



The Americas Report

From the Menges Hemispheric Security Project

Center for Security Policy

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Argentina



Bolivia



Brazil



Canada



Chile



Colombia



Costa Rica



Cuba



Dominican Republic



Ecuador



El Salvador



Guatemala



Haiti



Honduras



Mexico

*The Americas Report is the continuation of the work of **Dr. Constantine C. Menges'** original Americas Report. For almost two years that report chronicled the efforts of the Castro-Chavez axis and their allies in their efforts to undermine the new spirit of democracy and freedom in Latin America, in favor of autocratic forms of regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. The report also monitors events in the area as they effect regional and US security in this era characterized by the emergence of terrorist groups of global reach seeking international influence. The current Americas Report and the Menges Hemispheric Security Project of which it is a part will continue to support genuine democracy, free trade and the fostering of strong inter-American relationships as well as exposing growing tyrannies in the area.*

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For any questions, comments, or those interested in receiving this report or seeking to have their email removed from our list please contact **Nicole Ferrand** at: themengesproject@centerforsecuritypolicy.org or themengesproject@gmail.com. If you have news stories that you think might be useful for future editions of this report please send them, with a link to the original website, to the same e-mail address. If you wish to contribute with an article, please send it to the same address, with your name and place of work or study.

Highlighted Story – [The US must be able to Identify and support forces of Democracy and geo-political stability in Latin America.](#)

By Luis Fleischman.*

Throughout the numerous articles written on the pages of the Americas Report, and in recent testimony given by the Center for Security Policy's Hemispheric Security Project, we stated our vision of the current Latin American problem.

To sum up, **Hugo Chavez is the leader of a new plan that goes beyond Venezuela. He advocates not merely socialism but also a totalitarian project. This totalitarian vision is not only aimed at Venezuela but also towards as many Latin American countries as possible.**



Nicaragua



Panama



Paraguay



Peru



The United States



Uruguay



Venezuela

In order to achieve this Chavez interferes in his neighbors internal politics and establishes direct connections with groups who share his goals. In order to accomplish this he has established alliances with violent groups that have the potential to destabilize a particular country's government. This need for violence leads him to **form alliances with regimes that have mastered the art of violence such as Cuba and Belarus and countries that know how to convert violence into systematic terrorism like Iran.**

Latin America is already experiencing a situation of violence and international instability as the recent confrontation between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela has shown. Recent meetings sponsored by the Organization of American States in Santo Domingo were aimed at reconciling the parties and as such attempted to be evenhanded. However, it is abundantly clear that it is Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa who should be held responsible for supporting and enabling an ominous anti-Colombian terrorist organization (the FARC). However, **Correa would not have dared to host terrorists in his country if it weren't for the previously mentioned regional tactics of Hugo Chavez.**

Therefore, in the name of regional peace in Latin America and geo-political security, **it is crucial that the United States government as well as other governments in the Western Hemisphere help those who can be effective in counterbalancing these developments.** Venezuela is the epicenter of the Latin America earthquake and as long as Chavez is in power these threats will continue.

We depart from the assumption that if the Chavez regime collapses the revolutionary intensity and potential international escalation in the region will significantly decline. **All those who believe that Chavez's regime is facing major economic problems which he will not be able to survive forget that a regime can survive even under economic hardship.** It is enough to look at what Fidel Castro has done for the last five decades, what the Soviet Union did for seven and a half decades and what the Iranians have done for three. Paraphrasing writer Isaac Bashevis Singer we can say "Between dying and dead there is long leg."

Illusions and hopes will not bring us results but **taking a good look at the forces operating in Venezuela today may provide a better understanding of the situation and help us act accordingly.** In Venezuela, like in many countries in Latin America, the natural vehicles of political debate and opposition-the political parties- have become weak as a result of ongoing corruption, disconnection from the public, aloofness from sources of societal support, and lack of social and political vision. The virtual collapse (but not total disappearance) of the two traditional parties, the AD and COPEI, that ruled Venezuela for forty years gave way to a plethora of political parties, none of them capable of properly challenging Chavez. Moreover, **attempts at unity between the parties to form a single front against Chavez have often ended in disunity and collapse of coalitions.**

Non-political elements such as business, workers and oil associations have played a role in opposing Chavez, particularly before the recall referendum of August 2004. These groups comprised the most active opposition by organizing strikes and massive protests against the government. Newly mobilized groups that collected signatures during the recall referendum and other groups who demanded electoral transparency joined them.

However, these groups as well as the political parties lost importance as they experienced major defeats during the 2004 recall referendum, parliamentary elections in 2005 (where the political parties' abstention determined the virtual elimination of a real opposition in parliament) and the Presidential elections in 2006. These events strengthened Chavez's position and left behind a demoralized and passive opposition that waited for another round of elections to win. However, it was **General Raul Isaias Baduel** who turned events around in Venezuela when he publicly denounced the **December 2, 2007 Referendum on Constitutional Reform as an attempt by Chavez to carry a coup d'etat and perpetuate himself in power.** During the campaign Baduel loudly urged Venezuelans to vote against the reform. The referendum ended in a major defeat for Hugo Chavez.



General Raul Isaias Baduel turned events around in Venezuela when he publicly denounced the December 2, 2007 Referendum on Constitutional Reform as an attempt by Chavez to carry a coup d'etat and perpetuate himself in power. Source: Diario Critico.

The importance of Baduel's intervention was manifold. First, he denounced the Chavez reform as an attempt to take power away from the people and he did it publicly. The fact that Baduel was a military man, a former Chavez chief of the Venezuelan army and a former defense minister sent a message to the people of Venezuela that Chavez's power system was being challenged from within. Consequently, Venezuelans lost fear and defeated an otherwise self-confident Chavez. By the same token, **Baduel's actions motivated disenchanted Chavistas to join forces against their former master.** Such action was followed by other actions. During the hostage crisis in Colombia last February when the Colombian narco-guerilla group known as the FARC negotiated, with Chavez mediation, the release of Colombian hostages, **Baduel publicly criticized the President's complicity with the FARC.**

Following Baduel's statement, **the army, a source of silent support for Chavez, expressed uneasiness with the Venezuelan leader's association with the FARC** sending a clear signal to Chavez. At the same time, Baduel also urged Colombian President, Alvaro Uribe to dismiss Chavez's threats against Colombia. Early in March after a Colombian incursion in Ecuador killed a senior FARC leader, Chavez threatened to unleash war. **Baduel then courageously called on the Venezuelan army not to fight and defended Colombia, in open defiance of Hugo Chavez.** In that instance, the General also openly accused Chavez of inventing an external enemy to encourage nationalistic feelings in order to hide the internal failures of the Bolivarian regime.

General Baduel has demonstrated his effectiveness by having challenged Chavez's unquestionable authority and arrogant behavior. **He was effective because he aborted Chavez's totalitarian project.** Totalitarians want to show omnipotence. Baduel took that away from Chavez after the December 2nd election. **Despite these brave actions, General Baduel's motives are now being questioned.** Is General Baduel an opportunist looking for recognition and personal gain? Or is he for real? Should we trust him? Should the Venezuelan people trust him? If yes, what role could he play in Venezuelan politics? Is he another military man that will depose a civilian and impose a bloody regime? Or can he become a leader of a civilian political party and defeat Chavez via constitutional means?

Let us take a look at the man. **One day before the constitutional referendum he published an article in the New York Times where he expressed his opposition to those reforms.** He opposes a socialist state because "it has absolute control over the people it governs". In this well-written article Baduel criticized the traditional political parties for seeing "the Venezuelan people as clients who can be bought off" and for using oil money to dispense "favors, subsidies and alms". Under Chavez, Baduel believes the situation is even worse because of "exorbitant public expenditures, the recurrence of government deficits even at times of record-high oil prices, the extreme vulnerability of foreign investments, exceedingly high import tariffs, and our increased domestic consumption of fuel at laughably low prices". **Baduel predicts that the economy will crash** and along with it, **Chavez's neo-populist policies.** He suggests that a strong office of the President under the leadership of Chavez can only accelerate this national deterioration.¹

Thus, **Baduel has tried to bring Venezuelans into a debate on national issues of importance such as oil policy and how to use oil resources and oil income.** Baduel, as a military man has made declarations that are atypical of traditional Latin American generals. Curiously enough, Baduel is the man known for having intervened to save the Chavez's regime during a coup d'etat against him in April, 2002. This has legitimately raised some eyebrows. However, Baduel in a declaration a month later explained that he was committed to the constitutional order and the rule of law. This may explain Baduel's opposition to the coup d'etat².

These views were ratified later in 2006 in a different context. In reaction to Chavez's assertion that the Venezuelan armed forces as well as the national oil company were "red" (communist), **Baduel pointed out that the "constitution establishes that the armed forces are strictly professional.... (Therefore) I understand that there should not be any relation between political and military power".**³ In April, 2007 Baduel again reaffirmed this principle⁴. In July, 2007 at the time of his retirement as Secretary of Defense he warned that socialism cannot be part of a marxist orthodoxy but has to be deeply democratic and respectful of the division of powers.⁵ Judging by his words and actions, Baduel does not fit the profile of an opportunist. **Opportunists abound in the world of**

¹ Raul Baduel "Why I Parted Ways with Chavez", New York Times, December 1, 2007

² Marianella Rodriguez "General Raul Baduel Exige un Civil en el Despacho de la Defensa", El Universal, May 4, 2002

³ "La Fuerza Armada Es Esencialmente Profesional", El Universal, November 8, 2006

⁴ El Universal, April 16, 2007

⁵ El Nacional, July 19, 2007

politics but **Baduel has defended a number of principles that typical opportunists cannot even articulate.** Baduel is still committed to socialism (which explains his previous association with Chavez) but at the same time has issued a convincing affirmation of democracy and constitutionalism as a supreme principle of governance. **He has criticized Chavez in a timely manner on very specific points without the typical generalization of a demagogue.** He criticized the Chavez oil policies, his aggression against Colombia, and his support for the FARC. He not only helped to bring about Chavez's defeat in the December 2nd Referendum but has made his influence felt among army officers who rejected Chavez's complicity with the FARC and his anti-Colombian aggression.

Baduel seems to be, by virtue of his actions, the natural leader of a peaceful and democratic social movement whose de-facto goal seems to be to put an end to Chavez's irresponsible and aggressive domestic and international practices. He seems to have the potential to seriously weaken the current Bolivarian Project. If Baduel's voice continues to be heard it may bring about another Chavez defeat in the October, 2008 regional and municipal elections. There are a number of candidates from opposition parties that will be running. This does not mean that there is no room for other parties in a post-Chavez era but Baduel may well be the man most capable of triggering the transition. For his actions Baduel has taken a big risk. His own life is at the mercy of the unscrupulous Chavez' regime which may try to harm him.

In relation to US policy, we can say that every decision involves a risk. Not making a decision also involves a risk. **In considering our policy options, the United States should provide encouragement and support to people like General Baduel.**

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News Stories –The following are a summary of several news stories found in different media outlets. To access the information, we have provided the hyperlink below each news story.

[Colombia: Uribe has proof that Ecuadorian killed in raid was FARC member – Infobae.](#)

Ecuador sought the aid of the Organization of American States in condemning the killing of an Ecuadorian citizen in a cross-border military raid on a Colombian guerrilla camp that has strained relations between the Andean neighbors. **Attorney General Alfredo Alvear announced earlier in the day that fingerprint tests confirmed that a body, brought from the jungle camp to Bogota along with slain rebel leader Raul Reyes, belonged to Franklin Aisalla.** Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos said he hoped Aisalla's death would not harm relations, despite a weekend threat by Ecuador's leftist President Rafael Correa to launch a new "diplomatic struggle" against Colombia if Aisalla's identity was confirmed. **Santos told Bogota's Caracol radio that he did not understand "why a country like Ecuador would cause problems over the death of someone with links to the FARC,"** as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia is known. "Anyone who is in a terrorist camp is taking a very high risk, because it's a legitimate military target," he said in the interview.



Colombian President Alvaro Uribe. Source: El Nuevo Herald.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/371425-100891-0-Uribe-tiene-pruebas-que-ecuatoriano-era-FARC>

Colombia says FARC continues attacks from Ecuador – Infobae.

FARC members hiding in Ecuador launched explosives at Colombian anti-cocaine workers across the border, Colombia's government said on Wednesday. The terrorists shot makeshift bombs made from cooking gas cylinders at coca eradicators last week as they pulled up the illicit plants on Colombian territory, Foreign Minister Fernando Araújo said. “No government can stand by with its arms crossed while its citizens are being attacked from the other side of the border,” Araújo said. “We ask the Ecuadorian authorities to please help us. We should each coordinate security in our own territory.” No one was killed in the incident but Colombia complains that neighbors Ecuador and Venezuela do not do enough to help combat the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, which funds its four-decade-old insurgency with the cocaine trade and has set up camps inside Ecuadorian territory.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/371492-100891-0-Denuncian-ataques-las-FARC-Ecuador>

Chávez: Colombian Santos is “a minister for war” – El Universal.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez said Colombian Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos is “a minister for war.” “I want to believe that (Colombian President Álvaro) Uribe’s doctrine is not the same as Santos’; that minister is as minister for war. (Santos) thinks we are his enemies,” said Chávez in a press conference held in presidential palace of Miraflores. “The Colombian Defense minister, as if nothing had happened at the OAS and the Rio Summit, just said yesterday (Sunday, March 23) that Colombia carried out a lawful warfare against Ecuador, and he added that they are even ready to go to anyplace to look for terrorists in a similar operation,” said Chávez as quoted by state news agency ABN. “The main culprit is the Colombian Government; I am not talking only about Uribe, but other factors as well, such as the hand of the Empire. Every conflict has a main source: the US Empire,” added Chávez.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/25/en_pol_art_chavez:-santos-is-a_25A1459281.shtml

London court: Pdvsas failed to meet agreements with Exxon Mobil – El Universal.

In a 163-item ruling, Paul Walker, the judge hearing the case, rebutted virtually all of the allegations US oil major Exxon Mobil filed with the England and Wales High Court to extend an injunction freezing up to USD 12 billion in assets of Venezuelan state-run oil corporation Pdvsas. However, and **in the light of two arbitrations expected to begin in the next few months to determine the compensation Pdvsas should pay Exxon Mobil following expropriation of heavy crude oil Cerro Negro project, Walker found that the US company has enough grounds to argue that some of the terms of the strategic partnership Exxon Mobil and Pdvsas entered into -which was ratified by the extinct Venezuelan Congress- were breached.** “I am persuaded that Exxon Mobil has a case sufficiently arguable,” said the judge in connection with that aspect. Nevertheless, he noticed that “this does not involve the assumption that the case is worth USD 12 billion.” Based on Exxon Mobil’s allegations, even though Pdvsas

conceded it expropriated the US oil major's stake in Cerro Negro, the Venezuelan firm failed to meet its commitments in good faith, as "it failed to complete the steps provided for under Article 15 of the partnership agreement." In this sense, Pdysa allegedly failed to meet its obligation to advise Exxon Mobil that such expropriation amounted to "a discriminatory action" that had an adverse material effect.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/26/en_eco_art_london-court-pdysa_26A1460279.shtml

Chávez expects to improve relations with the US – *El Universal*.

Even though President Hugo Chávez Tuesday branded US Senator John McCain as a "warlord," he said he expects the relation between the United States and Venezuela enters a higher level. "We plan to improve and take the relation with the United States Government to a higher level," said Chávez. The Venezuelan head of State is hoping to establish a relation at least similar to the one existing with former US President Bill Clinton, because "there were dialogue and respect." On the contrary, Chávez said that the current US President, George W. Bush, has destroyed relations between his country and Latin America. "The discredit of a US President has never been so widespread as today," he added.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/25/en_pol_art_chavez-expects-to-im_25A1458919.shtml

Venezuelan lawmakers investigate Chavez brothers for acquiring ranches – *Infobae*.

Venezuela's National Assembly opened an investigation Wednesday into accusations that two of President Hugo Chavez's brothers acquired 17 ranches in recent years, if true, a potential stain on the image of Chavez's socialist movement. Lawmaker Wilmer Azuaje arrived at the assembly to present documents containing his allegations before the congressional audit commission in a closed-door session. Azuaje, of the president's socialist party, told the Venezuelan television channel Globovision on Tuesday that he has documents indicating Chavez's brothers Argenis and Narciso acquired 17 ranches through front men who carried out the transactions on their behalf. The legislator said the haciendas are all located in Chavez's home state of Barinas, where the president's father is the elected governor.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/371501-100891-0-El-congreso-Venezuela-investigará-hermanos-del-presidente-Hugo-Chávez>

Exports to Colombia still frozen, say Venezuelan exporters – *El Universal*.

Although the presidents of Colombia and Venezuela agreed to take relations between both countries back to normal after the Rio Summit, the Venezuelan Exporters' Association (AVEX) reported that local authorities are preventing exports to Colombia. Exports to Colombia have been frozen since last March 4, when the Ministry of Light Industries and Trade (Milco) issued a ban, amidst a diplomatic conflict that involved both countries and Ecuador. "We are deeply concerned about this because at the (air, sea and land) customs there are around 4,000 tons of Venezuelan products valued at USD 42 million that can not be exported," said Francisco Mendoza, AVEX chair. Mendoza said he does not understand why the government, which has allowed imports from Colombia to be resumed, has not cleared Venezuelan exports to Colombia, which include razor blades, auto parts, plastics, and glass.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/25/en_eco_art_exports-to-colombia_25A1457801.shtml

Venezuela's Chavez wary of McCain says he seems 'man of war' – *IHT*.

President Hugo Chavez said Tuesday he hopes the next U.S. president will be open to improving relations with Venezuela, but he warned that Republican contender John McCain seems to be a "man of war" like President Bush. Chavez, whose country is the United States' fourth-largest oil supplier, said Tuesday that McCain's remarks during the campaign don't bode well for easing tensions. "McCain seems to be a man of war too. He said yesterday that Bush has been very tolerant with Chavez. He's gone to Iraq to offer more weapons and more dollars — and more war," said Chavez, who regularly calls Bush the devil. "God save us — and beyond God, may the people of the United States save us from greater

madness.” McCain spokesman Brian Rogers dismissed Chavez’s remarks. “We weren’t expecting his endorsement. The attacks of a thug and dictator are a badge of honor for John McCain,” Rogers said.



John McCain disliked by Hugo Chavez. Source: Razon.

<http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/03/26/news/Venezuela-US.php>

Peru Says Chavez Funding Overthrow Their Government – *El Diario Exterior.*

Peruvian President Alan Garcia says the Venezuelan leader may be funding militants and anti-poverty centers that preach populist revolution. In recent weeks, Peruvian police have arrested nine people the government alleges are militants bankrolled by Venezuela. And the head of a Congressional investigatory committee accused Venezuela of supplying funds to outreach centers he says agitate against the government. President Alan Garcia supports the ongoing investigation into the centers. Venezuela and allies Bolivia and Ecuador “want to destabilize Peru so that our country adheres to their type of thinking, so that Peru fails,” said the government’s lead anti-terrorism prosecutor, Julio Galindo. Venezuela vehemently denies the allegations, and denies funding Peruvian militants or the anti-poverty centers. Venezuela’s ambassador in Peru, Armando Laguna, said the government should “ask me to leave Peru” if it finds proof. The accusations come in the context of a regional showdown over alleged Venezuelan and Ecuadorian attempts to destabilize Colombia’s U.S.-backed government. Colombian authorities claim a seized rebel laptop indicates that Venezuela planned to give \$300 million to rebels fighting to topple it. The opposition in Nicaragua, Argentina and Bolivia have accused Chavez of funneling funds to political pals. Among the alleged recipients is Ollanta Humala, the populist Garcia narrowly defeated in 2006. Venezuela has denied the charges.



Peruvian President Alan García. Source: Casa America.

<http://www.eldiarioexterior.com/noticia.asp?idarticulo=19569>

Peru steps up border patrol with Colombia – *Living in Peru.*

Peruvian Defense Minister Antero Flores Araoz said Monday the Peruvian army is patrolling its border with Colombia to prevent Colombia’s FARC from crossing over. “Peru is taking action in the Putumayo area to prevent the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) from entering, using aircraft, Putumayo River patrols and infantry patrols,” he said. He added that he had full knowledge that the FARC dips in and out of Peru in so-called

“pushes” designed to work around Plan Colombia. Araoz described the border as porous, with civilians regularly crossing from one side to the other, children from one nation go to school in another, and indigenous people using barter for trade rather than national currencies. Peru and Colombia share a 1,600-km border.



Peruvian Defense Minister Antero Flores Araoz. Source: RPP.

<http://www.livinginperu.com/news-6014-peru-peru-morning-news-roundup-tuesday-march-25>

Peru government slams independence moves by Puno – Peru 21.

The Peruvian government on Monday rejected statements by the governor of its Puno province that the region is on its way to becoming independent from the central government. “Peru is a united state, as signaled in its republican tradition and its constant constitutional tradition,” said Jorge del Castillo, president of Peru’s Council of Ministers. “If (Puno province governor Hernan) Fuentes, who by the way does not even have 5-percent approval rates in Puno, is really trying to create a separate state, then that is a seditious attitude,” he said. Castillo said that sedition was the best explanation for Puno’s decision to pass a rule in favor of coca-leaf production, even though 95 percent of the crop, some 1,500 hectares, is used to make illegal cocaine, while the remaining 5 percent is bought by state company Enaco. Fuentes failed to approve new rules for hiring teachers, said Castillo, describing Fuentes as having “a lamentable ideological dependence on foreign powers.” Regional leaders from 24 other jurisdictions in the country had rejected Fuentes’s independence moves, he added. Yehude Simons, coordinator for the regions and leader of the Lambayeque region, described Fuentes’s statements as damaging to the state-backed regionalization process.

<http://www.peru21.com/p21online/Html/2008-03-26/onp2portada0871370.html>

Correa warns Ecuador-Colombia tension could worsen – El Diario Exterior.

Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa warned Saturday that diplomatic tension with Colombia could rise again if Colombia’s cross-border attack on a rebel camp inside Ecuador on March 1 proves to have killed an Ecuadorian. “It would be extremely grave if it is proven that an Ecuadorian died,” Correa said on a radio program. “We will not let this murder go unpunished.” Ecuador broke off diplomatic ties with Colombia after Colombian troops entered the Ecuadorian territory to attack guerillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), calling the raid a violation of its territorial sovereignty.

<http://www.eldiarioexterior.com/noticia.asp?idarticulo=19563>

Argentina’s Fernandez Faces Protests and food Shortages – El Diario Exterior.

Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner is confronting the biggest anti-government protests in more than six years as farmers vowed to extend a strike and their supporters took to the streets in Buenos Aires. Cabinet Chief Alberto Fernandez questioned the demonstrators motives after thousands of people banging on pots and pans massed in front of the presidential palace until early this morning. Protests

extended across the country, from the coastal town of Mar del Plata to the northern city of Tucuman. “The leaders of the farming groups are the ones provoking this situation,” the cabinet chief said. “There are groups taking advantage of this situation for political purposes.” Farmers, whose roadblocks are preventing trucks from entering ports and warehouses, want the government to roll back export taxes on soybeans and sunflower seeds that were raised to 44 percent from 35 percent on March 11. **Luis D’Elía, a former official in Nestor Kirchner’s s government, accused the protesters of attempting a “coup d’etat.”** Television images showed him punching a protester in the face last night as he led government supporters past the obelisk. “Those with the money, the farmers, should pay the taxes, which are still too low and should be 60 percent,” D’Elía said last night.



Argentina’s First Lady. Source: Javno.

<http://www.eldiarioexterior.com/noticia.asp?idarticulo=19554>

[IAPA to assess press freedom in Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia – *El Universal*.](#)

The Inter-American Press Association (IAPA) next March 28-30 is holding its half-yearly meeting in Caracas to assess both the breakthroughs and regressions of press freedom in the hemisphere, particularly in Cuba, Bolivia, and Venezuela, IAPA sources said. IAPA executive director Julio Muñoz told Efe that during the meeting in the Venezuelan capital city they are to voice concern about the situation facing the countries where the press media are under threats and “certain” attacks. “Obviously, we are going to delve into the situations facing each of the countries. Over the last few years, attention has focused on Cuba, where a number of reporters are in jail,” Muñoz stressed. Bolivia is also in the spotlight, as the country is going through “a very serious situation,” said Muñoz, between the government and the news media. In his view, in Bolivia the press is filing complaints with international bodies rejecting “the government aggressions in that country.” Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela will also be under close scrutiny by some 300 representatives of the news media in the hemisphere who are expected to attend the meeting. Venezuela was at the center of the IAPA Annual Meeting held in Miami last October, after the shutdown of private television station Radio Caracas Televisión. The oldest TV channel in Venezuela -which operated for 53 years- stopped broadcasts last May 27 at midnight, after the Venezuelan government decided not to renew the relevant license for broadcasting on open signal. The IAPA directors hope this topic does not top the agenda of the Caracas half-yearly meeting to be held this week.

http://english.eluniversal.com/2008/03/25/en_pol_art_iapa-to-assess-press_25A1456601.shtml

[Bomb blast rips through Chilean bank building, no one hurt – *Infobae*.](#)

An explosive device exploded on Tuesday in a branch of the Credit and Investment Bank in Chile’s capital of Santiago, severely damaging the first floor of

the building but injuring no one, Chile's Armed Police said. The explosion which occurred at 1 a.m. local time (0400 GMT) also smashed windows in buildings close to the branch. "We have witnesses that say one or two dark vehicles carried the attackers," said Ronald Casanueva, an armed police commander. "A significant amount of damage has occurred," said Juan Alarcon, from the eighth Fire Brigade Company. Chilean radio said a self-described anarchist group had called to claim responsibility for the attack. Junior Interior Minister Felipe Harboe said Tuesday's attack resembled previous bank attacks. "It is a black powder bomb like those seen in previous occasions, when bank windows were smashed," Harboe said. "Investigators are checking closed circuit television cameras, witness testimony, neighbors and background information to clarify who is involved," he added.

<http://www.infobae.com/contenidos/371400-100556-0-Otra-bomba-explota-un-banco-Chile>

Venezuela's Chavez Visits Brazil – VOA News.

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has begun a visit to Brazil for talks with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva on energy cooperation and regional issues. President Chavez arrived in the northern city of Recife Wednesday to meet with the Brazilian leader and tour the construction site of a refinery that, once completed, is expected to process 200,000 barrels of oil daily. Officials have said the project will involve Brazil's state-run Petrobras oil company and Venezuela's state-run Petroleos de Venezuela, PDVSA. Separately, the presidents were expected to discuss Venezuela's pending membership in the South American trade bloc, Mercosur, which groups Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Mercosur accounts for \$1 trillion in annual economic activity and includes 250 million people.



Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez, right, with Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, during a visit to a refinery under construction in Recife, Brazil, 26 Mar 2008. Source: VOA News.

<http://www.voanews.com/english/2008-03-26-voa72.cfm>

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