

years old. I also lost a horse that was very useful to me. Even now, once in a while, a mine that was placed years ago explodes, despite the fact that they have taken control of the town once again.

Here, we are all silent. No one talks anymore, we are barely able to greet each other. Anything we say can get us in trouble. All friendship here is ended. My wife cries every night thinking about the six children we will never see again. She takes out the images of the Virgin and of Jesus Christ that are hidden, and she prays. And to think that the guerrillas began here by winning over the people because they assaulted the Agrarian Bank, after attacking the police station. At that time, they stole all the money in the bank and burned the bank's files. Then we were all happy because they had taken a great debt from us, since the bank now didn't know who owed or who had paid. They also told us they would defend the farmer from the greed of the landowners and that they would defend the wages of the day-workers.

### Theology of liberation allies

The government never replaced the police. Later, they threw out the village priest. They wanted the priest to use his robes, and transport weapons in his camper. He refused, and had to flee. The guerrillas thought the priest was the competition, because here, you did whatever the priest said. For a while the [Catholic] Church remained shut down. They told us that religion is the opiate of the people and that it was good that the priest had left. These guys didn't like to see Christs or Virgins. We kept our images of Christ and the Virgin hidden. Although now, since there is a new priest who works with them, they half-tolerate it when the people pray. But I think that he is not a priest, but a guerrilla with black robes. The priest talks more to us about revolution than about Jesus Christ and God, and says that now the church has a theology of liberation.

So that is how we lost four children. Of another two, we don't know if they are alive or dead. Each time we ask the guerrillas for them, they answer us: "Old ones, don't worry about them; they are alive and fighting." We have only two children left, which is going to be very hard for them when we can no longer work and they will have to support us.

Coca production this year is going to end, it seems. After they jailed the chiefs of the Cali Cartel, no one comes here anymore to buy coca leaf, the laboratory which the guerrillas guarded has been abandoned, and the people have no interest in renewing that crop. Many are asking the guerrillas for permission to emigrate, and the coca crops that the police destroyed are no longer being replaced. The guerrillas are very worried, and it looks like now they are going to replace the coca income with kidnappings, but for a long time there has been no one to kidnap here. It also seems that they are directly exporting the cocaine to the United States, and are going to use the networks of the distribution bosses.

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## Venezuela

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# Chávez organizes SPF's military wing

by David Ramonet and Cynthia Rush

The nation of Venezuela is a flashpoint for a new "Chiapas" on the Ibero-American continent, in which the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200 (MBR-200), founded by Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez Frías (ret.), will play the leading role. In fact, the MBR-200 is a case study for how the São Paulo Forum is rereading itself continentally. In the December 1993 Presidential elections, the Forum's affiliated Radical Cause (Causa R) party failed miserably in its efforts to defeat Rafael Caldera. While Causa R maintains a facade of promoting the electoral route, the MBR-200 is actively pursuing the path of armed revolt.

All the elements for Venezuela's destabilization are present: There is a direct British role in the attempt to overthrow President Caldera, using the still-intact political apparatus of deposed former President Carlos Andrés Pérez, as well as organized financial warfare executed through house organs of British economic policy, including the *Wall Street Journal*, the London *Financial Times*, and the London *Economist*. The latter publication insultingly refers to Caldera as a "cockroach."

### Unique characteristics

An MBR-200 insurgency in Venezuela would not have the indigenist characteristics of Mexico's EZLN—there is no sizable Indian population of that sort in Venezuela. What makes Chávez's operation unique on the continent is, first, the involvement in his movement of military personnel, many of whom participated in the two coup attempts against the government of Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) in 1992. Second, during Chávez's December 1994 visit to Cuba, President Fidel Castro received the MBR-200 leader with State honors, and personally anointed him as the "commander, not only of the Venezuelan Army, but of the continental revolution which is under way."

Chávez's organizational stronghold in Venezuela is the region bordering Colombia, where the drug-linked ELN guerrillas operate right across the border. Chávez recognizes both the ELN and the FARC as "belligerent parties," has reportedly met with their leaders, and demands that the Caldera government negotiate with them directly.

Exemplary of how the MBR-200 operates, was its support in February 1995 for a civic strike in Apure, the Venezuelan state bordering Colombia's Arauca department, and Chávez's stronghold. This is an area which the Caldera government has selected for a 4 billion bolivar economic and infrastructure development package, including the building of a new city, Ciudad Sucre. The strike, which took place in the municipality of Guasdalito, specifically opposed the building of Ciudad Sucre.

Guasdalito is a region into which the ELN had previously made numerous incursions, and two of its members successfully infiltrated the strike organizing committee, although they were later arrested by local authorities on Feb. 26. In a provocative move, Chávez announced that he would personally travel to Guasdalito to support the strike, "despite death threats I have received."

Perhaps as a reprisal for the arrests of the two Colombian guerrillas in Guasdalito, between 150 and 200 members of an ELN force attacked the Venezuelan Naval outpost of Cararabo, on the Meta River, and murdered eight Venezuelan sailors, decapitating some of them, and mutilating their corpses. Four others were wounded and several reported missing. Although Chávez formally condemned the massacre, his reported meetings with guerrilla leaders, and his presence in the region agitating against the government, immediately raised questions as to his role.

Chávez's MBR-200 also stands out for its open ties to London. In a March 29, 1995 press conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Chávez bitterly complained that he had been planning to travel to London for a series of meetings, at the invitation of London's ambassador in Caracas, John Flynn, but that the Caldera government had intervened with the British government to sabotage his trip. The Caracas daily *El Nacional* also reported that Paul Webster Hare, the British embassy's counselor, had been seen dining with the "commander" at one of Caracas's ritzier restaurants.

Chávez is totally open about his plans to overthrow Caldera. On March 30, he warned that "anything could happen at any time. We are prepared to govern now, or whenever necessary. We're not planning a conspiracy, or anything like it, but faced with rebellion, we're prepared. I don't think Caldera will make it to the end of his term." For this reason, he is courted by leading members of Carlos Andrés Pérez's political machine, who want to see Caldera ousted and CAP's image restored, if not the man himself back in power.

Last May, Chávez traveled to Spain and France, sponsored by Gustavo Lamoine and Ignacio Quintana, the latter a financier friend of CAP who handled special accounts of government officials in Banco Latino, before it went bankrupt and was taken over by the State. According to journalist Rafael Poleo, Quintana had offered several bankers to help organize a broad-based coalition to overthrow Caldera, which would include Chávez and the MBR-200.

## MBR-200 takes aim at the armed forces

**Name of group:** Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR-200); MBR-civil.

**Headquarters and important centers:** Caracas; El Amparo, Apure, Venezuela.

**Founded:** July 24, 1983, on the 200th anniversary of the birth of Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator" of Venezuela and other South American countries.

**Locations of operations, areas active:** Nationally, the main base of operations is in the border states with Colombia, where the Colombian narco-guerrillas operate: Apure, Amazonas, and Táchira. The primary base of operations is in the border town of El Amparo, Apure state. Apure is considered the "Chiapas" of MBR-200.

Active primarily in neighborhoods, the barracks, and universities. They tend to attract extremist students who are not members of another legal party. Their primary bases of support are at the Venezuelan Central University; the Caballero Mejía Pedagogical University in Caracas; Carabobo University in Valencia; University of the Andes in Mérida; the Lisandro Alvarado Central University in Barquisimeto, in the state of Lara.

They have recently organized among poor peasants, in the border states of Apure and Táchira, and in Barinas, Lara, Guárico, and Aragua.

They reject any participation in the electoral process.

In the international arena, MBR-200 leader Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez Frías (ret.) has conducted several tours abroad since his release from jail in early 1994, under the excuse of organizing the "Second Amphictyonic Congress of Panama," with the participation of leftist retired military personnel from throughout the continent. He has visited Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Spain, and France.

**Major terrorist actions:** Its first public action took place on Feb. 4, 1992, at the head of the failed military rebellion against then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Chávez was captured and jailed, together with other leaders of the uprising.

March 1, 1992: Lt. Raúl Alvarez Bracamontes stole a cache of weapons from a military installation, to deliver to clandestine members of MBR-200. According to Bracamontes, Chávez gave the weapons to Pablo Medina, leader of the Radical Cause (Causa R) party, to distribute among civilians.

Nov. 27, 1992: A group of active military members of MBR-200 participated in a second military uprising against Pérez, but with the intention of sabotaging it and simultaneously releasing Chávez from the Yare prison.

Feb. 26, 1995: The Colombian ELN narco-guerrillas at-