



(U) Venezuela's President Chavez: Castro's Ideological Successor

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Venezuelan leadership an intelligence target (S//REL)

(S//REL) Over the past few weeks the Bush Administration has identified Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez as a threat to democracy in the region in general and a threat to U.S. interests in particular. Chavez is a throwback to the Cold War Era; he is an ardent admirer and supporter of Cold War dinosaur Fidel Castro, whom Chavez views as his mentor.

(S//REL) Following in his mentor's footsteps, Chavez is virulently anti-U.S. and is actively seeking to end the oil relationship between the two countries, and to pursue any course of action he believes will have a negative impact on the United States. The Administration has tasked the Intelligence Community with improving our capabilities vis-à-vis Venezuela to enhance policymakers' understanding of the Chavez regime's plans and intentions so that policymakers can develop a means for countering them.

(S) Having centralized control over the government and military and weakened opposition groups to the point that they are incapable of offering a viable alternative to his regime, Chavez is focusing his efforts on exporting his Bolivarian Revolution** to neighboring countries, casting the United States in the role of imperial exploiter of Latin America and seeking to create regional trade and security blocs that would exclude the United States.

(S) Other democratic nations in Latin America are concerned that his efforts to develop and strengthen ties to insurgent and populist groups in the region could lead to civil unrest and that his anti-free market policies could impact negatively on their economies. Chavez also is reaching out to countries of enduring concern to the United States, particularly China, Iran, and Russia, to develop ties and further cooperation as another means of pursuing his anti-U.S. strategy.

(S) In addition to threatening democratic institutions in the region, Chavez is working to limit Venezuela's dependency on the United States to purchase Venezuelan oil. The high sulphur content of the oil requires specialized processing and most of the refineries capable of handling this crude are in the United States. Although there is an element of the impractical in Chavez' desire to reduce oil deliveries to the United States, since Venezuela is the fourth largest supplier of oil to the United States any threat to cut off that supply is one that needs to be taken seriously.

(S//SI//REL) From a SIGINT perspective, Venezuela poses a particularly difficult challenge. With Castro as his mentor, Chavez has learned the importance of communications security and has made sure that his subordinates understand this as well. NSA, in

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conjunction with its collection partners in the Intelligence Community, is working to improve our capabilities in the region through a series of surveys and initiatives designed to enhance our collection on a range of important issues related to Venezuela.

** (U) Notes:

Chavez' "Bolivarian Revolution" takes its name from 19th century Latin American hero Simon Bolivar, who led several Andean Ridge countries to achieve independence from Spain. The Chavez version, however, casts the United States as the "imperial aggressor."

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