Chávez from office (Jácome 2011) in April, 2002, and after the Altamira Square military insurrection of late 2002. Sweeping reforms were put in place to address two critical needs of the Chavista regime: the

insertion of government-backed, irregular armed groups into the larger structure of the Armed Forces and the formalization of the ongoing push to give the regular components of the military services an unequivocal political-ideological and partisan bias – which was growing but was still incipient.

These and other critical power-building needs of the Chávez era were partially addressed, on a normative level, with the passing of (Jácome 2011, p. 6): the 2002 Organic Law of National Security, the 2005 Organic Law of the National Armed Forces, the 2008 Organic Law of the Bolivarian National Armed Force (LOFANB in Spanish), the 2008 Organic Law of the Police Service and of the National Police Corps, the 2009 Reform of the LOFANB, the 2010 Reform of the LOFANB, and the 2011 Reform of the LOFANB.

Notably, the July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2008, *Ley Orgánica de la Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (LOFANB)*, was an important piece / Act of legislation which was also called for, following the enactment of the 1999 -Bolivarian- Constitution – and coming as a natural step after the “floodgates” had been opened by this document and by the previous two major organic laws put in place. Within Venezuela’s legal system, organic laws regulate the existence and governance of entire public “organs” or sectors of the nation-state, particularly those under the Executive branch of government, but not exclusively. This regulatory piece of legislation, however, provides only a general set of parameters and limitations, pending the approval of more detailed norms and controls further down the road.

It is outside the scope of this work to get deeper into the profound changes brought about by the birth of the 2008 LOFANB, but suffice it to say that it: consolidated a delicate process of shattering the vertical sense of hierarchy within the Venezuelan Armed Forces; expanded even more the functions of military authorities and command figures into the spheres of civilian life

on multiple levels across the country; allowed for a larger encroachment of the military upon the functions and tasks of non-military security services and agencies; and, last but not least, this law dramatically expanded the direct, discretionary powers and command attributions of the President / Commander in Chief – in obvious disregard for the traditional chain of command and the ascendancy of rank or merit (Redacción El Universo 2009).

### **Military Vote and Politics in the Barracks**

As has been hinted at before, one can trace the origins of the process of partisanship of the Venezuelan Armed Forces back to the 1999 Constitution. This document not only opened the gates and set normative incentives for the open and active role of military personnel in the economic, political, social, and cultural worlds of civilians, through state interventionism. The Bolivarian Constitution also changed the official name of the republic and set in motion an all-encompassing revolution of the symbols of national identity, pride, and power – including those of the defense and security sectors (Perera 2019). Therefore, by both the ruling party and, later on, the defense and security services identifying as the sole representatives of the nature of the new republic, the state became a *de facto* one-party system – of which the Armed Forces became its “gun”, and within which all other tendencies (everything outside Bolivarian socialism) were to become only marginal actors with virtually no chance of embodying the new system’s ideology and with practically no representative power.

The 1999 Constitution also gave the military the right to vote. It is true that it also expressly prohibits active-duty military personnel to engage in partisanship and activities like campaigning (Redacción BBC Mundo 2013), however, the Chavista regime has gone to great lengths to blur the lines demarcating such Constitutional prohibitions in practice. The conceptual

debate here centers around the issue of the deliberative vs. non-deliberative nature of this armed body within a modern republic. The actual policy decision towards one or the other direction, nevertheless, responds to a political-ideological project.

### **New Approach Toward Guerrilla Movements**

The Chávez administration implemented multiple 180-degree turns regarding the Venezuelan Armed Forces and the country's defense and security sector, writ large. The engagement of insurgencies and insurgent groups is perhaps one of the most noticeable rubrics in which radical changes took place. It would be impossible to cover in this chapter the entire timeline and sequence of actions that link Chávez's political and personal relationship with the Left-wing guerrillas of the region to the new policies and practices imposed upon the Venezuelan Armed Forces. Some of the earliest episodes of irreconcilable friction and fallout with his military and defense advisers, and with many high-ranking military officers in positions of authority, had to do with the new doctrine of indifference and/or direct support -even financial support-<sup>26</sup> vis-a-vis insurgent units on either side of the border with Colombia<sup>27</sup> and within the urban centers of Venezuela (Markovits 2019). The tolerated presence of groups like FARC, ELN, *Frente Francisco de Miranda*, *Frente Bolivariano de Liberación* (FBL), Tupamaros, etc. was notorious – and the consequential Venezuelan regime's diplomatic breakups with the Uribe administration, in Colombia, received wide media coverage. This radical change in doctrine was coupled with the vocal support<sup>28</sup> -during Chávez's years in office- by the ruling party towards officially removing the “terrorist” / “narco-terrorist” label from the international community's

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26 The Colombian attack on FARC positions across the border with Ecuador, in March of 2008, resulted in the capture of FARC senior commander Luis Devia's -AKA “Raul Reyes”- computer, which provided direct evidence that Chávez was very much involved with the FARC leadership (Tosta 2019, sec. 3).

27 See Napoleón Bravo's recent interviews with Rear Admiral (ret) Carlos Molina Tamayo, former Venezuelan National Defense and Security Adviser, here: <https://youtu.be/j4s6MG8W-ew>

28 Expressed by Chávez publicly, as early as February, 1999 (Tosta 2019).

reference of the Colombian insurgents and from their handling of the conflict in that country. A push for the treatment of FARC and ELN as belligerents [formal combatants, with political recognition] was being consummated (Tosta 2019), at the same time that Venezuela allowed sanctuary and provided rearguard for such forces (Hernández-Mora 2013) and their illicit activities. For all intents and purposes, an alliance had formed.

Chávez's regime showed sympathy and admiration for extra-regional insurgent and terrorist entities such as the basque ETA, the Irish IRA, jihadist movements like Hamas and Hezbollah, among others. A case could be made that this attitude towards violent extremists was part of a coherent revolutionary policy, regarding state and non-state entities which the U.S. and its allies and partners, worldwide, consider to be rogue and dangerous.

### **Doing Away with All U.S. and NATO Ties**

The Venezuelan armed services were once highly-capable, professional forces who participated in multiple joint and combined exercises with regional partners, under the auspices of USSOUTHCOM. These events were truly multinational in nature and would eventually expand in both scope and complexity, involving other NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] states such as the Netherlands, the U.K., Canada, Spain, and France (U.S. Southern Command 2009). Venezuela's continuous and exemplary partaking in long-running exercise programs, such as UNITAS, signaled not just an interest in bettering its own capabilities, improving interoperability with other forces, and absorbing knowledge and know-how from other latitudes in order to overcome deficiencies while facing the new challenges of XXI century military operations. This involvement also signaled a willingness to cooperate by

way of the good-neighbor doctrine, in full acceptance of friendly extra-hemispheric partners who hold centuries-old interests in the LAC.

The Chávez administration progressively uprooted and upended the Venezuelan Armed Forces' ties, agreements, coordination instances, cooperative engagements, and military-to-military exchanges that Venezuela held with the Western-led international security architecture. The final cessation of all military ties between Venezuela's government and the U.S. was officially announced by Chávez himself in April, 2005. In practice, that cut didn't happen overnight, given the fact that there were still 13 U.S. defense attaches stationed in Venezuela, plus 90 Venezuelan officers receiving military education in the U.S., by the time Chávez made the aforementioned announcement (Reuters 2005). Nevertheless, official defense and security cooperation between the U.S. and Venezuela eventually ceased to exist after that year.

### **Creation of the Reserves and of the Militia as a Separate Branch**

«In 2008, the government passed a law forming the National Bolivarian Militia, and replacing the former civilian reserve corps» (Strønen 2016, sec. 16). This sentence refers, of course, to the 2008 LOFANB, which was passed into law by executive order [«presidential decree» would be the term in Venezuela]. It also refers to the changes made to the National Reserve and the so-called Territorial Guard, both created via executive order, as well, before the September 6, 2005, organic law that better defined their actual roles & missions and their chain of command (Jácome 2011). In fact, both fell under the direct command authority of the President.

The 2005 organic law had defined two separate chains of command for the military writ large: one under the President and one under the Defense Minister. This piece of legislation,

therefore, had already fundamentally altered the overall structure of the Venezuelan Armed Forces (Jácome 2011), both in terms of command and in terms of the original four constitutionally-defined service components: Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard. Again, this paved the way for the new changes and modifications to come.

The nature, function, and command placement of the National Bolivarian Militia has remained in constant flux – and so has its interaction with other armed service components and branches. This is actually nothing strange in the contemporary Venezuelan military sphere, especially within the overlapping functions, roles, and responsibilities pertaining to internal security and civil-military cooperation tasks<sup>29</sup>. What matters here is to understand that the idea of this Militia comes from a desire to incorporate armed civilians into military life [“the People in arms”], with the hope of eventually having an irregular force structure coexisting with and, perhaps in some circumstances, even exerting command authority over regular forces (Jácome 2011, p. 8). It is an idea not limited to the sole need of having a parallel [paramilitary] armed component that is unequivocally loyal to the ruling party and is hence directly controlled by the political leadership (Perera 2019). It also incipiently resembles the concept of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which formally coexists and jointly operates with the regular Iranian Armed Forces and has its own diversified branches within. «It would be a parallel army comprised of militants from the ruling party and with a chain of command carefully separated from the professional military structure.» (Otálvora 2008, para. 3)

### **Partnering with Russia, Iran, the PRC, Belarus...**

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<sup>29</sup> For reference, see the example of the so-called *Guardia del Pueblo* (People’s Guard), which was placed within the structure of the National Guard.



Needless to say or highlight at this point, the Chávez administration cultivated friendly and tight military relations between the Venezuelan Armed Forces and those of other LAC states that were, or still are, under the rule of São Paulo Forum member parties. The most notorious examples being Cuba (whose military intelligence apparatus deeply penetrated all centers of power within the Venezuelan Armed Forces and foreign service), Nicaragua, and Bolivia. However, most noteworthy became Venezuela's military ties to larger U.S. adversaries on the world stage, such as Russia, Iran, or the People's Republic of China.

The purchase of equipment and weaponry has focused on both conventional offensive and defensive systems, geared towards both symmetric and asymmetric conflict scenarios (Jácome 2011); in other words: scenarios in which the fight takes place either against a peer adversary or against a superior adversary, respectively. During the Chávez era, the largest provider in terms of acquisitions and materiel support was the Russian Federation, becoming a sort of "partner of choice" that was repeatedly privileged -even opening up significant lines of credit- without much of a bidding process (Napoleón Bravo 2021). The Chávez administration got close to both the Iranian and the Russian nuclear programs, allegedly with peaceful/socio-economic purposes, however, original ideas about co-development and co-establishment of assets, infrastructure, facilities, and processes, in that regard, seems to have been put on hold during those years.

But the chavista regime's military policy makers didn't approach major U.S. adversaries just to purchase and acquire hardware and ordnance. Interested partners, like the PRC, turned into the top choice for military-to-military exchange programs, training, and education (Farah and Babineau 2019; Schechter 2019). All in all, during the Chávez administration, the defense spending average per year amounted to a total of U.S. \$3.9 billion, according to the *Red de*

*Seguridad y Defensa de América Latina (Redsal)* (La Tercera 2013). Of course, the list of countries with which defense business was done, during those years, is not limited to U.S. adversaries [even some NATO allies are on that list]; nevertheless, the doctrinal, geostrategic, and even operational concepts, that characterized the Venezuelan military before 1999, decidedly shifted in favor of accommodating to U.S. adversarial strategies, plans, and designs (Manwaring 2007).

### **Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB) and the Subordination to the Socialist Project**

In 2007, a new motto or watchword (in Spanish: *santo y seña*) was instituted throughout the armed services: *Patria, socialismo o muerte. ¡Venceremos!* («Fatherland, socialism, or death. We will win!» [sic] – which is, of course, syntactically incorrect), signaling the new unconditional nature of the requirement of allegiance to Hugo Chávez’s project of a ‘XXI century socialism’. However, an inexperienced observer might not notice another point of continuity here: *Patria o muerte* («Fatherland or death») was the famous slogan of the Cuban revolutionaries, led by Castro, Guevara, Cienfuegos, etc., and became somewhat of an official motto of the revolutionary government that was formed after their triumph in 1959. Around the same year that the FANB instituted the new political-ideological watchword, Cuban flags started flying next to Venezuelan flags in military facilities all throughout the country.

Symbolically speaking, not much beyond the obvious has to be explained about the new status quo brought about by these changes. The attempt to equate the feeling of national pride with the active defense of the Marxist-Chavista project, became clear and rather blatant. In terms of broader defense policy, however, this symbolic transfiguration meant a kind of imposed

psychological “seal of approval” regarding a major transfer of loyalty: from a defense of the nation and the republic, the Armed Forces were to now swear fealty to the ruling party. It meant a practical realignment of the military traditions of Venezuela, in order to fit Mao’s maxim: «the Party controls the gun».

### **Anti-Imperialistic, Asymmetric Warfare Concepts**

This chapter began with a brief description of the Chávez era’s main propensity within the defense policy arena. The “special relationship” with the Cuban government stretched well beyond the utilitarian/transactional aspects or schemes of, say, “oil and aid in exchange for regime security”. A closer look<sup>30</sup> at the nature and conception of the Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces [Spanish: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias* – FAR] reveals, inductively, that there is a cogent policy program – a coherent vision guiding all the different radical, and sometimes reckless-looking, changes brought about in order to revolutionize the Venezuelan military altogether. A hypothesis exists suggesting that such a deep transmutation of the Armed Forces was operated in order to remake this institution in the image of the Cuban FAR. One of the ultimate goals of this remake would be to turn the FANB into a resistance warfare corps. This idea fits Chávez’s «war of all the People» / «People in arms» slogans, reminiscent of the Chinese Communist Party’s «People’s liberation» war. The chief characteristic of such a force is the perfect and seamless blending, and joint interoperability, between regular and irregular units, all of which train in guerrilla/asymmetric warfare and exist, like Mao would say, «among the People like fish in the water».

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30 See: Dieterich, 2004, Chapter 3. Dieterich rose to notoriety around those years, as the chief ideologue and adviser behind Chávez’s touted *XXI-century socialism*. This author explicitly and purposely dedicates an entire chapter of his book -on an envisioned military integration of the LAC region- to talk about how the Cuban FAR are an example to be emulated by the other Armed Forces in the region, mainly because of their value as a vehicle/agent for such an integration – an idea that is instilled in their doctrinal education and official strategic thought.

The immediate insistence of the Chávez administration, upon assuming office in 1999, of both the urgency and importance of implementing the civil-military union/alliance, could be better understood by applying this framework to the case in point. There are other crucial aspects to the aforementioned remake. They pertain to a higher, grand-strategic level of analysis, and they are better illustrated by what Dr. Max G. Manwaring (2007) calls out as the quest for a fourth-generation-warfare [4GW] super insurgency. Such an approach would rest on a whole-of-nation, unrestricted use of the instruments of power to achieve victory through complex asymmetric means.

### **The Military Occupies Large Portions of the Government (Chinese- and Soviet-Style Praetorianism)**

The Chávez era brought about a dramatic and rapid expansion of the presence and power of Armed Forces officers, both retired and active duty, in the public sphere. Other related “innovations”, such as the ability to bring officers back from retirement, or the large amounts of business concessions and even regional and local civilian attributions given to military authorities (at first, extraordinarily, but later more permanently), just go to show how the blending of the Armed Forces with the rest of the nation-state was a deliberate policy and not just a function of the President’s background in the Army or the age-old popular perception of the military as the only efficient/effective state organ in Venezuela. While it is true that many of Chávez’s co-conspirators and fellow insurgents from 1992, and from his military lodge (the MBR-200 or *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200*), formed a special clique within the new regime’s *nomenklatura*, which is still somewhat true to this day, it is also correct to point out that the hardcore civilian wing of Chavismo has always wielded immense power since 1999.

A case could be made about the so-called militarization of the state and of society, writ large – and countless authors have suggested this as the only possible interpretation of the facts (Jácome 2011). But, without keeping in mind that the ruling party -with the help of foreign intelligence- ultimately controls the Armed Forces, and that these coexist as peers with a myriad of armed irregular groups steeped in Marxist guerrilla ideology (Perera 2019), one can easily miss the point and think of Chavismo as another form of neo-militarism, neo-Prussianism, or as another re-edition of the National Security Doctrine regimes that the LAC region was familiar with in the XX century. And the point here could very well be that the Chavista project needed, as one of its power-building imperatives, to transform Venezuela into a one-party system as quickly as possible, and a culturally-acceptable and feasible means to achieve that goal was to turn as many state organs as possible into subservient limbs of the most critical asset held by the Leninist party: its gun.

### **Creating the CEO (Comando Estratégico Operacional)**

The 2005 Organic Law of the National Armed Forces set the stage for securing the President's full, direct, personal, and permanent operational control over all military components in Venezuela, by way of the creation of the Strategic Operational Command, or CEO in Spanish. It did away with the old CUFAN (*Comando Unificado de la Fuerza Armada Nacional* or Unified Command of the National Armed Forces) and established the CEO to be on the same hierarchical level, within the triple chain of command, as both the Defense Ministry and the *Comando General de la Reserva Nacional y de Movilización Nacional* (General Command of the National Reserves and of National Mobilization). The CEO was to become the «top organ for programming, planning, direction, execution, and joint strategic-operational control of the

National Armed Forces» (Belmonte Guzmán 2012, p. 144). The significance of the Chávez government's push for the establishment of this organ has been highlighted by both sympathizers and detractors of the regime, chiefly because it consolidated the Presidency's grip<sup>31</sup> over the operational chain of command, later expanding the CEO's prerogatives into the areas of military thought and ideology, doctrinal development, concepts of operations, etc.

### **Creating New Ranks for the High Command**

On a final note regarding the most conspicuous policy changes made to the Venezuelan defense sector, during the Chávez administration (1999-2012), the creation of new ranks for the service components' hierarchies must be briefly addressed. To begin with, the formal rank of Commander in Chief was instituted for the President of the Republic, with its own symbols and insignia – and this meant the reinstatement of Chávez himself to the condition of active-duty military. Corps commander ranks were created for 3-sun [the U.S. equivalent would be 3-star] officers, designated as Major General and Major Admiral – depending on which service component they belong to. Above them, 4-sun officers will be promoted to the new ranks of General in Chief and Admiral in Chief, depending on the service. It has been pointed out that these new additions to the top of the hierarchy were an adapted copy of the Cuban FAR ranks (Otálvora 2008, sec. 2), meant to accommodate the new FANB structure to the concepts and functions of the FANB's new reality.

### **Bottom Line**

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31 It wasn't a standalone innovation, however. Along with the making of the CEO and through subsequent pieces of legislation, such as the 2008 LOFANB, came other organs: «*Se instituye la Comandancia en Jefe, que personaliza en el Presidente de la República la responsabilidad del funcionamiento y empleo profesional de la FANB.*» [«The Office of the Commander in Chief is instituted, which personalizes, on the President of the Republic, the responsibility over the functioning and professional use of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces.»] (Belmonte Guzmán 2012, p. 199)

In many respects, Chávez was one of the São Paulo Forum's most obedient and diligent soldiers. Despite not fulfilling every single point in the agenda, he was well under way towards completing the mission by the time he died. Venezuela's story under Chávez is an SPF success story. Chávez also laid the foundations of more future victories for the Forum.

His foreign policy was generally hostile to Western and NATO governments and interests, a fact that typically qualifies the Chávez regime as anti-imperialistic and anti-colonialistic. This was mostly true, despite having dealt in defense-and-security-sector purchases with Spain and Turkey, for example, who are both NATO allies. But his dealings with state actors such as Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, Belarus, etc. demonstrate what type of imperialism or colonialism is acceptable to the Chavista revolutionary project and, by extension, to the Forum.

Severing all ties to the United States was a hallmark of the Chávez administration. It went well beyond rhetoric and reached deeply and widely into all aspects of the defense sector. Venezuela was basically taken out of any equation, possibility, or design to take part in the Good Neighbor Policy, becoming perhaps the antithesis of that vision-objective aspired by the United States in terms of what it desires the nations of the Western Hemisphere to evolve towards. Not only were all ties severed but also was anti-Americanism to become leitmotif, *raison d'être* of the Chavista revolution: an enemy without which the project could not exist.

Chávez would do a whole lot more than rock the Venezuelan military's boat: he set Venezuelan national security on a path of irreversible transformation. The foundational end-goals of the modern nation-state, in terms of administering justice, securing sovereignty and jurisdiction over the national territory and population, and defending those prerogatives against enemies foreign and domestic, were no longer priorities for the Venezuelan government. Narcotics trafficking, to name just one prevalent example, became not simply a low priority in

terms of what the military was going to combat: it became one of the high command's most infamous trades. Venezuela's territory thus turned into one of the world's largest transportation hubs for illegal substances such as cocaine and heroine.

Chávez's legacy regarding the Venezuelan national security and defense sectors should perhaps be associated chiefly with the "irregularization" or even "paramilitarization" of the military. Some analysts have claimed that Chávez rendered the military useless, in terms of its classic republican role. Others have said that he turned the Venezuelan military into nothing more than the ruling party's praetorian guard. Yet some have argued that it is the totalitarian model of a blend between ideologically-fanatical, personally-loyal corps on one hand, and regular, traditionally-trained units on the other hand, what he was after – perhaps with the ultimate objective not of completely getting rid of the latter, but of eventually subordinating the latter to the former. Whatever the case may be, lest we forget two important historical facts. First, that the modern-day "collectives", who are -essentially- armed political gangs of civilians that aid in the repression and terrorizing of the dissident population in Venezuela, are in part a willful, improved offshoot from the early-day Bolivarian Circles, created before the first failed attempt to remove Chávez from office, in April of 2002, and organized precisely for such a scenario. Second, that then-Defense Minister General Raúl Baduel, who had a starring role in bringing Chávez back to power during the events of April of 2002, a few years later did everything he could to please Chávez's desire of parading the work -and the person!- of Spanish-French revolutionary intellectual Jorge Verstrynge to the Venezuelan officer corps, especially his most famous book on asymmetric warfare. What is made evident by all of this is the Chávez administration's undeniable, irrefutable policy of incorporating the civil-military asymmetric resistance warfare concepts and doctrines into all levels (tactical, operational, strategic),



domains, and dimensions of national security. This follows the SPF's prescriptions quite faithfully.

### **CHAPTER 3: LULA PROJECTS BRAZIL'S MILITARY OUTWARD**

Luis Inácio “Lula” da Silva, Brazil's Workers’ Party [PT] candidate for the Presidency in the October 2002 elections, defeated his opponent in the two electoral rounds held that year. He had been running for President almost consecutively since 1989, when a new era of democratic change was inaugurated in Brazil. Upon assuming office in January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003, Lula set out to reposition Brazil on the world stage. His administration (2003-2010) was the first to seek a distinct level of independence for the Brazilian defense sector, from the traditional grip of the diplomatic bureaucracy of the Brazilian foreign policy apparatus (Alves Soares 2012).

At the same time, this new-found autonomy meant a larger role for the Defense Ministry and the Armed Forces in the shaping of Brazilian foreign affairs. In this sense, Brazil used both diplomatic and defense instruments of state power to reassert its position regionally, vis-a-vis the United States primarily (Duarte Villa and Viana 2010). Brazil’s military establishment traditionally had an inward-looking mentality, focused on internal security-and-order functions as an important subset of tasks for national development. This vision had translated into the Brazilian Armed Forces intervening in politics and civilian affairs, multiple times throughout the XX century, particularly during the bipolar contest of the Cold War, counterinsurgency, and anticommunist activity (Bitencourt 2018).

Under Lula, some transcendental changes were implemented in terms of giving renewed purpose, coherence, and grand-strategic weight to the roles & missions of the Brazilian defense sector. However, there doesn’t appear to have been a major push, during Lula’s time in office, to radically or essentially transform the nature and institutional function of the Brazilian Armed

Forces as the premier state organ charged with the defense of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. The following is a brief overview of what novelties did take place.

### **Brazil Signals an Opposing Regional Stance Regarding the Defense-Security Divide**

In the context of the OAS, during the Special Conference on Security held in Mexico City in October, 2003, the Brazilian delegation opposed the proposal presented by the U.S. delegation: it suggested deeper cooperation between the Armed Forces and national police forces in the fight against narcotics, terrorism, and illegal migration (Duarte Villa and Viana 2010). This signaled an internal shift in policy-direction, on the part of Lula's government team, because Brazil was no longer willing to consider the need to militarize police functions inside its borders and urban centers. It would also imply a deeper review of the approach towards the drug problem – a review which would manifest itself through such items as the stance regarding the Colombian FARC (Bula-Escobar 2016).

### **War on Terror in the LAC? What Terror?**

The Lula administration refused to wholeheartedly adopt the U.S. policy of a fight against international terrorism. Regarding South America, Lula's team wouldn't recognize the presence of terrorist organizations. They also didn't accept the designation of some regional insurgencies as terrorist groups, even in the face of U.S. and Colombian pressure (Duarte Villa and Viana 2010; Bula-Escobar 2016). In this sense, Lula's Brazil was following its 2003 incorporation of the concept of *multidimensional security*, which made great emphasis on the analysis of the root causes of national security threats and vulnerabilities from an assessment of socioeconomic, cultural, sociopolitical, and other factors and catalysts.

## **A South American Defense Council at the Heart of UNASUR**

On March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008, President Lula made public his push for the establishment of a South American Defense Council [Spanish: *Consejo de Defensa Suramericano* - CODESUR]. The announcement came on the heels of Operation Phoenix: the attack on a FARC encampment, across the border with Ecuador, by the Colombian military, on March 1<sup>st</sup>. The CODESUR was officially approved and launched on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 (Bitencourt 2018, p. 25). Some analysts have linked the Brazilian move to create the CODESUR as either: a smart leveraging of the so-called Andean diplomatic crisis of the time, that broke out between Ecuador-Venezuela and Colombia, in order to position itself as a regional leader in crises management (Alves Soares 2012); or as a stepping stone towards a higher goal, pertaining to Brazil's appetite for a permanent seat at the U.N. Security Council [UNSC]. After all, Lula had suggested, in his announcement, that the proposed CODESUR ought to have a representative country at the UNSC (Voice of America 2008). In addition to that, the CODESUR is meant to be at the very heart of the UNASUR bloc's integration structure [itself heavily influenced by Lula's PT, in its conception], breathing life into the Union by functioning as a permanent body for regional defense-and-security consultation, cooperation, and crisis diffusion/resolution (Marirrodriga 2008). Therefore, Lula's opportunistic move is also consistent with his administration's quest to reorient the focus of the Brazilian Armed Forces outward, gladly supplanting a perceived vacuum left by the U.S. government across the LAC region.

## **Seeking the Technological Modernization of Brazilian Military Forces**

In September 2009, Lula and Nicolas Sarkozy agreed to begin negotiations facing the decision by Brazil to invest US\$14 billion in military hardware, marking the country's largest

defense-spending spree in more than 50 years (Perasso 2009). Brazil's nuclear submarine program was included in the list of goals set forth with this agreement, and such an ambition had been part of Brazil's military modernization plans for years. Conventional submarines, helicopters, next-generation fighter-bombers, and assistance with domestic defense-industrial development [technological transfer, etc.] were some of the items negotiated in this partnership with France. Lula had been very adamant about Brazil's potential to become a domestic-arms production powerhouse, in its quest to become both a regional defense leader and a considerable player on the international arena (Alves Soares 2012). Brazil thus turned into the number one defense spender in the LAC region, investing a total of US\$23 billion in 2008 alone – with an increment of 50% for the defense-and-security budget, since Lula assumed the Presidency (Perasso 2009, paras. 13–14).

### **Peacekeeping Mission to Haiti: Proving Brazil's Burden Sharing**

«Brazil provided the backbone of the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti, MINUSTAH. Its troops were present for the duration of the mission between 2004-2017.» (UN News Date unavailable, sec. 3) With the deployment of Brazilian troops to Haiti, Lula was pursuing multiple foreign policy short-term objectives. In terms of defense policy, his administration was proving the Armed Forces' capability to provide an autonomous response to regional challenges. Lula was also therefore able to even out the perception that his government was looking to cancel U.S. military and security objectives in the region: by contributing to the U.N. mission, the idea of burden-sharing with regional partners, which is one of the core tenets of USSOUTHCOM's command strategy, was materializing, albeit in a non-coordinated way.

## **The Defense Ministry Assumes a New Stature**

The decision process to deploy Brazilian troops and command forces to MINUSTAH, during Lula's tenure, rested primarily on the Executive branch of government, particularly the Presidency and the Defense Ministry (Duarte Villa and Viana 2010). Brazilian foreign policy tradition dictated that the Foreign Relations Ministry [also referred to as Itamaraty] was the ultimate guiding hand in all matters pertaining to the interaction between Brazil and the world (Alves Soares 2012). The Lula administration forged a new degree of political control for the Defense Ministry over the Armed Forces and, at the same time, elevated the Defense Ministry's stance in foreign affairs – from a supporting role to a starring one. This empowerment was consistent with the Lula administration's desire to establish the Brazilian defense sector as a strategic leader in the LAC region.

## **Forging a Systematic Approach to Strategic Guidance**

During Lula's years in office, the national objective of strengthening Brazil's national defense agencies and military services was streamlined, on paper, to the country's global strategy. A new systematic approach to better instrumentalize the potential of Brazil's defense sector required a sort of re-intellectualization of strategy, planning, and force development. In September 2007, Lula launched a working group to direct the drafting of a modernization plan for the Armed Forces; the group was headed by the Defense Ministry and coordinated by then-Minister Head of the Secretariat for Strategic Affairs of the Presidency Roberto Mangabeira Unger.

Out of this initiative came the Strategic Plan of National Defense (Duarte Villa and Viana 2010), which sought: «I) to review defense strategies; II) to reactivate the domestic arms

industry; III) to assure [sic] the autonomy of defense policy.» (p. 8) This broad review also focused on rekindling: issues of national and territorial sovereignty and identity vis-a-vis the Armed Forces [giving special attention to the Amazon sub-region], strategic concepts for peace and war times, the technological and organizational upgrading of the military, issues regarding military service and social-development tasks, and the directives that the Armed Forces should operate on when called upon to perform as guarantors of internal public order, security, and law enforcement.

Brazil's re-insertion into the international community as an exemplary force to be reckoned with, which has been a historical item on the country's development wishlist since its independence (Degaut 2016), was a notorious theme of the Lula administration. The novelty seemed to be that defense policy would become a highly-visible part of the framework to pursue this ambition; accordingly, an agenda was adopted to shape that policy rubric (Alves Soares 2012).

In 2005, the Ministry of Defense's National Defense Policy document came out. Interestingly, this early national security guidance product of the Lula administration accepts a concept similar to that of the Venezuelan 1999 Constitution and 2002 National Security Organic Law: the concept of *integral defense and security*; in other words, the emphasis of co-responsibility over national defense and security that exists between the state and society. Hence, in the very first paragraph, the document already mentions the involvement of the civilian world in national training for all spheres of national power (Ministry of Defense 2005). And the document highlights how «[I]t is imprudent to imagine that a country with the potentiality of Brazil doesn't have disputes or antagonisms when aiming to reach its legitimate interests. One of

the purposes of the National Defense Policy is to make all the segments of the Brazilian society aware that the defense of the Nation is a duty of all Brazilians.» (p. 1)

Three years later, the National Strategy of Defense was approved and published by way of Lula's presidential Decree no. 6703, of December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2008. This document presented a much more detailed argumentation of how the defense and security goals set forth by the Lula administration stemmed from the Federal Constitution's mandates, the previous defense policy documents/whitepapers, and the national interests of Brazil – as defined by both its foreign policy tradition<sup>32</sup> and by its economic- and social-development imperatives (Alves Soares 2012; Ministry of Defense 2008). Some common themes are revised in this document: reorganization and composition of the Armed Forces, restructuring the domestic defense industry, promoting the implementation of compulsory/mandatory military service, among others. Of note is the fact that: «[a] key NDS [National Defense Strategy] tenet is that Brazil can only achieve national independence and international prominence through mastery of sensitive technologies in the strategic sectors of space, cybernetics, and nuclear affairs.» (Diehl and Fujii 2009, para. 2)

Then, in 2010, Supplementary Law 136 restructured the Ministry of Defense -created in 1999- under three scopes: the creation of a Joint Chief of Staff and Joint Staff, the broadening of formal attributions of defense ministers<sup>33</sup>, and the broadening and upgrading of the civilian staff of the Defense Ministry (Alves Soares 2012). Essentially, this legal instrument allowed the Lula administration to cement and solidify the conquests attained with, and projected through, the major defense policy documents of the preceding years. The still-young tool crafted a decade

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32 Three essential principles stand out: non-intervention or non-belligerence, defense of peace, and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

33 The 2008 National Strategy of Defense exhorted the government to secure the institutional function/role of this office, as well as to ensure jointness among the three branches of the Brazilian Armed Forces [Army, Navy, Air Force]: «The Minister of Defense will fully perform all the direction of the Armed Forces, those the Constitution and the Laws do not explicitly assign to the President. The subordination of the Armed Forces to the constitutional political power is a basic premise of the republican regime and a guarantee of the Nation's integrity.» (Ministry of Defense 2008, p. 12)



earlier in order to begin implementing more serious civilian control over the military, the Brazilian Ministry of Defense, had just come of age.

### **Change with Continuity**

It is safe to say that it was particularly after 2007 that the major changes and reforms to the Brazilian defense sector were made by the Lula administration – that is, only after Lula had secured a second term in office. For instance, on 21 February, 2007, a newly-reelected President da Silva changed the commanders of the three branches of the Brazilian Armed Forces (Latinnews Daily 2007). This move was scarcely publicized and might have been motivated by the upcoming need to secure the support of the high command towards the new transformations in defense policy that were on their way that same year.

In an act of strategic wisdom, on April 12, 2010 the Brazilian government resumed the Defense Cooperation Agreement [DCA] with the U.S. The official press release by the U.S. Department of State, covering this event, concluded with:

The United States seeks partnership with the other nations in the Americas to address the complex security challenges that all our countries face. The strengthening of U.S.-Brazil defense cooperation at the strategic, operational and tactical levels will enable our two countries, and our neighbors, to come closer to achieving this goal.

Office of the Spokesman 2010, para. 5

Taking into account events like this one, some analysts claim that during the two recent PT administrations in Brazil, «military cooperation with the U.S. continued, and actually improved.» (Bitencourt 2018, p. 25)

Generally speaking, one can agree with Olavo de Carvalho in his popular assessment that “Lula” da Silva was a master player in the game of calculated perception and protagonism on the world geopolitical chessboard. He was able to please the liberal, global-capitalist interest groups while simultaneously managing to become a “rock star” figure for the socialist, international Left: Lula eventually received equal praise at the World Economic Forum in Davos, and at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. It was this sort of *scissors strategy* what his administration, with the key help of figures like then-Defense Minister Nelson Jobim, became famous for and perhaps applied internally as well as externally.

### **Bottom Line**

Narrowing down the scope and time frame of this case study to the years of the Lula administration, made the workload for analysis manageable and reasonable. This applies to the chapter on Venezuela, as well. However, it must be recognized that the openly-available information, in the English language, regarding the case study in point is not as abundant as the openly-available information, in Spanish, regarding the Venezuela case study. This diffculted things for the author of this thesis paper, for sure. Nonetheless, it is also likely that Lula did not attempt a radical, total transformation of the Brazilian armed forces. However assertive his agenda for «broadening Brazilian “South-South foreign policy”» (Bitencourt 2018, p. 25) may have been, and however much that political-ideological leaning may have unsettled policy- and decision-makers in Washington, D.C., the evidence suggests that Lula sought to appease -for lack of a better term- the Brazilian defense establishment. He strove to accomplish that with larger modernization efforts (both intellectual and material), bilateral cooperation with NATO allies, and a kind of “military *rapprochement*” with the United States.

Lula played the card of projecting the image of a “Brazilian giant” as a friendly regional hegemon: a kind of would-be mature, older-brother figure to other Latin American states. Defense and security affairs were a conduit for Lula’s administration to play this card, at least according to many experts. At the same time, and knowing very well the historical propensity of the Brazilian armed forces to intervene in the country’s major political decisions, Lula’s team sought to refocus the military’s energy to the outside world and the most pressing regional issues, without endangering the SPF’s interests. This came about while the administration was slowly engineering ways to empower the Ministry of Defense, as a hub to secure and ensure the executive’s political control over the Brazilian Armed forces. A big part of this change was achieved under the rubrics of modernization and professionalization.

The Lula administration was thus very careful, apparently, not to rock the Brazilian defense boat too much, and consequently played a very delicate game of change and continuity with stellar moments of satisfaction generated for the defense establishment, in order to please the traditional military organization. However, lest we forget that Lula is a founding member and figurehead of the São Paulo Forum, his party -the Workers’ Party- the founding host of the Forum, and his city and state -São Paulo- the proud initial hub and operations base for the SPF’s secretariat. Sure, there was a smart and timely recognition, from the PT’s leadership, that the Brazilian defense and security sectors’ “objective and subjective conditions” did not warrant a profound transformation of the armed forces and the associated power factors and centers. In other words, the military and their world were not ripe for radical change. But, even if unsuccessful and even if the later PT administration of Dilma Rousseff couldn’t finish the job, Lula’s people did set the stage and the record straight for: getting the military mostly out of the War on Drugs and the War on Terror (e.g. largely ignoring threats like FARC, ELN, etc.), for

establishing the architecture of a future military integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, and for plausibly paving the way towards political indoctrination of the defense and security forces by first securing their complete subordination to the political -away from the purely bureaucratic- leadership in the government.

Perhaps the PT didn't necessarily lack the skills, the concentration of power, or the wisdom to carry out the SPF's armed forces agenda: it appears rather that time wasn't on their side. If this is true, then a possible re-election of Lula to the presidency of the Federative Republic of Brazil could bring about a more assertive/aggressive program of radical transformation to the entire national security field in the country, along the lines of the SPF's agenda, with special emphasis placed on the armed forces and the rest of the defense agencies and stakeholders, both public and private.

## **CHAPTER 4: KEY FINDINGS AND WHY THEY MATTER**

Let us now turn to separately analyzing the correspondence -or lack thereof- between each case study's results and the policy-guidance synthesis performed in the second chapter of this work. In other words, the following is a look at the correspondence -or lack thereof- between: the defense policy changes of the Chávez administration [Venezuela: 1999-2012] and the SPF armed forces agenda; and the defense policy changes of the Lula administration [Brazil: 2003-2010] and the SPF armed forces agenda.

### **Chávez-Era Venezuela**

The implementation of the civil-military union/alliance doctrine corresponds with the SPF's agenda. The radical transformation of the legal and judicial framework that sustains the armed forces' institutional role within the nation-state, in order to make way for concepts such as integral defense, regional military integration, the "horizontalization" of the chain of command, etc., corresponds with the SPF's agenda. On the other hand, the continuous expansion of the military's roles & missions into the realm and functions of internal security, public order, and law enforcement, well beyond the scope of the National Guard's traditional roles & missions, contradicts the SPF's agenda.

The normalization of a deliberative (politically active) military establishment corresponds with the SPF's agenda. The sympathetic, apologetic, and even protective approach towards the handling of a multiplicity of violent extremist organizations and other ideologically-motivated, violent non-state actors corresponds with the SPF's agenda. Severing all ties with the U.S. defense sector and cutting most military relations with NATO members corresponds with the

SPF's agenda. Creating the Reserves and then the Militia as a separate branch, loyal exclusively to the party leadership, corresponds with the SPF's agenda.

Partnering with major U.S. adversaries, both regional and extra-hemispheric, corresponds with the SPF's agenda and the touted quest for a *multipolar world*. The subordination of the armed forces to the Revolution, and its defense as top priority, corresponds with the SPF's agenda.

The adoption of an anti-imperialistic, asymmetric/resistance warfare doctrine, concept, and military thought, by the armed forces, corresponds with the SPF's agenda. Fomenting the military establishment to fill in or occupy large portions of the country's government/public sector does not correspond with the SPF's agenda.

Establishing the CEO as a way of consolidating the Presidency's grip over the armed forces' chain of command corresponds with the SPF's agenda, in the sense that it secures political control over the military – strategically and operationally. The creation of new ranks within the military hierarchy, to emulate friendly militaries from the LAC region, corresponds with the SPF's agenda as a stepping stone towards achieving a future military integration of the regional bloc.

### **Lula-Era Brazil**

Securing a sharper separation between the defense sector's activities and the security services' functions corresponds with the SPF's agenda. An apologetic and sympathetic approach towards handling terrorist, narco-terrorist, and/or insurgent organizations, and other violent non-state actors and extremists, on the grounds of a supposed need to re-assess the root causes of violent conflicts in the LAC region, corresponds with the SPF's agenda.

The enthusiastic push for the establishment of the CODESUR as a tool for regional, autonomous military integration and as a stepping stone towards the strengthening of UNASUR, corresponds with the SPF's agenda.

The technological modernization of the Brazilian Armed Forces does not correspond with the SPF's agenda. What's more, the fact that this modernization effort -along with its intended beneficial repercussions upon the domestic Brazilian defense industry- was achieved through the significant involvement and cooperation of a NATO ally, contradicts the SPF's agenda.

Brazil's starring role in regional peacekeeping efforts, concocted by way of a unilateral decision-making process, does not correspond with the SPF's agenda.

Expanding and consolidating the institutional stature of the Ministry of Defense, beyond purely administrative functions, corresponds with the SPF's agenda inasmuch as this measure aggregates power on the most common instrument of civilian/political control of the military – curtailing its autonomy and own sense of “caste”.

Streamlining a more transparent and systematic strategic-guidance development process for the defense sector, tying its upgrade to the country's own version of a *Manifest Destiny* and the so-called Brazilian exceptionalism, does not correspond with the SPF's agenda. On the other hand, opening the intellectual and legal gates up for a deeper adoption of the concepts of the integral defense doctrine, in the future, corresponds with the SPF's agenda.

Pursuing the normalization of a climate in which revolutionary changes to defense policy are the expectation within and outside the defense sector, corresponds with the SPF's agenda. Nonetheless, maintaining and improving defense cooperation -of any kind- with the United States contradicts the SPF's agenda.

## Lessons Learned and their Significance

Why should these findings matter to the U.S. interagency, in consideration of American national interests? The answer is multi-pronged:

There is now less doubt about the weight of São Paulo Forum prescriptions over the governmental behavior of its member parties and figureheads, especially over those who find themselves in a position comfortable enough to pursue a more extreme/revolutionary agenda in their respective countries. Granted, the SPF's national security agenda is complex and sometimes covered in ambiguity or abstract generalization. It is most likely meant to be a flexible paradigm for members, rather than a detailed, specific recipe to follow. Nonetheless, the SPF is interested chiefly in the four "bottom-line" points described at the end of chapter 1 of this work. Given the intellectual heritage at the heart of the SPF's political-ideological record, it is not unreasonable to think of the Forum's strategy as being one of *attrition*: a sort of "long march through the regional institutions". Despite some of the media commentary from the last couple of years, the SPF's history reveals patience: a preference for a Fabian-socialist-styled gradual, progressive, and corrosive approach to radical change, seeking limited, cumulative effects rather than quick blows against the structures and practices they aim to transform or eliminate. The example of Brazil is probably a case in point. In 2003, during Lula's first year in office, a joint communique from Lula's party, the PT, and the SPF was emitted in support of the FARC, their struggle, and the multilateral effort that was then building up to scratch the FARC's name from the list of international terrorist organizations (Bula-Escobar 2016). That same year, such an attitude vis-a-vis the handling of the Colombian conflict would become the crux of the Brazilian Executive's official policy stance on the matter. Therefore, a review of the Lula administration's defense policy innovations may not reveal total obedience to the SPF agenda, in absolute terms. In



relative terms, however, the qualitative advantage of having a regional leader such as the Brazilian government supporting the Forum's imperatives towards Colombia, has a massive beneficial effect for the SPF, even if it is only on that pressure point.

That being said, it may be easy to get carried away into thinking that both of the case studies covered by this paper represent the most striking/extreme cases of SPF national defense & security policy influence in the LAC. They're not – insofar as Brazil cannot be considered an extreme case. Nicaragua is perhaps another obviously striking case, akin to Venezuela. In Brazil, the PT administration/government was ousted and a very different political color rules the Executive now. This means not only that the military and the rest of the national defense/security establishment were not turned into an arm of the ideological project analyzed in the Introduction. It also means that, in the country where the Forum formally began and had one of its founding organizations and main sponsors become the ruling party for over 13 years, with one of its top founding leaders as head of state, the SPF could not effectively take over the entirety of the institutions necessary to stay in power.

The findings in this and previous chapters confirm a fascinating trait of international security and the dynamics both within and between nation-states: concrete -objective and subjective- conditions matter. Countries and nations and governments are not blank sheets of paper whose content unfolds in a geographical and historical vacuum. They cannot be transformed at will in only a few years. Political, economic, socio-cultural, technological, intellectual, ethical, ethnological, and other factors both enable and constrict change or continuity, and usually in very particular combinations thereof. In the reading of this work, a nation's strategic culture and, as one of its subsets, military culture become potent variables for understanding the directions taken by leaders and concrete government bureaucracies in the

realm of defense policy, and the whys and why-nots of change and continuity. Venezuela's was an exhausted, collapsing socio-political structure when Chávez assumed the Presidency in 1999. On so many levels, its societal institutions had been corroded and eroded to the point of showing little resistance to the revolutionary project. Political, economic, military, and cultural elite circles were pretty much impotent -and even sympathetic- when it came to facing the Bolivarian socialist strategy and tactics, despite some brief moments of intense challenge against the radical process taking place in the country. In Brazil, things were different. Even though the SPF was founded in Brazil by the very same PT, under the auspices of Lula, its conquest of Brazilian defense policy orientations was nowhere near as complete as it turned out in Venezuela, where Chávez's ruling party is by no means a founder, or even senior member, of the original alliance. Brazil had just recently (1985) transitioned out of a cycle of military dictatorships, its powerful foreign-policy bureaucracy was still strong and accustomed to a high degree of autonomy vis-a-vis the political flux of administrations and electoral contests, and its elites were likely still cohesive and able to wield a significant amount of hegemony over the Brazilian state's centers of power. The corollary from this being, in short, that politically-successful SPF members have to adapt to their own realities' objective and subjective conditions, showing flexibility and the will to apply Lenin's *two steps forward, one step backwards* maxim to their behavior in government and their public policy program. It is thus important that U.S. policy towards the Hemisphere be crafted only upon careful evaluation of the differing conditions and factors that shape the acceptance of, or resistance to, certain ruling-party programs and agendas. In other words, the U.S. antidote to the SPF agenda has to be as flexible and tailor-made as the Forum's own performance seems to be, regarding each and every country in the LAC region.

The SPF does not operate in a geopolitical vacuum: the LAC region is not a standardized, one-size-fits all universe that lends itself to reductionist assessments of the strategic environment. Control over the Venezuelan state and its riches had been a decades-long ambition of the Castro regime in Cuba, therefore, its penetration of the Venezuelan government/state was already deep, by the time that Chávez first ran for office. In Brazil, the Castro-communist influence of Cuba and its regional allies and proxies seems to have been a lot less significant, at least within the governmental civilian and military spheres, when Lula won the presidential elections in 2002. Both countries had been largely successful at quelling the Left-wing guerrilla insurgencies of the 1960s and 1970s, nevertheless, the autonomic, far-less-dependent nature of the Brazilian state and its sources of wealth may have done a huge difference throughout its contemporary history vis-a-vis Venezuela's situation and ability to shield itself from extremist influence. Again, the U.S. must take into account all of these specific internal, bilateral, and multilateral geopolitical/geostrategic relations and interactions across each one of the countries that make up the LAC region, paying special attention to the weight of history in the crafting of policy responses to the subcontinent's ills.

The expansion of the SPF's country-by-country power and influence means the contraction of case-specific maneuver space for the U.S. government: it's a zero-sum game. Through Chávez's MVR/PSUV, for example, the SPF was able to completely shut the U.S. out of the defense equation for Venezuela – a process accomplished in 6 years. For Brazil, Lula's PT did not manage to block out the U.S. defense-sector presence and had, in fact, allowed for the bilateral defense relationship to rejuvenate, by the end of Lula's 8-year tenure. This means that the SPF had not gained the total net amount of power and influence that it had probably hoped to gain by way of the PT holding the highest office in the land. These statements are probably true

even well beyond the fields of the national security and defense sectors and point to the living, non-static, shifting nature of the opportunities and challenges that the U.S. defense- and foreign-policy organs must be able to play with in order to expand the geopolitical maneuver space. They must be able to translate such expansions into defeats for the Forum's network, perhaps even while a large amount of its members is still in power.

The price of neglect and ignorance towards the Western Hemisphere is the invitation for strategic competition with adversaries, at the U.S.' nearest front line: its own neighborhood. This lesson is likely a logical consequence or corollary of the previous item on this list, and lends credence to some portions of the *Realpolitik* or realist perspective in International Relations Theory<sup>34</sup>. In the presence of a global strategic contest, «all the world's a stage», so to speak, and adversarial powers will always seek to gain advantage, in both space and time, to advance their interests. Penetrating, dominating, and then leveraging alliances and other power structures in the United States' own continental neighborhood is a sound geostrategic goal, from the viewpoint of capable adversaries such as Russia, the PRC, Iran, and even North Korea. However puzzling, amorphous, contradictory, or incoherent the ideological/intellectual compromises of anti-Western partnerships across the LAC region appear to some analysts (de Arístegui 2008), the truth is that a common enemy is a powerful unification factor. The SPF is, itself, proof of that. Its networked entities also apply such a logic and the appreciation of common hatreds, desires, and appetites when it comes to engaging and bonding with extra-regional: parties, non-state actors, non-governmental organizations, governments, intellectual circles, other multilateral *fora*, etc. U.S. national security and defense decision makers have been warned long enough (Faller 2021) against Latin America & the Caribbean falling to the bottom of the priorities list, in terms of U.S.

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34 Such as the adaptation of Elitist Theory to the field of international relations: whereby the rise in influence and projection of a rising power is always the function of a simultaneous decline in influence and projection of a waning power. There is also the related idea that the global geopolitical contest space abhors a power vacuum, and thus the absence of leadership is almost always filled by a competing symmetric or asymmetric force.

engagement and focus. And the cost of such a derelict attitude towards the Western Hemisphere might be more than that of an imperfect preparation for conventional, high-end war in either the European or the Indo-Pacific theaters of operations.

It seems important to clarify that the São Paulo Forum *is not* a multilateral organization. It isn't – first and foremost for two obvious reasons: it is not integrated by states/governments, and it is not an organization (in the sense that its organs/parts perform the roles of facilitators in a relatively-loose network, which serves as a communicating vessel between state and non-state, national and transnational, legal and illegal, political and para-political, formal and informal entities and power players and brokers and factors). The SPF exists beyond -sometimes behind- the functions of states/governments, even though it benefits from concrete governments and exists partly because it has its hands within certain governments (Hernández 2016). The Communist Party of Cuba is perhaps the only member which can be considered a “state actor” that enjoys an outsized role to play in the Forum, adding to the fact that such an entity has most likely been steering the SPF's development/activities since the network was conceived. But the fact that Brazil's PT and Cuba's PCC precede the Forum chronologically, ideologically, and strategically is not really an argument to suggest that the SPF is the instrument of particular Latin-American & Caribbean states/governments and their grand strategies / foreign policies. If anything can be hypothesized that far up the level of abstraction/analysis, it would be instead that certain governments throughout the LAC region have become, at certain points in time and to varying degrees, instruments of the Forum's grand strategy; whereas a smaller number of states/governments are now so enmeshed with the network's leadership (or central nodes) that it becomes rather difficult to separate the state actor's behavior from the goals of the transnational alliance. The fact that the SPF can remain both coherent and cohesive, in terms of ideology and

objectives, while at the same time appearing so diverse and overcrowded, in terms of its member list and the nature of the members' specific platforms, says more about the historically overriding goals, imperatives, and necessities of the revolutionary Left's continental strategy than about the hypothetical presence of a group of official, orchestrating state hands from regimes like those in Cuba, Nicaragua, or Venezuela.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The foreign policy apparatus of the United States government, particularly the national security communities (intelligence, defense, law enforcement, strategic systems, etc.), typically generate periodic documents to guide policy and strategy at the federal level. In these documents and summaries, at least in the ones unclassified, the different agencies, organs, and bodies that carry out the functions and tasks of national security divide world security threats into two large camps, however problematic the two are conceptually: *state* actors and *non-state* actors.

The São Paulo Forum, by virtue of its power to steer the national defense and security policy programs of its members, should be regarded as a threat to international and regional security. The reason for that categorization is that once a member reaches high office they will try to implement the agenda, with varying degrees of success; that is: they will try to make some or most changes necessary to radically transform the defense-and-security sectors and forces of their respective countries and governments, in ways that partially or completely antagonize with stated U.S. goals and objectives in the Western Hemisphere (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2016). Chances are that, at a minimum, these SPF members will be able to generate some negative effect with their policies once they're installed in office; an effect that, if aggregated to other such effects throughout the LAC region, generated by similar actors, predictably and collectively can have a lasting detrimental impact on U.S. strategy and efforts to promote stability, peace, and prosperity.

Even if only qualitatively important, one Venezuela-style debacle (Reuters Staff 2012), one Bolivarian Revolution is one too many in the LAC region. The disruptive, destabilizing, and destructive potential stemming from such a security-threat exporter and hub can multiply and

grow exponentially, if never checked. The radical effects of such a transformation can be most clearly glanced at with other examples such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and even the powerful non-state actors associated with the Colombian conflict. The damaging effects brought upon the Western Hemisphere by these hubs, in terms of sharp power, is also subjecting many nations and governments to unprecedented levels of institutional corruption, coercion, and corrosion. This onslaught of so-called *strategic corruption* not only erodes these states' ability to then respond to major security threats of any kind and contribute their part to the Good Neighbor Policy, but it also cements the vulnerabilities -new or old- that are then exploited by malign non-hemispheric state and/or non-state actors in order to advance their strategies. Overall, the risk to regional security is increased many times over whenever there is another SPF revolution on the horizon – if we consider that Risk = Vulnerability x Threat.

But under what “camp” should the SPF be labeled? Is it a non-state actor, really? Given the fact that it operates mainly to conquer state power and that it strengthens itself by way of its members' control of national or sub-national governments, can it be properly considered a classic non-state entity? And given the fact that it is truly international -and even transnational- in its dealings and in the networked nature of its individual member organizations and persons, is it merely the equivalent to a government in disguise? Or is it actually a formidable supranational entity/organism? Any answer to these questions would be, at this point, merely speculative, as it would greatly surpass the explanatory potency, not to mention the research goals and objectives, of this study. The few experts out there that can comment long enough on the nature of the Forum do not agree on a defining terminology. Hence, transplanted or adopted terms-of-art from the U.S. Department of Defense, such as transnational threat network (TTN) or super-empowered TTN, never seem to fit the known description, however tempting it may be to use



such terms. In this regard, comprehensive and exhaustive multidisciplinary research is required to fully identify the SPF's underlying characteristics, in order to effectively tackle it as a threat to international security. The United States' and other regional partners' national security communities carry the burden of doing away with inadequate notions copied from the heyday of the Communist International or the OSPAAAL, and consequently need to look at the phenomenon from all angles and consider all possibilities without preconceived labels.

In this same vein, what follows is a list of broad conclusions directly extracted from the analysis performed at the intersection between this study's dependent and independent variables. The tail end of this thesis paper consists of two additional lists, similar to the general conclusions one: a list of recommendations for public policy, from the perspective of the United States federal government interagency, with a focus on the major defense-sector stakeholders in charge of these matters; and a list of recommendations for future academic and scholarly research, both following in the footsteps of this study or otherwise, within this field of work or parallel to it, with the hope of encouraging many disciplines to chime in with their own corpus of knowledge and contribute to the deeper understanding of this fascinating, albeit menacing, entity and the consequences of its activity.

## **General Conclusions**

The São Paulo Forum's defense and security agenda has influence over its members' administrations regarding their countries' defense sector policies, particularly their military policies. Nevertheless, this assertion carries within it multiple nuances. Influence does not -and cannot- amount to *dictate*, given the complex nature and structure of even the weakest and smallest modern republican governments. Public policy-making does not always translate well

into decision-making, let alone government action: a political and governmental system replete with internal friction, segmentation, and compartmentalization can easily be a formidable obstacle to the practical implementation of concepts, doctrines, or directives that maybe even look great on paper. This conclusion's assertion has to do more with the political actors' attitudes and volition, as it is the function of the actors' loyalty to a preexisting political-ideological power structure. It has to do less with the concrete end-result of the said actors' performances in governmental/bureaucratic positions of authority, as such performances are both limited and enabled by the actors' own traits and by the "objective and subjective conditions" under which these actors' performances take place. The aforementioned nuances might help this conclusion's assertion hold true in the face of discrepancies, originated from further scrutiny on the matter of the SPF's influence over the countries under its members' control; for instance: is the assertion also true for other countries whose leaders are members of the SPF, but have not implemented the SPF's agenda and policy prescriptions? Or, further still: although Chávez's Venezuela and Lula's Brazil can be considered SPF successes, why have other governments led by SPF members not been so successful?

The level of influence exerted by the São Paulo Forum's agenda over the defense policy initiatives of the Chávez administration (1999-2012), in Venezuela, was very high.

The level of influence exerted by the São Paulo Forum's agenda over the defense policy initiatives of the Lula administration (2003-2010), in Brazil, was moderate or partial.

The number one strategic imperative of the São Paulo Forum is the destabilization of the Latin America & Caribbean region, with the immediate goal of facilitating the crises and processes that can later be exploited to consolidate more power for its member organizations and

leaders, in order to redirect such power towards the ultimate goal of a complete regional integration under a single ideology.

National strategic culture and, in particular, military culture can represent a significant obstacle for the successful implementation of the São Paulo Forum's armed forces agenda. In Venezuela, Chávez had to cater to the historical military temptation of seeking to expand its roles & missions into the realm of internal security, public order, and law enforcement. In Brazil, Lula had to cater to the traditional ambition of the Brazilian foreign-policy apparatus regarding the elevation of Brazil as regional leader and respectable world player with good relations with the West; he also felt the need to please the Brazilian military establishment by feeding its appetite for technological and operational upgrades, and by turning that appetite outwards – risking a degree of unilateralism.

The São Paulo Forum's policy agenda has not been a static product, neither in time nor space. The Forum recognizes the tactical imperatives of flexibility, adaptability, and crisis leveraging. These and other good practices in formulating and designing policy prescriptions and recommendations have allowed the Forum to incorporate new items -and expand old ones- to the agenda, adapt some items in view of a particular crisis or priority arising in one or more countries in the region, adjust the language and rhetoric pertaining to some items so as to accommodate the current global situation or accepted discourse, etc. The classic advice from revolutionary Marxist thinkers to always evaluate objective and subjective conditions in order to preserve the marriage between theory and *praxis*, so as to remain at the forefront of effective revolutionary strategy, is alive and well with the São Paulo Forum.

The complete fulfillment of the Forum's defense and security agenda would spell serious trouble for the objectives and means of USSOUTHCOM in the LAC region. The PRC, Russia,

Iran, North Korea, and international terrorist organizations, would each benefit from the lawlessness, ungoverned territories, illicit economies, ability to claim natural resources, state weakness/balkanization, corruption, and anti-U.S. indoctrination that would result in such a scenario. Each actor would benefit in their own way, of course, depending on their global strategies and characteristic approach/outlook – and that could even pave the way for a hypothetical catastrophic scenario of “turf war” competition between the adversaries, in this Hemisphere.

The São Paulo Forum’s defense and security agenda’s four non-negotiable / invariable points, during the period analyzed for this study (1990-2013), together amount to a defense-sector picture that is very similar to that painted by the Cuban military doctrine and the concepts that the Cuban FAR is most comfortable with. Complete “decolonization” of the region, severing all defense and security ties with the U.S., de-securitization and de-militarization of regional conflicts and conflict actors’ activities, and the adoption of an asymmetric/resistance warfare framework for the armed forces and society writ large, is exactly what the anti-imperialistic posture of the Cuban FAR handles best. This is, by the way, contrary to what the bulk of the regional armed forces have traditionally gravitated towards.

The ultimate success of the São Paulo Forum’s strategy still rests on the ability to utilize the nation-state in favor of the Revolution. Using the resources, talents, bureaucracies, relative international stature, and diplomatic and defense power projections of each country in which they grab on to government control, is still the main means to the stated end voiced by the Forum. This implies that the São Paulo Forum does not exist but within a matrix in which its network is both enabled and constrained by concrete political, economic, legal, cultural, strategic, historical, and other realities that are not always under its exclusive sphere or radius of

influence. Some concrete realities might also even escape the Forum's ability to grasp, process, and analyze different scenarios for operation.

If the Venezuelan defense and security revolution, undertaken by Chávez's project, were to replicate many times elsewhere in Latin America & the Caribbean, and affect a majority of the countries in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility, the Department of Defense and the Department of State would have an almost impossible task of trying to restore some level of trust, cooperation, burden-sharing, or even governability and governance with and within most countries in the region. In such a scenario, the prospects for stability, peace, and prosperity throughout the Western Hemisphere would be slim-to-none. If the Brazilian case under Lula were to replicate thus, other concerns regarding strategic stability and conventional arms races would arise, and yet even more concerns would surface regarding the approach toward regional conflicts and security vulnerabilities. However, facing such a regional scenario (the latter scenario) would be easier for the U.S. to handle. This is true given the avenues for communication and close cooperation that would remain open with individual countries' defense and security sectors, and also given the superior defense and diplomatic stature that the U.S. enjoys as "natural", historical arbiter of disputes and schisms in the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

The first step to solving a problem is openly recognizing the problem. The national security establishment of the United States of America has yet to formally recognize the threat potential of a São Paulo Forum operating as a rogue transnational power network. Defense policy making also does not take place in a vacuum. It is not a linear process either. It is a multi-

dimensional, multi-disciplinary endeavor best understood as a complex negotiation between bureaucracies, external power brokers, and decision makers, and as a confluence of a myriad societal factors which condition the process. Influencing those who are the target of influence by the São Paulo Forum's and other malign agendas, across the LAC region, is a sound approach by the organs of U.S. foreign affairs.

The U.S. government must re-engage with the LAC region on a higher level of priority. This can be justified as an *Americanist* geostrategic doctrine that does not lessen commitments and deterrence objectives in other critical hot spots across the globe, but rather couples them with a recognition of the obvious need to secure the Western Hemisphere and, especially, the southern approaches to the United States, as a minimum requirement for successful strategic competition with major adversaries. There is nothing wrong with defending the neighborhood first. The U.S. national security community has to let go of all the self-imposed prejudices and perceived fears regarding benign U.S. intervention in Latin America & the Caribbean.

Military-to-military exchanges are perhaps nowhere near as crucial as they are with sympathetic countries in the LAC region. Restoring the perception of the U.S. as partner of choice, exceeding any reasonable benefits offered by the PRC or the Russians, can go a long way in creating a ripple effect on doubtful defense establishments who can still be persuaded to go American.

The end of the Venezuelan tragedy will most likely require the total defeat of the Marxist-Chavista force that occupies its government, at all levels of society. At this point, there is no easy or quick way out, but one has to start by at least identifying the enemy correctly. The Cuban Communist Party is a senior, determinant entity in the São Paulo Forum and, as such, can become the target of improved containment and disruption efforts. Conversely, the Brazilian case

can serve as an example of how sustained, robust defense cooperation can keep channels open for influence and understanding in the highest positions of power. The friendly encouragement of Brazil as a civilized regional leader can secure the sympathetic stance of its foreign policy leadership and bureaucracy, which can, in turn, guarantee a long-term priceless ally in the South, vis-a-vis the challenges to come. The same thing goes for Colombia. Interestingly, it is with these two nations that the U.S. will need to shoulder the most, in order to find realistic alternatives to be able to tackle the Venezuelan conundrum.

U.S. and allied intelligence capabilities need to be jointly employed in order to map out and analyze the São Paulo Forum's entire network (relations, sub-networks, centers of gravity, critical nodes, periphery, and global connections), especially by spotting the links with transnational organized crime and extremism. The network's real and perceived weaknesses, vulnerabilities, threats, and risks must be properly identified in order to figure out better ways to contain, disrupt, degrade, and defeat its operations and normal performance.

The United States government has superb public diplomacy and communications capabilities worldwide. Capacity should be expanded and geared towards better information warfare campaigns against the destabilizing effects of the Forum's existence. The SPF has relied for decades on not transcending very opaque, if any, media coverage, and it has succeeded in expanding and accumulating power under a shroud of denial. It is time to end that tactical advantage by resorting to the serious exposure of SPF goals and the disclosure of uncomfortable connections.

How has the Forum grown stronger and been able to stay resilient through so many political defeats and setbacks in recent years? Is there a steady stream of income sources for its regular operation? Is that stream perhaps tied to its more obscure relations with the regional

criminal underworld? Only good intelligence collection and sharing can answer these questions in a professional way. But with USSOUTHCOM, and the interagency which aids its activities, facing year after year of underfunded budgets, limited asset availability, and shortage of resources to spend on even the most essential of its missions (like interdiction, all-source intelligence gathering, and maritime patrol), it is very difficult to get the structure to work – a structure that’s already available and in place. Better resource allocation for these forces and agencies has to be guaranteed in this area of operations. The bare minimum is not enough.

The LAC region’s private business sector has much to lose if the SPF’s endgame materializes, given the extreme ideological leaning of the club. The United States public and private sectors have many shared interests throughout the Western Hemisphere, and the LAC region represents an almost limitless potential opportunity zone for many global markets. The U.S. government has the tools to renew efforts for international public-private partnerships that generate common solutions, as well as enduring platforms, to expose the Forum and defeat its agenda on the battlefield of ideas (hearts and minds).

Finally, a coalition of friendly regional neighbors can be formed and energized by a U.S. diplomatic and multilateral security initiative to openly oppose and condemn what is perhaps the biggest, most problematic generator of asymmetric warfare instability within the LAC region: the SPF.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Perform an open-source network analysis of the entire São Paulo Forum. Expand the amount of similar case-study analyses to other countries under SPF-member rule. Expand the



scope of correspondence analyses, performed with each case study, to the wider realms of foreign policy and security.

Upon deeper case-study availability, perform comparative analyses between countries and administrations, in order to systematically spot patterns and common rubrics that make cases more or less distinct. Perform both longitudinal and cross-sectional studies of all the SPF-member administrations' defense and security policy initiatives, in order to identify robust commonalities in a comprehensive manner.

Perform a fully updated synthesis of the SPF's defense and national security policy agenda, compiling more detailed information from the Working Group and the theme groups at each one of the recent gatherings – including all the available documentation emitted by the Forum to date. Perform a comprehensive survey on irregular, asymmetric warfare theory and practice, as connected to the most notorious leaders within the SPF and their respective strategists, ideologues, geopolitical advisers, etc. This can begin by studying the case of Hugo Chávez and his ideologues and strategy “gurus”.

Taking into account the absolute and relative importance of the SPF to the LAC region's new security reality, continue expanding and comparing research findings in the tradition and paradigm of Dr. Max G. Manwaring. Special attention should be given to his understanding and tracing of the origins of the project for a *fourth-generation warfare super insurgency* in the region, as compared to other similar approaches in other parts of the world.

In the same vein, a thorough documentary and theoretical study of the formation and evolution of the Cuban FAR should be carried out, in order to better grasp the doctrinal and conceptual direction in which regimes like the one in Venezuela or Nicaragua are taking their own defense and security sectors. Perform a region-wide study compiling all of the episodes and

actions of internal resistance against the imposition of the São Paulo Forum's defense and security policy agenda. This will allow the researchers to identify differences and commonalities, as well as useful patterns that can be leveraged by the U.S. to promote positive change within the countries under the rule of an SPF member.

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