



Hugo Chávez's Criminal Nuclear Network: A Grave and Growing Threat

By Roger F. Noriega

Hugo Chávez's criminal activities, long the bane of his neighbors in the Americas, have now extended to Iran, where he is aiding that regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons. The U.S. policy of averting our eyes so as not to give him the attention he craves must change. The Obama administration needs to strengthen ties with the friends in the region, bring Chávez's partnerships with Iran to the attention of the United Nations (UN), and engage the Venezuelan people to confront the threat Chávez poses.

The dramatic showdown between Western nations and Iran over the disclosure of a clandestine nuclear facility run by the radical Iranian regime stirs faint hopes the United States may be prepared to get tough with other rogues threatening U.S. security. One example is Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. Last month sources disclosed a Caracas–Tehran conspiracy to harvest uranium in Venezuela, setting off a series of clumsy cover stories and unconvincing denials that tend to confirm the worst fears about Chávez's intentions.¹

The uranium connection is only the tip of the iceberg, and the U.S. intelligence and defense community has known of these troubling operations for years. Venezuela's supporting role in Iran's nuclear program may finally force the United States and other countries to confront the grave and growing threat of Chávez's regime, and not a minute too soon. For the past decade, Chávez has provided financial, material, and political support to a global network of anti-U.S. regimes and criminal organizations—from the nuclear rogues in Iran to the narcoterrorists in

Colombia. By providing uranium and gasoline to Iran, cash and arms to guerrilla groups, logistical support and money laundering to drug traffickers from the Andes to Africa, and intelligence support to radical allies worldwide, Chávez is waging asymmetrical warfare using cocaine, criminality, and the nuclear wild card.

The First Step: Admitting We Have a Problem

Venezuelans were the first to underestimate Chávez; they ignored the violent coup d'état he

Key points in this *Outlook*:

- Hugo Chávez is developing a nuclear program for Venezuela while aiding Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons.
- The United States must confront the grave threat posed by Chávez.
- The Obama administration should strengthen ties with stalwart friends, redouble antidrug cooperation with Africa and Europe, and caution the Venezuelan people on the costs of Chávez's risky behavior.

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led in 1992 and his divisive revolutionary rhetoric. Then, international observers doubted his ability to pursue his global ambitions. However, Chávez has proven himself to be a determined, clever, and ruthless autocrat who has manipulated anti-U.S. sentiment to escape any real scrutiny for his blatantly destructive agenda.

Since taking power through democratic means in 1998, Chávez has held the diplomatic offensive and kept distracted or passive U.S. policymakers off balance as he forged alliances with like-minded regimes in the Americas and around the globe. Although President George W. Bush personally recognized the threat, his administration was unable (and in the final years, unwilling) to organize an effective response among wary partners in the region who were loath to provoke their irascible, wealthy neighbor or be seen doing Bush's bidding. Indeed, some prominent Latin countries have run interference for Chávez, urging Washington to ignore his antics while claiming that they held some sway over his behavior.

Once-powerful neighbors have been caught flat-footed as the man they once dismissed as a crude blowhard is wielding disproportionate influence in South America. Erstwhile leaders in the Americas have been reduced to bit players on Chávez's stage. For example, Chávez has managed to hijack the region's diplomacy; he has bullied the feckless officials who head the Organization of American States into ignoring the antidemocratic measures of his club of *caudillos* (strong men) in Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. With U.S. forbearance, he has rallied the region to defend the right of his Honduran puppet Manuel Zelaya to hotwire that nation's constitution so Zelaya could hold on to power. And, Latin American and African leaders were mere props at a late September conclave on Venezuela's Margarita Island as Chávez and his radical chum Muammar Qaddafi announced plans to forge stronger ties between Africa and Latin America.²

Today, the U.S. government and others in the region seem less able or willing than ever to confront Chávez as he leaps over red lines involving international crime and terrorism, Middle Eastern radicals, and the nuclear genie. The longer they wait, the deeper the tiger pit being dug by Chávez and his allies.

Abetting Iran

Venezuela's oil riches helped the country form its ties to the Middle East long before Chávez took power. But immediately upon taking office, Chávez used Venezuela's involvement in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting

Countries to fuel his anti-U.S. agenda by talking up the price of oil and cultivating close collaboration with dangerous radicals such as Saddam Hussein, Qaddafi, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In recent years, he has converted Venezuela into a platform for Iranian operations and diplomacy in the Western Hemisphere. Chávez has committed the Venezuelan state to helping Iran develop nuclear technology, obtain uranium, evade UN sanctions, smuggle arms and munitions, and carry out a host of other shadowy deals under the nose of the United States.

In September 2005, Chávez signaled his sympathies when Venezuela was the only member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency to vote against sanctioning Iran for its illegal uranium enrichment program. The following month, Chávez declared his intention to develop nuclear technology. Many regarded his implausible scheme as a move to provoke an overreaction from Washington. Instead, apparently counseled not to take the bait, Bush underreacted, saying "maybe it makes sense" for Venezuela to request help building a nuclear reactor.³ In the intervening years, Chávez has pressed forward on this dangerous turf. Last month, during his eighth visit to Iran, Chávez declared Venezuela a "strategic ally" with Iran;⁴ on September 11, in an interview with the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, he thanked Iran for expanding Venezuela's nuclear know-how.⁵

We know now that the two rogue states have been cooperating on nuclear technology for several years. On November 13, 2008, during five days of intense consultations in Caracas, the Venezuelan and Iranian governments further formalized their collaboration in a memorandum of understanding to "cooperate in the field of nuclear technology."⁶ Jesse Chacón, a *chavista* known for his ruthlessness and not his intellect, was appointed minister of science and technology to manage this politically sensitive task.

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Venezuela is now providing crucial raw material for Iran's renegade nuclear program. In the past several years, Venezuela watchers have heard of eyewitness accounts of Iranians harvesting uranium clandestinely in a remote part of the province of Bolívar that has been declared off-limits to locals or overflights. When such reports began to appear in the media in March 2006, Chávez personally denounced them as "lies" and part of an "imperialist plan."⁷ Out of ignorance or worse, the U.S. State Department backed up Chávez's denials with obfuscation of its own, saying, "We are aware of reports of possible Iranian exploitation of Venezuelan uranium, but we see no commercial uranium activities in Venezuela."⁸

The facts are catching up with Chávez (and with the U.S. State Department): as part of a mineral survey in Guyana this year, U308 Corp, a Canadian uranium exploration company, recorded a substantial source of uranium in the Roraima Basin that straddles the border between Guyana and Bolívar.⁹ The area is said to be comparable in area, age, and composition to the world's largest uranium deposits in the Athabasca Basin in the northern part of Canada's Saskatchewan province. Iranian companies and others with Middle Eastern backgrounds now operate mines, a "tractor factory," and a cement plant in or near Bolivar; at least two of these facilities have their own ports on the navigable Orinoco River through which uranium and other contraband can be smuggled to the Atlantic.

The VenIran "tractor factory" in Bolivar attracted international scrutiny when Turkish customs inspectors intercepted twenty-two containers bound for the Venezuelan facility on December 28, 2008. Labeled "tractor parts," the containers instead carried an "explosives lab" and nitrate and sulfite chemicals that could be used to manufacture explosives.¹⁰ Asked to explain this shipment, an Iranian embassy official in Ankara issued a rather unconvincing statement that the cargo was "nothing important."¹¹

Late last month, just as Iran was being forced to admit to a previously undisclosed nuclear fuel facility in Qom, reliable reports again emerged that Venezuela is supplying Iran with uranium. (One account has British authorities confronting Chávez personally with these reports on the margins of the UN General Assembly meetings in New

York and delivering a stern warning of the consequences of this irresponsible behavior.)¹²

Seeking to downplay these latest revelations of Iran's uranium mining, another *chavista* henchman, Minister of Mines Rodolfo Sanz, explained that Iran was simply conducting a survey of Venezuela's mineral wealth.¹³ Days later, however, Chacón issued a frantic denial of Sanz's explanation. On September 25, Chacón issued a third cover story that the uranium exploration was being conducted with Russia's support, but Russian officials destroyed that alibi when they said that any such exploration by them was "a long way off."¹⁴

The Chávez regime's clumsy denials have only confirmed the momentous reports that Venezuela is supplying uranium to Iran, making Venezuela complicit in these dangerous and illegal activities. Moreover, Chávez continues a massive military buildup, purchasing over \$4 billion in fighter aircraft, one hundred thousand rifles, and other materiel from

2004 to 2007 from Russia; he announced an additional \$2.2 billion in credits after a mid-September visit there. In addition to acquiring ninety-two T-72S tanks, this latest deal with Russia includes missiles with a range of up to 250 miles as well as help to develop a "peaceful nuclear program."¹⁵

While Venezuela's materiel support to Iran is serious enough, no one should dismiss the possibility that Chávez has the means and the motive to develop his own nuclear program that might threaten his immediate neighbors and the United States. "The secret accords between Chávez and Ahmadinejad constitute a true joint-venture to develop nuclear arms for the arsenals of both countries," postulates respected observer Carlos Alberto Montaner. "That is the only explanation of the continuous trips of Hugo Chávez. The Venezuelan objective is not only to sell uranium but to convert itself into a nuclear power."¹⁶

In addition to investments in industrial operations, Iran has created several financial institutions that can be used to channel money to and from the regime, aimed at circumventing UN sanctions. Iran has established a "binational investment and development fund" in Venezuela, opened Caracas branches of Saderat Bank, an Iranian commercial institution, and incorporated an "International Development Bank" that is wholly owned by Saderat. In addition, Iranian companies have

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established Venezuelan subsidiaries, which can serve as conduits for laundering money and evading sanctions.

Renowned Manhattan district attorney Robert Morgenthau denounced these financial ties in a September 8, 2009, speech in Washington. “A foothold into the Venezuelan banking system is a perfect ‘sanctions-busting’ method,” he said, explaining that Iran could use its correspondent relationships with Venezuelan institutions to launder funds through unwitting U.S. banks.¹⁷

In addition to helping Iran resist existing UN sanctions, Chávez’s decision to sell the pariah regime twenty thousand barrels of gasoline a day, announced during his September 6–7 visit there, will blunt the impact of one measure being considered to ratchet up pressure on Tehran.¹⁸ Iran depends on imports for 40 percent of its gasoline requirements; by agreeing to sell these supplies, Venezuela has thrown a lifeline to Ahmadinejad’s regime. Chávez cronies with ties to Middle Eastern radical groups (including Hezbollah) are in a position to use their key government and commercial posts to abet the activities of Iran and other dubious actors. Tarek Zaidan El Aissami Maddah, Chávez’s thuggish minister of interior and justice, is the scion of Syrian immigrants who were virulent defenders of Iraq’s Saddam Hussein and activists in Venezuela’s Baath party. Before becoming minister, El Aissami served as deputy director in the office responsible for border controls, passports, and national identity cards.¹⁹ Others include Tarek William Saab Halabi, governor of the province of Anzoategui; George Kabboul Abdelnour who heads Bariven, the purchasing arm of state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela, SA (PDVSA); Imaad Saab, Venezuela’s ambassador to Syria; Radwan Sabbagh, president of a mining company operating in the province of Orinoco; Aref Richany Jimenez, a brigadier general in the Venezuelan army who heads the military’s industrial company and is a director of PDVSA; Fadi Kabboul Abdelnour, PDVSA’s director of planning; the minister of interior’s sister, Amin Obayda El Aissami Maddah, an executive in PDVSA’s technology arm; Kamal Naim Naim, president of the Bolívar provincial assembly; and others.

Venezuela serves as a transportation hub for Iran in the Americas, evading U.S. enforcement efforts. For example,

a Boeing 747 operated by IranAir and an Airbus 340 of the Venezuelan carrier ConViasa each make weekly flights from Caracas to Tehran, with a stop in Damascus. Also, just one month after the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control designated the Islamic

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Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) a “specially designated national” subject to financial controls and sanctions, IRISL announced that it had established a direct container shipping route to Venezuela. The infamous “tractor factory,” VenIran, is one of IRISL’s clients.

The Caracas Connection: A Willing Player in the Deadly Drug Trade

Aiding and abetting drug trafficking is an ingenious means to pay for Chávez’s network of corrupt clients and to attack foes who have dared to defy him—including the governments of the United States, Colombia, and Mexico.

Venezuela sits astride the transit routes between the cocaine-producing region (principally Bolivia and Colombia) and the markets in North America and Europe. In light of Chávez’s long-standing ties to the narcoguerrilla groups waging a bloody war against Colombia (principally the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC), it is no surprise that Chávez has provided them safe haven and political support since he took power. High-profile FARC operatives have operated with virtual impunity in Venezuelan territory—even under state protection—for many years. When small arms from Venezuelan military inventories turned up in the hands of FARC guerrillas in 2003, it was never clear whether such support was a result of Chávez’s policy or merely corruption among his senior security officials.²⁰ The guerrillas and drug smugglers’ use of Venezuelan territory along the 2,200-mile border with Colombia had been considered episodic.

Just as the forty-year-old Colombian guerrilla movement morphed from an armed political movement into a drug cartel in the late 1990s, however, Venezuela’s alliance with the guerrillas evolved into clear and crucial complicity in smuggling narcotics and laundering illicit funds through Venezuelan financial institutions and state-run enterprises.

According to a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report that cited an Office of National Drug

Control Policy report, cocaine flows through Venezuela grew fourfold (from 60 to 260 metric tons) between 2004 and 2007.²¹ Not coincidentally, in July 2005, Chávez’s government expelled U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration operations and broke off antidrug cooperation. Beginning in late 2007, it began denying visas to U.S. antidrug personnel. In September 2005, for the first time, Bush formally declared that Venezuela had failed demonstrably to make effective antidrug efforts.

As Colombia has taken the upper hand in its conflict with the guerrillas in the last five to six years, FARC narcotics operations have been flushed out in the open—as has Venezuela’s complicity in these deadly criminal activities. The 2009 GAO report noted, “According to U.S. officials, Venezuelan government officials have provided material support, primarily to FARC, which has helped to sustain the Colombian insurgency and threaten security gains achieved in Colombia.” U.S. officials note that the Venezuelan government may have provided FARC with as much as \$300 million and arms.²² In July, Colombian authorities revealed that they had seized a FARC arms cache containing powerful Swedish-made antitank rockets that, according to the serial numbers, were originally sold to the Venezuelan military; Chávez’s regime denied providing the weapons to the guerrillas.²³

To evade increasingly effective Colombian enforcement to deny traffickers use of their air space, traffickers have resorted to new routes, including hundreds of clandestine flights carrying drugs from Bolivia to airstrips deep in Venezuelan territory. Drugs are then moved by air or sea to the Caribbean (principally the Dominican Republic and Haiti), Central America, and Mexico for transit northward.

On March 1, 2008, Colombian forces captured the “smoking gun” in the form of FARC computer records documenting the intimate role played by numerous Venezuelan officials in FARC smuggling activities. (These files also chronicle a virtual alliance between the communist guerrillas and Chávez predating his presidency.) The U.S. Treasury used that information to designate several senior government officials drug “kingpins.” Venezuelan intelligence officials Hugo Armando Carvajal Barrios and Henry de Jesus Rangel Silva, and the former justice and interior minister Ramón Emilio Rodríguez Chacín, who were named

kingpins, are among Chávez’s most trusted confidantes and operatives.²⁴

It is interesting that Chávez is promoting Latin America–Africa ties while his regime is playing a growing role in the drug trade, notably in the burgeoning trafficking from Venezuela to West Africa.²⁵ According to the State Department’s 2009 *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*:

While the majority of narcotics transiting Venezuela continue to be destined directly for the U.S. and Europe, a rapidly increasing percentage has started to flow towards western Africa and then onwards to Europe. . . . Narcotics destined for Europe are shipped directly to several countries in Europe,

especially Spain, or are shipped through the eastern coastal waters of Venezuela and the Caribbean to West Africa, notably Guinea and Guinea-Bissau. Clandestine flights departing Venezuela are another means of transporting cocaine shipments to West Africa.²⁶

In addition to transatlantic flights originating in Venezuela, fishing vessels are loaded with cocaine on or near

Margarita Island—the very site of Chávez’s recent Latin America–Africa summit—before making the journey across the Atlantic; the illicit cargo is either transferred to smaller fishing boats for transport to Europe or delivered to conspirators in several weak and corrupt African states.²⁷ Cocaine makes its way from Africa to the European market in private aircraft or on “mules” traveling either by land or on commercial flights.²⁸

The growing traffic to Europe via Africa—perhaps as much as half of the South American production—is a natural result of the fact that the product commands nearly six times the price in Europe as it does in the North American market (\$85,000 per kilo in Europe compared to \$15,000 per kilo in North America). The consequences are being felt already: witness the assassination of the president of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, by the military, which is suspected of ties to drug trafficking.²⁹ Moreover, security officials in the region fear that terrorists raising their profile in North Africa may seek to exploit this lucrative narcotics trade to support their own deadly operations. Of course, this deadly trade and all of its terrible consequences are a direct result of

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Chávez and his corrupt regime having converted Venezuelan territory into a platform for this illegal trafficking.

A Hostile, Rogue Regime

Years of averting attention from Chávez's activities has failed to temper his behavior or to garner multilateral support to contain the threat he poses. Indeed, by trying to appear unperturbed by Chávez's rhetoric, the United States and other neighbors have allowed him to seize the initiative and to establish a dangerous network that may already present an acute threat to stability and security in the Americas. By abetting drug trafficking, Chávez is able to undermine the security of the United States, support a proxy war against Colombia, destabilize Mexico, subvert regional democracy, and underwrite a network of corrupt collaborators. His alliance with Iran and his growing role in the transatlantic drug trade means that Chávez has "gone global" and crossed the nuclear red line.

While the United States cannot count on more than a handful of neighbors in the Americas to deal with this toxic threat, it should move immediately to cement economic and security ties with Colombia, which is the only regional actor motivated enough to confront the Chávez threat. The Obama administration's national security apparatus must elevate Venezuela on its radar screen and engage other responsible countries—perhaps in the Western Hemisphere, but definitely in Western Europe—in a sober assessment of the Chávez challenge. The United States should bring Venezuela's role in the Iranian nuclear program to the attention of the United Nations and warn Chávez of the terrible consequences of playing this very dangerous game. U.S. security and antidrug agencies should redouble cooperation with African and European governments that are willing to confront the growing drug routes emanating from Venezuela.

Finally, President Barack Obama should use his famous political capital to initiate a dialogue, not with Chávez but with the Venezuelan people, to make clear to them that their president has made their country an international pariah and is courting disaster for which they may pay a heavy price. In short, Hugo Chávez should—at long last—get the attention that he has been craving and so richly deserves.

Notes

1. Simon Romero, "Venezuela Says Iran Is Helping It Look for Uranium," *New York Times*, September 25, 2009.

2. "Gaddafi Proposed the Creation of a South Atlantic Military Alliance," MercoPress, September 28, 2008, available at <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/09/28/gaddafi-proposed-the-creation-of-a-south-atlantic-military-alliance> (accessed October 7, 2009). "For African countries, it's closer to visit our brothers in South America. We share the same interests of liberation and revolutionary ideals," said Qaddafi. "Colonialism humiliated us, insulted us and robbed us of our riches." Presidents Luis Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil, Cristina Fernandez of Argentina, Rafael Correa of Ecuador, Tabare Vasquez of Uruguay, Fernando Lugo of Paraguay, and Evo Morales of Bolivia attended the Margarita Summit at Chávez's invitation.

3. "Venezuela Seeks Nuclear Reactor from Argentina," WMD Insights, December 2005/January 2006, available at www.wmdinsights.info/11/LA1_VenezuelaSeeks.htm (accessed October 7, 2009).

4. "France Cautions Venezuela on 'Nuclear Links' with Iran," MercoPress, September 12, 2009, available at <http://en.mercopress.com/2009/09/12/france-cautions-venezuela-on-nuclear-links-with-iran> (accessed October 14, 2009).

5. "Ma Main Reste Tendue vers Obama et Son Peuple" [My Hand Is Extended toward Obama and His People], *Le Figaro*, September 9, 2009.

6. The author has obtained a copy of this agreement, which was signed on November 14, 2008, by Venezuelan vice minister of science and technology Gladys Maggi Villarroel and Iranian vice minister of science, research, and technology Ali Reza Jahangirian.

7. Kelly Hearn, "Iranian Pact with Venezuela Stokes Fears of Uranium Sales," *Washington Times*, March 13, 2006.

8. "Now they say I am sending uranium to make atomic bombs from here, from the Venezuelan Amazon to send directly to the Persian Gulf. . . . This shows they have no limit in their capacity to invent lies," said Chávez. See Kelly Hearn, "Iranian Pact with Venezuela Stokes Fears of Uranium Sales."

9. U308 Corp, "Why Roraima Basin," U308 Corp: The Uranium Discovery Company, available at www.u308corp.com/main1.aspx?id=10 (accessed October 7, 2009). See also "Canadian Mining Company Finds Uranium in Guyana," Export.by, August 6, 2009, available at www.export.by/en/?act=news&mode=view&id=10206 (accessed October 9, 2009).

10. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2008*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., report in compliance with Title 22 of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f (Washington, DC, April 2009), 105, available at www.state.gov/documents/organization/122599.pdf (accessed October 7, 2009).

11. Selcan Hacaoglu, "Turkey Holds Suspicious Iran-Venezuela Shipment," Associated Press, January 6, 2009.

12. The author attained this information from a Venezuelan source whose past reporting has been corroborated.

13. Simon Romero, "Venezuela Says Iran Is Helping It Look for Uranium."

14. Fabiola Sanchez, "Venezuela Exploring Uranium Deposits with Russia: Minister," Associated Press, September 27, 2009.

15. Daniel Cancel, "Chávez Agrees to \$2.2 Billion Russia Arms Credit Line," Bloomberg.com, September 14, 2009, available at www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aqDCi6BKbDVk (accessed October 7, 2009). The article says, "Venezuela will buy 92 T-72S tanks, Smerch missiles with a range of 90 kilometers (56 miles) and an S-300 Antey-2500 anti-aircraft defense system including radar and missiles with a range of 400 kilometers, Chávez said yesterday during his weekly program on state television, 'Alo Presidente.'"

16. Carlos Alberto Montaner, "Venezuela Nuclear," *El Nuevo Herald*, October 4, 2009 (translation mine).

17. Robert M. Morgenthau, "The Link between Iran and Venezuela: A Crisis in the Making?" (briefing, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, September 8, 2009).

18. See "Venezuela to Export Gasoline to Iran," CNN.com, September 7, 2009, available at www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/americas/09/07/iran.venezuela.gasoline/index.html (accessed October 7, 2009). The article says, "Iran produces 60 percent of its domestic gasoline demand and imports the remaining 40 percent, Press TV reported. Despite having large oil reserves, Iran lacks the refining capacity to cover all of its internal gasoline consumption. The leaders had said on Saturday that they plan to stand up against 'imperialist' foes—a reference to the United States and other nations opposing Iran's nuclear program—by cooperating on a range of issues, including nuclear power."

19. Phil Gunson, "Chávez Appoints Radical to Head Venezuelan Passport Agency," *Miami Herald*, November 28, 2003.

20. Linda Robinson, "Terror Close to Home," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 28, 2003.

21. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Report to Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate, Drug Control: U.S. Counternarcotics Cooperation with Venezuela Has Declined*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., GAO-09-806 (Washington, DC, July 2009): 5, available at www.gao.gov/new.items/d09806.pdf (accessed October 8, 2009).

22. *Ibid.*, 12–13.

23. Charles Kraul, "Colombia-Venezuela Relations Fall Further with Rocket Revelation," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 2009.

24. U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Targets Venezuelan Government Officials Supporting the FARC," news release, September 12, 2008.

25. A confidential UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) memorandum states that according to authorities, the majority of cocaine transported to Western Africa is done using fishing vessels. In addition to a significant level of maritime drug trafficking shipments, the UNODC report states that drugs also are moved by illicit small aircraft departing Venezuela headed in particular toward Africa. See UNODC, *World Drug Report 2009* (New York, United Nations, 2009).

26. U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 111th Cong., 1st sess., annual report prepared in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act (Washington, DC, March 2009), 620, available at www.state.gov/p/rls/nrcrpt/2009/index.htm (accessed October 8, 2009).

27. According to an interview between the author and senior officials of the National Police of Colombia and Ministry of National Defense in September 2009, illicit maritime drug shipments are loaded in a zone off the northeastern coast of South America and unloaded onto smaller vessels in several zones in the Atlantic Ocean due west of Morocco, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Sierra Leone. Significant numbers of illicit shipments originate from in and around Venezuela's Margarita Island due north of Venezuela and are transported to West Africa or the Canary Islands before being smuggled to the European market using fishing vessels and private aircraft, or via courier aboard commercial airline flights. Some shipments go to Brazil and Argentina, and some also proceed directly to Europe, principally through Portugal and Spain.

28. The UNODC *World Drug Report 2009* states, "In 2007, 83% of total seizures of cocaine in Africa were reported in West and Central Africa, 12% in Southern Africa, 5% in Northern Africa and 0.3% in Eastern Africa. . . . The main African transit countries in 2007 (in terms of cocaine seized in other African countries) were Cape Verde, Guinea, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana, Benin, Togo, Gambia and Nigeria, all in West Africa." See UNODC, *World Drug Report 2009*, 74.

29. Tristan McConnell, "President João Bernardo Vieira of Guinea-Bissau Assassinated by Army," *The Times* (London), March 3, 2009.