



Revolutionary Cuba's imperialism: a plan of regional expansion. Implications for Colombia

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Revolutionary Cuba has systematically and for decades created, coordinated, financed, provided logistical support, trained militarily and politically, and/or given refuge to radical elements —individuals and groups— especially from Latin America and the Caribbean. All countries of the region are particularly vulnerable to Cuban interference, yet their political leaders and security apparatus generally ignore the nature and history of the Cuban regime, its pernicious interventions, and the threat it poses to hemispheric security. Inadequate resources and appropriate countermeasures are not in place to defend against it.

Revolutionary Cuba's international interference

The Cuban regime's undue international influence stems from its perverse “soft power”^{2/3} and the unique methodological toolkit of asymmetric non-military capabilities it use to advance its strategic goals. For over six decades, it has developed this “core competency,”⁴ which is rooted in the centralized command-and-control nature of its totalitarian system. Cuba's leadership enjoys absolute power and is unconstrained by term limits, electoral challenges, judicial and bureaucratic-institutional rules, and any requirements for consultation, transparency, or accountability; it has ample flexibility to operate unconstrained, act quickly, plan long term, and use even the most unsavory tactics. Its top-down directives are implemented by a huge number of submissive orderlies working in sync within a large and diversified infrastructure designed to essentially do just that.

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² Joseph Nye, a political scientist and former Clinton administration official, coined the post-Cold War concept of “soft power.” He proposed that beyond using military power “to get others to do what they otherwise would not,” the U.S. could draw on its soft power —noncoercive power— to cement its leadership position in the world through cultural, ideological, and institutional mechanisms.” (Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Think again: soft power,” *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 23, 2006; Eric X. Li, “The rise and fall of soft power,” *Foreign Policy*, Aug. 20, 2018.)

³ Some scholars have started to write about “sharp power.” See Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, “The meaning of sharp power: how authoritarian states project influence,” *Foreign Affairs*, Nov. 16, 2017.

⁴ Cuba's “core competency” is described in Chapter IX of M. Werlau, *Cuba's intervention in Venezuela*, op.cit., and is akin to applying to geopolitics the business management theory of core competency strategy. The term “core competency” was coined in 1990 by the leading management experts CK Prahalad and Gary Hamel as a way for firms to grow and play to their strengths, or areas or functions in which they have competencies. (C.K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel, “The Core Competence of the Corporation,” *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 1990.)

The Cuban leadership's priorities have been consistently two-fold from the start of the revolutionary regime: 1. exert internal totalitarian control;⁵ and 2. spread its radical revolutionary model and influence across the globe. On both counts, it has devoted enormous material and human resources, working with sophistication, cohesiveness, determination, and patience.

Cuba's intelligence services have put in place an army of spies, propagandists, and collaborators in wide-ranging sectors of society in all countries of the region and globally. For decades, they have recruited countless native agents and collaborators even the smallest island-nations of the Caribbean. It manages these large networks with a well-trained, select, and dedicated corps of intelligence officials that pose as diplomats or have other official capacities, such as trade representatives and journalists for Cuban press agencies. This clandestine cadre includes hundreds of "illegals," highly-trained Cuban intelligence assets with false identities from other nationalities who are planted as long-term spies in target countries.⁶

Few policy makers understand that Cuba's formidable intelligence/counterintelligence force is "among the best in the world."⁷ It was formed with considerable support and training from the KGB and Stasi, and worked collaboratively with the security services of all the former Soviet bloc countries;⁸ most recently, it has support from within the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance) bloc, whose intelligence services Cuba has helped train.⁹ Cuba has also established a gigantic propaganda apparatus working internationally that is entirely disproportionate to the country's size and gross domestic product (GDP). With funds and other resources

⁵ Cuba's density of surveillance of the population is higher than the Stasi in the former GDR (East Germany), which had the highest ratio of the former Soviet bloc. According to former Lieutenant Colonel of Cuba's Ministry of the Interior Omar Ruíz Matoses, in 1989 Cuba, with a population of around 10.6 million, had 62,000 officers working for the counterintelligence service, or political police. (Maria C. Werlau, telephone interview with Máximo Omar Ruíz Matoses, March 27, 2021.) Thus, its density of surveillance was higher than other former Communist countries of Europe and the URSS, as reported from their recovered archives. (Maria C. Werlau, Memorandum of meeting at the Commission on Stasi Records of December 9, 2005, Report of trip to Berlin, December 6-11, 2005, Free Society Project, Inc.)

⁶ Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence has an Illegals Department, modeled after the KGB's, that prepares and plants individuals with assumed identities in many countries who become deep cover moles with very long or lifelong assignments. A Cuban intelligence official who defected estimates that Cuba could have up to 480 illegals in the U.S. alone. See "Estimated number of Cuba's intelligence relationships dedicated to working against the United States," Updated Dec. 2021, Cuba Archive, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Intelligence-relations-in-US-12.2021-update.pdf>.

⁷ William Tucker, "Cuban intelligence following reconciliation with the US," *In Homeland Security*, Jun. 16, 2015, goo.gl/DjFHwE.

⁸ The work of Cuban intelligence with the KGB and Stasi appears to have been the most prolific. (The author has researched documents of the former Stasi archives and those of other Soviet bloc countries and conducted several research trips to former Soviet bloc countries for research purposes.)

⁹ ALBA has eleven full member states which, in order of joining, are: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, Ecuador, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Grenada and the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis. ALBA is the Spanish acronym for the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples of Our Americas (Alianza Bolivariana de los Pueblos de Nuestra América), a regional integration treaty for Latin American and Caribbean countries that seeks economic independence and political coordination under "21st century socialism" with Cuban-Venezuelan tutelage and emancipation from economic subordination" to the U.S. and Canada and free-market liberalism and capitalism. (See [www.ecured.cu/ALBA_\(Alianza_Bolivariana\)](http://www.ecured.cu/ALBA_(Alianza_Bolivariana)); www.portalalba.org; "Instalada XIV Cumbre del Alba-TCP en honor al Comandante Hugo Chávez," Venezuelan Embassy in Syria, Ministerio del Poder Popular para Relaciones Exteriores, goo.gl/xxy52M; and "XV Cumbre del Alba-TCP se realizará este lunes en Caracas," Vicepresidencia de Venezuela, Mar. 4, 2018.)

from Venezuela, Cuba's intelligence services have also developed software, including for citizen and government control,¹⁰ that has been exported to Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, Uruguay, Panama, Mexico, and Peru.¹¹

According to former officers (defectors) of Cuban Intelligence, in the early 2000s, the Directorate of Intelligence had approximately 600 operational officers managing an estimated 7,800 worldwide intelligence relationships¹² of individuals secretly embedded in governments, media outlets, academic and scientific institutions, political parties, international bodies, unions, post offices, telephone companies, businesses, cemeteries, etc. Since then, all indications are that Cuba's intelligence service has grown thanks to financial support from Venezuela, the alliance with other ALBA partners, strengthened ties with Russia, Iran, China, and North Korea, and the increasingly open relations that most governments around the world have afforded Cuba. The mass exodus from Cuba (around 500,000 just to the United States since 2009),¹³ and in recent years the Venezuelan and Nicaraguan exodus, have allowed for an easy introduction of many agents throughout the region, some with false identities.

Cuba's long history of subversion

Fidel Castro's longtime goal was to take his revolution straight to the Río Grande, bordering the United States, having conquered the entire region. In July 1958, during the armed insurgency he led against the Batista dictatorship, he had written in a letter from the Sierra Maestra about the U.S.: "When this war is over, a much longer and greater war will begin for me: the war I will wage against them. I realize that this will be my true destiny."¹⁴

Cuba's interventions started in many countries of Latin America and the Caribbean as soon as the Castro brothers took power on January 1, 1959. To cite just one example of the scope, by October 1960, Cuba's Ambassador in Lima, Luis Ricardo Alonso Fernández, had sent his Minister of Foreign Relations a detailed list of Cuba's clandestine payments, amounting to \$347,500, to an extensive network of influential individuals (almost a hundred) in the media (15), academia (8 just in one university), political parties (8), legislators (4), and unions (23) of Peru, whose names and affiliations he provided.¹⁵ Payments to Communist Party groups in 13 departments of Peru were also listed to dozens of recipients, but the amounts were not detailed. The Ambassador ended his report to Havana by asserting: "I can responsibly affirm that when a response is needed ... there will be protests, acts of solidarity, strikes, and insurrectionary movements ... *according to the instructions received from Havana.*"¹⁶ The previous month, the

¹⁰ See chapter V. "Data is power": Cuba's virtual occupation of Venezuela," in M. Werlau, *Cuba's intervention in Venezuela*, op. cit.

¹¹ "La mentira está institucionalizada en Venezuela," Jan. 10, 2013, [anthonydaquin.wordpress.com](https://anthonydaquin.wordpress.com/2013/01/10/la-mentira-esta-institucionalizada-en-venezuela/), <https://anthonydaquin.wordpress.com/2013/01/10/la-mentira-esta-institucionalizada-en-venezuela/>.

¹² See "Estimated number of Cuba's intelligence relationships working against the United States," op. cit.; and "Relaciones de inteligencia de Cuba en Latinoamérica y el Caribe," Archivo Cuba, Diciembre 2021, <https://cubaarchive.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Relaciones-de-Inteligencia-Latinoam..pdf>.

¹³ Precise statistics per year are available in the Yearbook of Immigration Statistics published by Homeland Security agency of the United States, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook>.

¹⁴ Delfín Xiqués Cutiño, "La histórica carta de Fidel a Celia," *Granma*, Jun. 4, 2018. (Translated from Spanish.)

¹⁵ Leovigildo Ruiz, *Diario de una Traición*, 1960 Miami: The Indian Printing, 1970, p. 346-350.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 350. (Translated from Spanish. Italics are added for emphasis.)

Peruvian government had occupied two tons of “subversive propaganda” printed in Moscow, Peking, and Prague sent from Havana to Cuba’s embassy in Lima.¹⁷

In 1963, the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. Senate released a report detailing Cuba’s subversive activities in the hemisphere which concluded: “The design of Communist expansion finds in subversion the least costly way of acquiring peoples and territory without exaggerated risk. . . . Its aim is to replace the political, economic, and social order existing in a country by a new order, which presupposes the complete physical and moral control of the people. . . . That control is achieved by progressively gaining possession of bodies and minds, using appropriate techniques of subversion that combine psychological, political, social, and economic actions, and even military operations, if it is necessary.”¹⁸

During the three decades of Soviet backing (until 1991), the Soviets and Cuba worked in sync in the Third World promoting subversion, “wars of liberation,” and many other actions and initiatives to spread Communism and counter U.S. interests. Cuba organized, armed, financed, and provided logistical support as well as military and ideological training and refuge to terrorists, radical groups, and leaders of unions, indigenous people, political parties, and social movements of several continents, especially from Latin America.¹⁹ In the region, it participated directly in guerrilla movements against *all* democracies in Latin America with the reported exception of Mexico, often at odds with the Soviets. An extensive bibliography on this issue includes testimony from numerous participants, including defectors from Cuba’s intelligence services and former guerrillas, as well as a treasure trove of information and documents extricated from the Soviet Union²⁰ or preserved in its former satellites. After the end of Soviet Communism and its huge aid for Cuba, Venezuela under Chávez and later Maduro has provided the resources for Cuba to continue spreading its influence, especially in the region. Cuba can count on having put in place complementary subversive strategies of coordinated radical urban shock forces as well as covert penetration by agents and collaborators; an untold army of clandestine recruits can be counted on to mobilize upon receiving the order.²¹

Foro de Sao Paulo, Fidel Castro’s brainchild

Foro de Sao Paulo (the Sao Paulo Forum) was the post-Cold War strategy conceived by Fidel Castro “to discuss progressive strategies after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.”²² It sought to redesign, reframe, revive, and coordinate the radical left to find a more practical way to reach power. Castro sought help from

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 281.

¹⁸ Jon B. Perdue, *The war of all the people: the nexus of Latin American radicalism and Middle Eastern terrorism* (Virginia: Potomac Books, 2012), p. 164.

¹⁹ There is an extensive bibliography on Cuba’s international interventions. See a concise article in Ignacio Montes De Oca, “Fidel Castro, el antiimperialista que quiso imponer su revolución al mundo,” *El País*, Jan. 2, 2017; and see a list of Latin American subversive groups sponsored by Cuba in Pablo Alfonso, “El legado subversivo de Fidel Castro,” *Martinoticias.com*, Nov. 26, 2016. Among books worth mentioning are: Juan Benemelis, *Las guerras secretas de Fidel Castro* (Miami: Grupo de Apoyo a la Disidencia, 2003); Enrique Ros, *Castro y las guerrillas en Latinoamérica* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 2001); and Enrique Ros, *La aventura africana de Fidel Castro* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1999).

²⁰ Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin. *The world was going our way: The KGB and the battle for the Third World*. New York, Basic Books, 2005. (Vasili Mitrokhin was the KGB’s former senior archivist.)

²¹ Maria C. Werlau, interviews with Enrique García, Miami, 2015 - 2021. (García is related to the author.)

²² “São Paulo Forum for 25 years,” op. cit.; Instituto Lula, op. cit.

subversive comrades including Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva),²³ then head of Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* and future president (2003-2011). Lula had been funded by Cuba since his early days as labor leader, and was considered “*un hombre de Cuba*.”²⁴ Early supporters came the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), founded in Havana in January 1966 after the Tri-Continental Congress to unify the revolutionary struggle in Latin America.²⁵ The Foro's first meeting was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in July 1990 and was attended by 48 leftist (and Communist) parties and movements from Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁶

Chávez acknowledged that Fidel had told him in his first trip to Cuba in December 1994 about the *Foro de Sao Paulo*.²⁷ He was clearly sold on the idea and gave it his full and open backing upon becoming president of Venezuela with Castro's encouragement and help.²⁸ Cuba oversaw the Foro's transformation towards “rebuilding the old Communist International in the Western Hemisphere under Cuban control.”²⁹ The template came from Fidel's playbook on how to make revolution “silently” —furtively and opportunistically—³⁰ with inspiration in the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci's ideas on cultural hegemony.³¹ The new template rejects traditional armed struggle, pretends it is not communist, tailors its actions to the circumstances, and uses capitalism conveniently.³² Foro members are to build constituencies around populist social causes and, once elected and under the cover of democratic legitimacy, progressively undermine civil and individual freedoms, free markets, and bourgeois institutions and values; mechanisms

²³ A former Cuban intelligence official for 11 years, Enrique García headed the Brazil team for Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence in 1985-1986 and reports that Lula was always “Cuba's man,” financed and supported by Cuban intelligence since he began his career as a union leader. (Enrique García, undated manuscript, and M. Werlau, interviews with E. García, op. cit.)

²⁴ Lula was funded by Castro since early on, according to former Intelligence official Enrique García, who at one time led the Brazil department of Cuba's Directorate of Intelligence. (M. Werlau, interviews with E. García, op. cit.)

²⁵ Maria C. Werlau, telephone interview with Dr. Hilda Molina, July 22, 2019. (Dr. Molina was close to Fidel Castro at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Sao Paulo Forum.)

²⁶ “São Paulo Forum for 25 years,” Instituto Lula, July 30, 2015, <https://www.institutolula.org/foro-de-sao-paulo-faz-25-anos>; “Cuba: Foreign policy in Latin America,” *Focus Cuba*, Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies, University of Miami, Issue 51, Jan. 22, 2004.

²⁷ Chávez acknowledged that Fidel had told him in his first trip to Cuba in December 1994 about the *Foro de Sao Paulo*. (Ignacio Ramonet, *Hugo Chávez, mi primera vida: Conversaciones con Ignacio Ramonet* (Vintage/Random House, 2013).)

²⁸ M. Werlau, *Cuba's intervention in Venezuela*, op. cit. has Chapter II, “Revolutionary aspirations and synergies,” devoted to that story,

²⁹ “The Sao Paulo Forum, Castro's shocktroops,” *Executive Intelligence Review*, Nov. 10, 1995, p. 11.

³⁰ M. Werlau, telephone interview with Dr. H. Molina, op. cit.

³¹ The Italian politician and philosopher-theorist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) was an advocate of a radical social and cultural transformation to establish Communist order whose reflections and writings on the cultural and political concept of hegemony are of particular importance. Gramsci believed that Christianized Western culture stands in the way of the envisioned communist order, thus, it must be conquered and defeated (destabilized and fragmented) not by force but by a “long march through the culture” targeting the traditional family and institutions and “equalizing” society downward by empowering an ensemble of marginalized groups (racial minorities, women, and the economically deprived), including criminals, and pushing members of the upper and middle classes towards exile. (“Antonio Gramsci.” Encyclopaedia Britannica, last updated, Apr. 23, 2019. www.britannica.com/biography/Antonio-Gramsci; Fonte, John. “Why there is a culture war: Gramsci and Tocqueville in America.” Dec. 1, 2000, *Policy Review*, Hoover Institution, Dec. 2000 & Jan. 2001, goo.gl/8qFWfX.)

³² Antonio Sánchez García, “El foro de Sao Paulo: la izquierda real y la nueva izquierda,” *Análítica*, Feb, 21, 2014.

of the constitutional order are used to lay the ground for a takeover of a state through its own institutions. Venezuela under Hugo Chávez was a perfect candidate for this gradualist model favored by Fidel,³³ which was also successfully applied in other ALBA partner countries with presidents belonging to the Foro, including Bolivia,³⁴ Nicaragua, and Ecuador under Rafael Correa.

Castro and Chávez baptized with new terminology, “21st century socialism,” their joint project to propel “a new humanistic model privileging social issues over the model of economic subordination” with Cuban-Venezuelan tutelage.³¹ Castro had been seeking semantic distance from the word “communism” after the fall of Soviet Communism and a fresh image for his new brand; with Chávez’s help, the term was appropriated from the sociologist Heinz Dieterich, who had first written about it in 1996. Chávez first mentioned “21st century socialism” at the World Social Forum meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in February 2005.³⁵

The Foro’s successes were impressive. By 2008, Fidel Castro was gushing that it was “attaining power in almost all countries” of the region.³⁶ During the Obama years (2009-2017), a “normalization process” with the Cuban regime propelled all member countries of the OAS (Organization of American States) to fully legitimize the Cuban dictatorship and unanimously vote in 2009 to welcome it back to the OAS without conditions as Cuba and its quasi-satellite Venezuela were afforded total impunity for their grave and systematic human rights violations.³⁷ In 2015, presidents of eleven of the most important countries were members of the Foro: Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Uruguay, Bolivia, and El Salvador. These achievements as well as Cuba’s influence over Venezuela, which was a free-market democracy, demonstrates the powerful asymmetrical advantages of its unique imperialist

³³ Dr. Hilda Molina asserts that Fidel convinced Chávez on that trip to Cuba to create a great Bolivarian homeland and eventually co-lead the Sao Paulo Forum, offering him the money and human resources for his campaign for the presidency of Venezuela. (M. Werlau, telephone interview with H. Molina, op. cit.)

³⁴ See Luis Leonel León, “Carlos Sánchez Berzaín: how Castrochavismo took over Bolivia,” *Panampost*, Nov. 5, 2018 and Mario J. Pentón, “Ex ministro: ‘Bolivia le sigue a Venezuela. Es la crónica de una muerte anunciada,’” *El Nuevo Herald*, Dec. 13, 2018.

³⁵ The term “21st century socialism” had reportedly been coined in a 1995 book by Alexander Buzgalin, a Russian Marxist professor at Moscow State University. Heinz Dieterich Steffan, a German-born sociologist living in Mexico since the 1970s, first used it in writings in 1996 and in 2000 published a book with the same title. Fidel Castro asked Chávez to invite Dieterich to Venezuela so they could appropriate the term. Dieterich visited Caracas for the first time in December 1999 and became an advisor to Chávez, although in 2007 he broke with him and eventually became a strong critic of *Chavismo*. (“Alexander_Buzgalin,” en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Buzgalin; Lucho Lazo, “El socialismo del Siglo XXI por Heinz Dieterich,” Aug. 24, 2007, goo.gl/NdYXQp; M. Werlau, telephone interview with H. Molina, op. cit.)

³⁶ “‘Lula,’ Reflexiones del Comandante en Jefe, Fidel Castro Ruz,” Jan. 22-31, 2008, *Granma*, in *La Jornada*, Jan. 25, 2008, www.jornada.unam.mx.

³⁷ In June 2009, the OAS revoked the Jan. 1962 resolution that excluded Cuba from participation in the organization, although the resolution states that it would result from “a process of dialogue initiated at the request of the Government of Cuba, and in accordance with the practices, purposes, and principles of the OAS,” which Cuba refused. (“OAS revokes resolution suspending membership of Cuba in the Inter-American system,” San Pedro Sula, Honduras, June 3, 2009, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=GA-12-09; Anahi Rama, “OAS ends Cuba suspension after 47 years,” *Reuters*, Jun. 3, 2009; Final Act, Eighth Meeting of Consultation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Punta del Este, Uruguay, January 22 to 31, 1962. <http://www.oas.org/consejo/meetings%20OF%20consultation/actas/acta%208.pdf>.)

“brand.”³⁸ The feat is even more impressive given that Cuba, compared to Venezuela, is eight times smaller, has a third of the population, and, during the socialist period has been far less developed, much poorer, and governed by a socialist dictatorship with a failed and parasitic economic model.

Taking control of Venezuela had been Castro’s obsession; it was the crown jewel of his regional quest due to Venezuela’s geopolitical importance, privileged location as a gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean, and vast oil and mineral riches. Venezuelans were dominated with “Fidel’s recipe,” a long-term strategy of collective impoverishment, dependence on the state, and repression³⁹ that used Venezuela’s huge wealth to bolster populist expectations and solidify Chavez’s control through a clientelist model that galvanized the population’s hopes through elections.⁴⁰ Chavez spent an estimated \$500 billion on social services during his 14-year presidency—which saw poverty decline from 49.4% in 1999 to 29.5% in 2012⁴¹—but the gains were unsustainable; when they evaporated, authoritarianism was well in place.

After Castro’s death in November 2016, Cuba’s unique brand of “revolutionary imperialism” continues to drive the Cuban and Venezuelan leaders and their allies, partners, sympathizers, and well-intentioned “useful idiots” in the region and worldwide.

The new insurgency

Events since the last semester of 2019 point to a change in tactics likely stemming from an awareness that the gradualist model toward radicalization⁴² takes too long to consolidate and requires too much money. The Foro had suffered important setbacks, particularly since 2015.⁴³ The growing economic crisis in Venezuela and Cuba together with increasing international pressure against the Maduro regime called for distracting, intimidating, and destabilizing governments to neutralize a military intervention in Venezuela or measures contemplated in the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, TIAR for its Spanish

³⁸ This author’s book describes in detail how Cuba essentially “occupied” Venezuela. See M. Werlau *Cuba’s intervention in Venezuela*, op. cit.

³⁹ As reported by General Guacaipuro Lameda, former president of the Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA (Oct. 2000 to Feb. 2002), who met with Castro for hours. (“Una grave alerta de Guacaipuro Lameda,” Mar. 11, 2016, goo.gl/E9ZwTd; Carla Angola, “Los pobres tendrán que seguir siendo pobres, los necesitamos así,” Feb. 13, 2013, goo.gl/5kaA2p.)

⁴⁰ To foster dependence on the state, employment in the public sector rose enormously while houses, food, and innumerable social programs were delivered at a frantic pace. (“NTN24: Venezuela, el país con mayor cantidad de ministerios en el mundo,” NTN24, Jul. 2, 2014; and “El chavismo duplicó el número de empleados públicos,” *Infobae*, Jun. 17, 2015.)

⁴¹ “Las misiones sociales, el vínculo de Chávez con los pobres de Venezuela,” *Univisión*, Mar. 6, 2013.

⁴² E. García, manuscript and M. Werlau, interviews with E. García, op. cit.

⁴³ The pro-Foro tide started to turn with the removal of Mel Zelaya from the presidency of Honduras in 2009 for attempting to impose a Foro-like constitutional reform, then Fernando Lugo of Paraguay was impeached in 2012. Falling oil prices aggravated the economic debacle in Venezuela and mass protests followed in 2014 and 2017. Dilma Rousseff of Brazil was impeached in September 2016 and other key allies were replaced with center-right presidents after elections in Argentina (December 2015), Peru (June 2016), Chile (December 2017), Colombia (June 2018), and Brazil (October 2018). Ecuador’s Lenin Moreno unexpectedly refused to play the role of Rafael Correa’s puppet after his election as president in April 2017, his government left the ALBA in August 2018. In October 2016, a plebiscite in Colombia to validate the peace agreement with the FARC was defeated (although it was later passed through the Congress, mildly modified).

acronym.⁴⁴ Accelerating the regional conquest would also provide access to more economic resources and new vassals.

A Foro offshoot was created, the “Puebla Group,” to bring together progressive Latin American forces and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) with the purported goal of combatting neoliberalism, growing inequality, and a failure to meet the demands of “the most popular and neglected classes.”⁴⁵ Its first meeting was in July 12, 2019 in Puebla, Mexico, with thirty political leaders from twelve countries “joining forces and proposals to consolidate a new axis with the objective of producing regional consensus and politically articulating progressivism.”⁴⁶ Likely not a coincidence, beginning immediately, violent riots broke out first in Puerto Rico in July 2019 and then in successive countries of the region, including Chile and Colombia, where more persistent rounds followed. If anyone had any doubts on their origin, Venezuelan leader Diosdado Cabello declared on October 20, 2019: “What is happening in Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, Honduras, is just a breeze; a Bolivarian hurricane is coming.”⁴⁷ That same day, President Nicolás Maduro said: “We are fulfilling the plan... the Sao Paulo Forum plan is in full swing, victorious. We are fulfilling all the goals we proposed in the Sao Paulo Forum, one by one. ... The Sao Paulo Forum is revitalized, boosted, and that’s how we must continue, articulating the progressive, revolutionary, left-wing, advanced parties from all of Latin America and the Caribbean and the world with social movements. That was the strategy we designed and we are doing well, we are doing better than we thought, much better than we had thought.”⁴⁸

The recent wave of insurrections has multiple signs of a coordinated strategy as well as the reported presence of Cubans, Venezuelan, and Colombian guerrilla elements when violence breaks out. Among other similarities,⁴⁹ they seek to denigrate the institutional order and democratic institutions, especially of the security forces, and emphasize systemic imperfections or failures such as corruption and inequality. The methodology reveals a pattern: radical elements prepared and coordinated in advance selectively deploy extreme violence in a synchronized and organized manner supported by a broad popular-street movement that is mostly peaceful and seemingly spontaneous (most participants have no clandestine preparation or prior warning). Material damages occupy the law enforcement agencies, blackmail and distract the politicians, cause discomfort, inconvenience, and harm to most citizens, increase costs for the State, and hurt the economy. Emblematic examples of irreverence, disobedience and even violence against the forces of order quickly emerge (most are likely pre-planned) and are imitated to feed the violence. Law enforcement agencies are overloaded so real or fabricated victims accumulate and the situation is further polarized, with mounting claims directed against State authorities and discrediting the established order.

⁴⁴ “The Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance,” Media Note, Office of the Spokesman, Washington, D.C., US Department of State, 20 de septiembre de 2001, bit.ly/2Hks64P and bit.ly/2YrIirZ.

⁴⁵ Daniel Pardo, “Qué es el Grupo de Puebla, el “contrapoder” a la derecha que reúne en Buenos Aires a la izquierda latinoamericana (sin AMLO ni Maduro),” *BBC News Mundo*, Nov. 9, 2019.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ “Diosdado Cabello amenaza: «La brisa bolivariana que recorre la región se convertirá en huracán,” *ABC*, Oct. 20, 2019.

⁴⁸ “Maduro: Estamos cumpliendo el plan del Foro de Sao Paulo a la perfección,” *El Nacional*, Oct. 20, 2019; “Maduro: “Estamos cumpliendo con el plan, no puedo decir más,”” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMORpx9CwxY>.

⁴⁹ The Spanish version of the author’s 2019 book on Venezuela enumerates eleven similarities among the violent protests in different countries. (See Maria C. Werlau, *La intervención de Cuba en Venezuela: una ocupación estratégica con implicaciones globales* (Free Society Project / Neo Club Press, 2019), <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1652248765>.)

The prevailing social contract for raising citizen demands for peaceful negotiation and the rule of law (the institutional and legal framework) are ignored; when some demands are satisfied, the bar is raised and followed by calls for the resignation of rulers, new constitutions, and a new political-social-economic order. Many of the participants are not aware they are being used as accessories to carry out a clandestine preconceived plan.

This Foro update was conceived with a skillful understanding of human psychology and of how masses are manipulated, as well as through the exploitation of new technologies and social media. Presented as just leaderless movements of our new interconnected world,⁵⁰ the insurgency transmits a powerful and simplistic *leit motif* to young people, who are easiest to impress, have no historical memory of subversion, communism, or the Cold War, and tend to support utopian social views. Another key constituency is among those who feel deprived, the least privileged “victims” of the capitalist system; by empowering themselves as a bloc to make demands, they adopt a group identity that gives a new and revitalized meaning to their lives. The massive “spontaneous” movements, once unleashed, have found instant support in the press, academia, the judicial system, and progressive civil networks largely thanks to the advance of the “silent revolution” that Fidel Castro spoke of. Their focus turns to social demands, not on condemning organized violence, and the narrative is usurped to explain the problem in those terms.

This recent mode of insurrection has all the aspects of an unconventional insurgency strategy disguised as a “revolution of the masses” whose managers and ultimate objectives remain hidden. Marxist orthodoxy, communism, and organized violence are not mentioned; instead, the movements behind them embrace the vindication of social demands surrounding gender identity, climate change, indigenous and union rights, anti-capitalism, inequality, poverty, racial justice, etc. They are populist in nature —promising whatever is necessary— and use tactics learned from the KGB as well as historical mechanisms perfected by Cuba in its “silent war” to overthrow liberal democracy. The ideological framework comes from an amalgamation of traditional class war seeking to undermine the hegemony of the ruling class and the “war of all the people” (militarizing the population) favored by Fidel Castro. It is a formula of great asymmetric value, as the violence foments excesses, real and contrived, of the security forces that tend to backfire, producing more polarization; this puts democratic societies at a difficult crossroads in finding an effective response.

There are always multiple endogenous causes for social unrest, as no system can meet all demands, and the promise of prosperity and social justice confuse people who ignore the hidden dangers of resorting to violence and destruction. Legitimate complaints, demands, and hopes for a better life are the breeding ground for those deliberately working to destabilize democratic governments, export revolution, promote regional integration under Cuba’s tutelage, and seeking the defeat of the United States. The late Fidel Castro was a master in the manipulation of expectations. In early 1959 he declared that his new revolutionary government would turn Cuba into “the most prosperous country” with a standard of living “higher than any country in the world.”⁵¹ His grandiose promises of great prosperity could fill many pages;

⁵⁰ See Ori Brafman y Rod Beckstrom, *The starfish and the spider: the unstoppable power of leaderless organizations* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006).

⁵¹ “Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer Ministro del gobierno revolucionario, en el aniversario del ataque al palacio presidencial el 13 de marzo de 1959,” <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1959/esp/c130359e.html>. (Translated from Spanish.)

eventually, they were extended to Venezuela, that he declared would “create jobs not only for Venezuelans but also for their Colombian brothers and sisters” and become “a revolutionary model for the world.”⁵² No matter that the opposite has happened, as revolutionary Cuba is technically bankrupt and oil-rich Venezuela stands in ruins, power was consolidated precisely by exploiting promises that were impossible to keep.

The Foro has recovered a lot of ground since the start of the insurgency. Key allies of Cuba have been elected presidents of Argentina, Mexico, Peru, and Chile, the latter planning to pass a new and radical constitution, and they have a more amenable president and in the majority of the Congress of the United States. Foro candidates are polling high in coming elections in Colombia (May 29th) and Brazil (October 2nd), where longtime Cuba pal Lula da Silva is staging a comeback. The Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan regimes, reenergized and continuing to enjoy international impunity, have heightened repression.

The Foro gathers annually with guests from social movements and political organizations from other continents to seek unity of action in the “anti-imperialist and people’s struggle” against neoliberalism and in defining “a new concept of continental unity and integration.”⁵³ Its Working Group represents 16 countries and meets periodically; it has three regional departments of which the Andean Amazonian department is temporarily based in Colombia.⁵⁴

A trial run of Cuba-led insurgency

The insurrectionary model had seen a trial run in many Latin American cities in the 1980s with “spontaneous riots” by radical movements and groups organized from Cuba and Sandinista Nicaragua.⁵⁵ Fidel Castro led the onslaught with his public harangues against the external debt and the adjustment and stabilization agreements with the International Monetary Fund; Cuba’s intelligence apparatus took care of the operational details. In a 2015 book titled *The conspiracy of the 12 coups*, Venezuelan professor Thays Peñalver includes testimony of intelligence officials from several Latin American countries as well as radical leaders who participated in the events—all report that the riots were designed to make people believe they had been spontaneous.⁵⁶ The violent riots and looting occurred in many cities including in Ecuador, Honduras, and Guatemala and led to a state of siege in 1982 in Peru, and in 1984 in the Dominican Republic, Chile, and Jamaica.⁵⁷ Peñalver writes that the “authorship of revolutionaries was always denied or omitted no matter how much evidence there was of their militias, bombs, and snipers.”⁵⁸

According to Professor Luis Lauriño, from Venezuela’s Andrés Bello Catholic University, the “austerity” protests began in Mexico in 1981 and spread to Argentina in March 1982, October 1983, June 1984, September 1984, May 1985 and August 1985, as well as to Brazil from April to October 1983 in Sao Paulo,

⁵² Statements by Fidel Castro quoted in the media during one of Chávez’s many visits to Cuba. “Fidel Castro llama a Venezuela ‘el modelo revolucionario’,” Havana, *Informador*, Oct. 19, 2011. (Translated from Spanish.)

⁵³ <https://forodesaopaulo.org/brief-history-and-foundations/>

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* (The Southern Cone department is headquartered in Uruguay and the Mesoamerican and Caribbean department is headquartered in El Salvador.)

⁵⁵ Thays Peñalver, *La conspiración de los 12 golpes*, 2015, p. 138.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 141 and 146-154.

Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Campinas, Fortaleza, Ribeirão Preto, Brasília and to other cities in November-December 1986 and July 1987.⁵⁹ An important underlying theme, Lauriño notes, was to erode the image and hegemony of traditional political parties and processes and question the established order.

In August 1985, Fidel Castro declared at an international meeting on the debt that oil-producing countries such as Nigeria, Venezuela, and Mexico could not be excluded from the anti-debt movement and that it would now be valid for all Third World countries.⁶⁰ This laid the foundation to bring the anti-capitalist insurrection to Venezuela, where the radical left took control of the student movement at the universities after the fuse was lit with the death of a student at the University of the Andes in March 1987. Students looted and distributed food to the city's poor in coordination with neighborhood organizations in many cities where riots and violence broke out in perfectly coordinated fashion and with a preconceived plan.⁶¹ The government reported on hundreds of detained foreigners, many of them armed, for immediate deportation. A former guerrilla, Fernando Soto Rojas, said that the guerrillas, assisted by a Venezuelan communist professor, had trained a group of almost eighty youngsters and that the current president of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, had participated in the riots, having just returned from a one-year Marxist training course in Cuba.⁶² Years later, the head of Venezuelan Intelligence, General Carlos Julio Peñalosa, reported that Fidel Castro had a plan to stage a coup and that, when it failed, he had opted for Plan B, which was to produce a sniper massacre to blame it on President Carlos Andrés Pérez.

In Argentina a similar wave of violence started in May 1988 with an assault on a supermarket in Córdoba; three days later, the country's urban centers were in a state of upheaval. According to Peñalver "everything appeared with manifest synchronization" and organized groups were observed in different cities. In January 1989, an assault on the Mechanized Infantry Regiment No. 3 of La Tablada, province of Buenos Aires, sought to start a popular insurrection but failed. In 2000, the Cuban regime was accused in an Argentine court for the assault; the complaint file had thirty pages of testimonies and other evidence but was dismissed.⁶³

Cuba's longstanding interventions in Colombia

There are currently at least nine political parties in Colombia reported as members of the Sao Paulo Forum (among 123 member parties from 27 countries).⁶⁴ Many like-minded groups and non-governmental

⁵⁹ María C. Werlau, telephone interview with Luis Lauriño and text messages of Nov. 4, 2019.

⁶⁰ Fidel Castro Ruz, "Discurso de clausura del encuentro sobre la deuda externa de América Latina y el Caribe," La Habana, 3 de agosto de 1985 (en Eric Toussaint, "Fidel Castro: La deuda es impagable," Comité para la abolición de las deudas ilegítimas, 28 de noviembre de 2016, www.cadtm.org.)

⁶¹ George Ciccariello-Maher, *We created Chávez: a people's history of the Venezuelan revolution*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2013; T. Peñalver, op. cit., p. 146- 147.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The case was filed by an Argentine businessman, Omar Adra, president of the Argentine American Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy in Cuba but appears to have been dismissed. (Pablo Alfonso, "Acusan a Cuba por asalto guerrillero en Argentina," *El Nuevo Herald*, Dec. 6, 2000; "La Tablada: procurador dice no a la Corte," *Ambito*, Dec. 18, 2000.

⁶⁴ <https://forodesaopaulo.org/partidos/>. (Other member parties include Cuba's Communist Party, the Sandinista Front of Nicaragua, and five parties in Venezuela, member parties in Latin America, thirteen in Uruguay, twelve each in Argentina and Chile, ten each in Peru and Dominican Republic, nine in Paraguay, eight in Ecuador, five in Brazil, four in Puerto Rico, three each in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, and Panama, two each in Costa Rica and Martinique, and one each in Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, Trinidad and Tobago, St. Lucia, and Curacao.)

organizations are said to receive substantial funding from abroad. Together, these pour untold resources into radical causes and social movements that play into Cuba's agenda.

Key assets have been in place for years in Cuba's embassy in Bogotá to advance its ambitious objectives in Colombia. The intelligence center, operating within the embassy, greatly increased the number of 'diplomats,' most of whom are spies, during the presidency of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018). The former head of the Intelligence Center, Juan Loforte Osorio, was officially accredited as Minister Counselor but is a seasoned Colonel in the Intelligence service with a distinguished career of around 40 years.⁶⁵ (After he was outed in the press in 2014, he was transferred.) In May 2021, the Colombian government declared the second in command of the Cuban embassy in Bogotá, First Secretary Omar García Lazo, *persona non grata* for carrying out activities incompatible with the Vienna Convention.⁶⁶

Cuba has had a long history of intervention in Colombia. Since the early 1960s it has played a leading role inspiring, sponsoring, training, assisting, and providing safe haven to Colombia's guerrillas. In 1960, Colombia's communist and radical leaders began traveling to Havana for military and political instruction, meeting directly with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara to plot armed uprisings in Colombia and all of Latin America.⁶⁷ In 1960, the Colombian Communist Party—financed and instrumented by Cuba—had express orders from Fidel Castro for the Colombian Guerrilla General Staff to be “composed of urban shock groups and rural guerrillas in different parts of the country.”⁶⁸ By March 1961, Colombian police had uncovered a massive plot by Cuba to establish a guerrilla front in Colombia.⁶⁹

The Castros facilitated the entry of Colombian guerrilla groups into the drug trafficking business. Their history of drug-dealing went back to their fight against Batista⁷⁰ and by the 1970s they had resorted to drug trafficking to weaken the United States and bring in hard currency to fund international subversive activities and liberation movements.⁷¹ Not surprisingly, in 1995, an *Executive Intelligence Review* report warned that intelligence officials in the region knew that Cuban officials had advised other groups in the Sao Paulo Forum to adopt “the M-19 model” to assure self-reliance through the drug trade.”⁷²

⁶⁵ M. Werlau, interviews with E. García; Antonio María Delgado, “Espías cubanos miran con interés el proceso de paz en Colombia,” *El Nuevo Herald*, Dec. 14, 2014.

⁶⁶ “Diplomático de Cuba en Bogotá, Omar Rafael García Lazo, un represor de exportación,” *Radio Televisión Martí*, May 11, 2021.

⁶⁷ Darío Villamizar, *Las guerrillas de Colombia: una historia desde los orígenes hasta los confines* (Bogotá: Penguin Random House Group, 2017), pp. 194-95, 201-204, 230-231.

⁶⁸ Fernando Vargas Quemba y Elkin Gallego, *Memoria Histórica de las FARC: su verdadero origen*, 2da. ed., (Bogotá: Unetex por Colombia/Editorial Litotecnia, 2019), p. 248. (Translated from Spanish.)

⁶⁹ The recovered documents showed that two Cubans were directly participating in the guerilla front and another one was delivering training to guerrillas in Sumapaz, Colombia. Cuba was also delivering arms to the guerrilla by using solitary and remote coastal locations and semi-abandoned airports. (J. Benemelis, op. cit., p. 334.)

⁷⁰ The Castro brothers had cultivated marijuana in the Sierra Maestra to purchase arms for the fight against the Batista regime and had developed ties with the U.S. mafia upon rising to power. In 1960, Cuba signed a mutual assistance agreement with Czechoslovakia's intelligence service to produce drugs and, with KGB participation, launched the “Pink Epidemic” operation to introduce illegal drugs into the U.S. to finance arms purchases for armed struggle in Latin America. (J. Benemelis, op. cit., p. 331-340.)

⁷¹ Georgie Anne Geyer, *Guerrilla prince: the untold story of Fidel Castro*, 3rd ed. (Kansas City: Andrews McMill Publishing, 2001), p. 371.

⁷² “The Sao Paulo Forum, Castro's shocktroops,” p. 10.

Colombia's 2,200-kilometer border with Venezuela has allowed the "Bolivarian" neighbor to provide safe haven, operational bases, routes, armaments, training weapons, resupply, and medical services to longtime Cuban allies and accomplices, Colombian terrorist groups ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional), FARC, and, since the "peace" agreements, FARC dissidents and "demobilized" militias. Venezuela's armed forces have systematically violated Colombia's sovereignty with numerous air and land incidents to provoke a confrontation.⁷³ Drug trafficking, illegal mining, and other criminal activities are rampant.

Plans to weaken the Colombian government of Iván Duque use traditional military and non-military sources. A document of "Venezuela's Council of Defense of the Nation" recommends destabilizing Colombia by extracting political capital from a strike by the indigenous community in Cauca, Colombia; it highlighted the importance of exacerbating internal problems for Duque in order to draw his attention away from Venezuela. The document recommended supporting and financing the social movements and indigenous protests in Colombia and promoting a national and international media campaign.⁷⁴

The burdens and destabilizing effects on Colombia of the Venezuelan mass exodus also fit the larger strategy to weaken Colombia and advance a continental agenda. Almost two million Venezuelans have migrated to Colombia, of which 90% reportedly live from the informal economy and 56% do not have an official immigration status.⁷⁵ Impoverished, hungry, and sick Venezuelans of all ages constantly arrive in Colombia needing medical and social services, security, housing, and infrastructure. According to Colombia's ambassador to the U.S., the Venezuelan government clearly benefits from migration to reduce social pressure as well as have fewer people to control, access goods and services, and obtain remittances that in their exchange enrich the Venezuelan government.⁷⁶

The evidence of Venezuelan and Cuban involvement in undermining Colombia is extensive. In 2008 documents and laptops seized by Colombia⁷⁷ had proof of Venezuelan and Ecuadorian (Correa) support as well as that the encryption system used for FARC communications came from Cuba. In March 2019 Colombia expelled a Cuban for spying on a strategic installation of the Colombian Air Force located north of Bogotá, he had been part of the Cuban medical brigade in Venezuela, which is used to bring Cuban intelligence agents into Venezuela and Colombia.⁷⁸

The Colombia peace agreement with the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), of which Cuba was a "facilitator" with Norway, played a decisive role in inserting the FARC guerrillas into the Sao Paulo Forum track of "elected dictatorship." Havana was chosen as the location for four years of

⁷³ Sonia Osorio, "Solicitan ofensiva en la ONU contra Maduro por violar la soberanía de Colombia," *El Nuevo Herald*, Sep. 23, 2018.

⁷⁴ "Documentos secretos develan un plan del régimen de Nicolás Maduro para debilitar al gobierno colombiano de Iván Duque," *Infobae*, Apr. 5, 2019.

⁷⁵ Daniel Pardo, "Colombia: qué derechos tendrán cuando regularicen su situación," *BBC Mundo*, Colombia, Feb. 11, 2021.

⁷⁶ Frank López Ballesteros, "Embajador de Colombia en EEUU: 'En Venezuela el ELN se conectó con las mafias del oro,'" *Diario Las Américas*, Nov. 2, 2018.

⁷⁷ Douglas Farah, "Cuba's role in the Bolivarian radical populist movement's dismantling of democracy," Dec. 11, 2017, IBI Consultants LLC, p.34.

⁷⁸ "Expulsan a espía cubano que rondaba la base aérea de Palanquero," *El Tiempo*, Mar. 17, 2019; Jaime Moreno, "No hablan español pero les dieron pasaporte venezolano, denuncia Colombia," *Voice of America*, Nov. 15, 2019.

Colombian peace talks that provided Cuba's large and aggressive intelligence services a large pool of potential recruits among the numerous negotiators and their staffers sent there by Colombia and Norway.

The peace agreement was also used to establish a Cuban presence in critical areas of Colombia. In 2016, Cuban soldiers arrived in the designated concentration areas for around 7,000 FARC members and their associates who agreed to lay down their arms, 26 points around the country with no presence of state forces. A growing number of Cuban civilians were also there reportedly indoctrinating the population as well as in peasant reserves.⁷⁹ In 2017, it was reported that the Cubans were imparting “a pedagogical and political practice to advocate for emancipation, social justice, and equity” and instructing Colombians in “awareness that agroecology is a weapon of struggle against hegemony and capitalism.”⁸⁰

Cuba's long-term influence in Colombia was further guaranteed by providing 1,000 scholarships (200 annually over five years) for Colombians, mostly of the demobilized FARC, to study medicine at Cuba's Latin American School of Medicine, ELAM.⁸¹ The Cuban regime has long used this “health collaboration” scheme to gain loyal adepts to the revolution and allow its intelligence services to recruit select candidates who will return home to attain positions in their governments or their state's administrative structure and help further Cuban objectives.



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⁷⁹ Isabel Cuervo, “Cubanos están adoctrinando en Colombia,” *Martinoticas*, Nov. 24, 2017.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* (Translated from Spanish.)

⁸¹ Edilma Prada Céspedes, “Gobierno colombiano 1.000 becas para estudiar Medicina,” Bogotá, *Diario de Cuba*, Mar. 16, 2017; “La Habana recibe a los 100 primeros miembros de las FARC que estudiarán medicina en la Isla,” Havana, *Diario de Cuba*, Aug. 28, 2017.

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