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# VOICE OF REVOLUTION

Publication of the U.S. Marxist-Leninist Organization

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**Obama at West Point : 1-9**



**U.S. Out of Africa : 10-17**



**Hands Off Venezuela : 18-23**

## OBAMA AT WEST POINT

### Further Institutionalizing U.S. Interference and Annexation

President Obama gave the commencement address at the Army's West Point Academy May 28, giving a speech billed as a major foreign policy address. As expected, Obama emphasized that the U.S. will

continue to use military force worldwide and continue to strive to secure its world empire. He repeatedly defended the criminal U.S. wars, drones and intervention worldwide,

**Obama at West Point • 3**

## ALL U.S. TROOPS HOME NOW

### No to U.S. Intervention in Africa

The U.S. is stepping up its intervention in Africa, this time using the kidnapping of the teenage girls in Nigeria as justification. In addition to Special Forces, FBI and others sent to conduct spying and surveillance in Nigeria,

the U.S. has now sent 80 troops to neighboring Chad. These are all in addition to the 4,000 troops at the U.S. base at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti and other troops associated with the U.S. African

**U.S. Out of Africa • 10**

## U.S. HANDS OFF!

### Oppose Sanctions Against Venezuela

The House of Representatives recently passed a bill to impose sanctions on Venezuela and increase funding to opposition forces, as part of trying to secure overthrow the elected government in Venezuela. The Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee also voted 13-2 in favor of a similar sanctions bill. The

Senate bill will now go to the full Senate, with a vote possible in the coming weeks. Then the two bills would have to be reconciled and another vote taken. If passed it would then go to President Obama for his signature before becoming law.

Both bills would allow  
**No Sanctions Against Venezuela • 18**

**ALL U.S. TROOPS HOME NOW! DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF ALL ABROAD AND AT HOME**

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### I • Obama at West Point

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saying the U.S. will take unilateral action and “should never ask permission” to do so.

In addition, however, Obama also brought to the fore that the military will be used for “training” and “development” purposes all around the world. The military is to work directly with the militaries of other countries. It will be a team with U.S. diplomats to ensure that “development” in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America follow U.S. demands. This also includes by-passing governments and working directly with non-governmental organizations, networks and “ordinary people.” Obama is working to put in place funding and institutions for these efforts, most notably the Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund, with \$5 billion to “train, build capacity and facilitate partner countries on the front lines.” He also called for the NATO military alliance to expand beyond “Europe’s borders.”

#### Unilateral Action and Partnerships

Reflecting both the desperation of the U.S. that it cannot contain the struggles of the peoples worldwide for progress, and its arrogance, Obama said, “America has rarely been stronger relative to the rest of the world. Those who argue otherwise — who suggest that America is in decline, or has seen its global leadership slip away — are either misreading history or engaged in partisan politics. Think about it. Our military has no peer... The United States is and remains the one indispensable nation. That has been true for the century passed and it will be true for the century to come.”

Commenting on the current contention within the ruling circles about how the U.S. should achieve empire, he presented two extremes of either always intervening militarily or of being isolationist, then presented the Obama doctrine as one in the center.

“America must always lead on the world stage. If we don’t, no one else will. The military that you have joined is and always will be the backbone of that leadership. But U.S. military action cannot be the only — or even primary — component of our leadership in every instance. Just because we have the best hammer does not mean that every problem is a nail.”

Then he reemphasized U.S. readiness to take unilateral pre-emptive military action:

“First, let me repeat a principle I put forward at the outset of my presidency: The United States will use military force, unilaterally if necessary, when our core interests demand it — when our people are threatened, when our livelihoods are at stake, when the security of our allies is in danger. In these circumstances, we still need to ask tough questions about whether our actions are proportional and effective and just. International opinion matters, but America should never ask permission to protect our people, our homeland, or our way of life.

“On the other hand, when issues of global concern do not pose a direct threat to the United States, when such issues are at stake — when crises arise that stir our conscience or push the world in a more dangerous direction but do not directly threaten us — then the threshold for military action must be higher. In such circumstances, we should not go it alone. Instead, we must mobilize allies and partners to take collective action. We have to broaden our tools to include diplomacy and development; sanctions and isolation; appeals to international law; and, if just, necessary and effective, multilateral military action.”

This multilateral military action includes expanding the role of NATO. Obama said, “NATO is the strongest alliance the world has ever known. But we’re now working with NATO allies to meet new missions, both within Europe where our Eastern allies must be reassured, but also beyond Europe’s borders where our NATO allies must pull their weight to counterterrorism and respond to failed states and train a network of partners.”

This and additional remarks by Obama made clear to all that the U.S. will take unilateral military action, using drones and Special Operations forces. As Obama put it, “There are times when [drone strikes] are necessary and we cannot hesitate to protect our people.” Obama will also “broaden our tools” of intervention

and annexation, involving the militaries and governments of other countries to support U.S. action on “issues of global concern.” He added, “We have to develop a strategy that ... expands our reach without sending forces that stretch our military too thin, or stir up local resentments. We need partners to fight terrorists alongside us. And empowering partners is a large part of what we have done and what we are currently doing in Afghanistan.”

#### Counterterrorism Partnership Fund

Obama uses Afghanistan as his example of the partnerships he has in mind. He said “hundreds of thousands of Afghan soldiers and police,” have been trained. He said that a lesson of Afghanistan is that “our military became the strongest advocate for diplomacy and development.” As experience shows, this is destruction and control of, by and for the U.S. and its monopolies, not development in the interests of the people. And the forces trained, following in the footsteps of the U.S. military, act not as a force for development but as a repressive force against the people. The U.S. is also leaving about 10,000 occupation troops for at least another two years.

Obama does not speak to the massive death, destruction and violence unleashed by the illegal U.S. wars of aggression against both Afghanistan and Iraq. He also does not mention U.S. responsibility now to pay reparations and take responsibility for its crimes, including massacring civilians, destroying civilian infrastructure,







toxic and radioactive waste poisoning humans and the environment, and the huge healthcare problems inflicted on the peoples of Iraq and Afghanistan (see p.5-7 for more). Instead he speaks to how the U.S. plans to further institutionalize U.S. intervention and annexation worldwide.

Obama states, “Our reduced presence allows us to more effectively address emerging threats in the Middle East and North Africa. So, earlier this year, I asked my national security team

to develop a plan for a network of partnerships from South Asia to the Sahel [in Africa]. Today, as part of this effort, I am calling on Congress to support a new Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund of up to \$5 billion, which will allow us to train, build capacity, and facilitate partner countries on the front lines. And these resources will give us flexibility to fulfill different missions, including training security forces in Yemen who have gone on the offensive against al Qaeda; supporting a multinational force to keep the peace in Somalia; working with European allies to train a functioning security force and border patrol in Libya; and facilitating French operations in Mali.”

He adds that the U.S. will continue funding violent forces in Syria and step up its interference in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq, while also making sure these partners “are contributing their fair share.” Even without the \$5 billion from Congress, which Obama is likely to get, as president he can proceed with the partnerships, training, development and other forms of intervention and annexation — as is already evident in Africa (see p. 10-14).

Obama then expands on this plan to institutionalize intervention worldwide. He says, speaking to the cadets, the military will be “part of a team that extends beyond your units or even our Armed Forces, for in the course of your service you will work as a team with diplomats and development experts. You’ll get to know allies and train partners. And you will embody what it means for America to lead the world.” This team will “form alliances, not just with governments but also with ordinary people.”

In this manner sovereignty is completely eliminated, use of military forces in all aspects of life is sanctioned and promoted, and all norms of government-to-government relations replaced by military relations with whoever the U.S. decides to fund and back. The results of this direction are readily apparent in Syria, where U.S. efforts at regime change have caused tremendous chaos, death and suffering. Similarly, it can be seen in repeated U.S. efforts to overthrow the government in Venezuela, first of Hugo Chavez and now of elected President Maduro (see p.19-23).

The “opposition” and “rebels” the U.S. funds and arms are some of the “ordinary people” Obama has in mind, as are non-governmental organizations, education institutions, and more. Obama wants to leave in place, for the Office of the Presidency, a military machinery involved in and militarizing all aspects of life in countries worldwide. There is no longer to be debate as to whether the military should be involved in development, nor is there debate as to whether diplomacy and all other aspects of U.S. intervention are to be subordinate to the military, which will command on all fronts.

### A Warning to Congress

Obama also says the military, rather than the “intelligence community,” will have greater responsibility to explain U.S. actions publicly: “We must be more transparent about both the basis of our counterterrorism actions and the manner in which they are carried out. We have to be able to explain them publicly, whether it is drone strikes or training partners. I will increasingly turn to our military to take the lead and provide information to the public about our efforts. Our intelligence community has done outstanding work, and we have to continue to protect sources and methods. But when we cannot explain our efforts clearly and publicly, we face terrorist propaganda and international suspicion, we erode legitimacy with our partners and our people, and we reduce accountability in our own government.”

Here Obama is reflecting the on-going conflicts within the ruling circles as power is increasingly concentrated in the Office of the President and those outside that office vie for other sources of power, such as the CIA and NSA. The role of Congress in deciding use of military force is largely eliminated by this Counterterrorism Partnership network. Obama also wants to lessen the role of the CIA and other intelligence agencies that are more independent of the military, including giving greater control to the military and its Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in drone warfare.

It is also an effort to use the great anger and lack of legitimacy the NSA and other agencies now have among the public. Obama wants to keep the anger directed at them and away from the military, which is presented as the most powerful on earth, embodying what it means to be an American.

In this manner he also makes clear that U.S. military force and partnerships will be used inside the country as well as outside. It is a warning not only to those in Congress, but the people more generally, to submit to the military, and its Commander-in-Chief.

Far from ending the U.S. crimes of aggressive war and interference, Obama is ensuring that a flexible military machinery, capable of unilateral action, drone warfare and acting to dictate economic and political development anywhere in the world, is in place. It is a dangerous direction that can only lead to even greater wars and destruction.

The peoples at home and abroad are one in demanding: *All U.S. Troops Home Now!* The peoples want a new direction, with international relations of mutual respect and benefit, not intervention and annexation. U.S. foreign policy can only contribute to world peace if it starts with the stand: *Defend the Rights of All, Abroad and at Home!*

# Iraqi Organizations and Iraq Veterans Against the War Demand Reparations for U.S. Crimes in Iraq

## *Right to Heal*

Eleven years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the war has largely disappeared from the corporate media, and President Obama recently took the widely criticized step of defending the invasion and claiming the Iraqi people now have “sovereignty.” Yet, on Wednesday night, Iraqi organizations and U.S. military veterans gathered at a “People’s Hearing” in Washington, DC to tell a different story: of a war that is not over, that is still taking life, spreading trauma, and poisoning Iraq.

In two hours of emotionally-charged testimony — organized by the *Right to Heal* campaign, a joint effort of the Organization for Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWF), the Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions of Iraq, and Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) — the hearing traced the ongoing impacts of the U.S.-led war and occupation. This legacy includes environmental poisoning, Iraqi government repression, sectarian conflict, poverty, trauma, displacement, and death.

Throughout the event, which followed an earlier briefing in the House of Representatives featuring the testimony of witnesses, an overwhelming call emerged. The U.S. must give reparations to the Iraqi people, clean up its toxic legacy, and stop waging wars and occupations around the world.

“Relations based on militarism need to be changed,” said Yanar Mohammed, president and co-founder of the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq. “The change can come from places like this.”

### **Toxic Legacy**

Speakers described a country poisoned for decades by the U.S. military — from depleted uranium used in the 1991 Gulf War and recent Iraq War, the chemical weapon white phosphorous used in the 2004 U.S. attack on Fallujah, and burn pits — which are run by the U.S. military and private contractors and burn munitions, chemicals, rubbers, plastics, and a host of other substances often within close proximity of Iraqi civilians. The toxic legacy in Iraq was repeatedly compared to the U.S. nuclear legacy in Japan and Agent Orange attacks in Vietnam.

Mozhgan Savabieasfahani, an environmental toxicologist, testified that U.S. burn pits in Iraq are exposing the Iraqi public to a litany of dangerous compounds, including lead and mercury. Research teams sent to Iraqi hospitals in Basra and Falluja found abnormally high rates of cancer, birth defects, and heart defects, she stated.

Kristi Casteel, mother of IVAW member Joshua Casteel, explained that her son passed away August 25, 2012 due to what she believes were complications from cancer caused by exposure to burn pits in Abu Ghraib during his Army service. “Had we known he was at risk from toxins in Iraq, he might have been saved,” said Kristi, adding, “The military was allowing more harm to our soldiers than our supposed enemies were



inflicting.” Joshua became a conscientious objector, writer, and anti-war activist, and according to his mother, had the dying wish that burn pits be eradicated and those exposed to these pits, especially Iraqis, receive care.

Mohammed, who fled Iraq during the first Gulf war but then returned after 2003 to “help people,” described epidemics of birth defects in cities and towns across Iraq. “There are some mothers who have three or four children who don’t have limbs that work, who are totally paralyzed, their fingers fused to each other. These children have mental disabilities,” she said. “There needs to be reparations for families facing birth defect and areas that have been contaminated. There needs to be cleanup.”

### **U.S.-Backed Repression**

Speakers testified that the U.S. has also left behind another poison — the Nouri al-Maliki regime that is stoking sectarian conflict and repressing protesters and organizers fighting for their rights — against the backdrop of health problems, trauma, and a climbing refugee crisis.

According to Falah Alwan, President of the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq, said “The new [Iraqi] government is busy with how to re-divide the wealth and seize the resources of society.” He added, “They are supported directly by the U.S. government. They want to issue new labor laws to control the workers and restrain them from stating their demands.”

Mohammed slammed the “corrupt” U.S.-backed Iraqi government and scoffed at Obama’s claims about Iraqi sovereignty. “The U.S. occupation taught us how to hate each other based on

sectarian divides,” she said. “The U.S. occupation has alienated the women of Iraq and the ethnicities of Iraq.”

### The Traumas That Spread

One by one, Iraq veterans took to the podium to testify to the wounds they still carry and the U.S. military’s refusal to account for the harm done. IAW member Rebekah Lampman described the harrowing experience of being raped by a fellow soldier and being denied recourse for winning justice and accountability. In fact, she was blamed for her own assault, she stated. Reflecting on her own healing process following her military discharge, she stated, “I’m not a victim. I’m a survivor.”

Former marine and IAW member Ramon Mejia, who said he joined the military out of the “economic necessity” of providing for his family, explained that he was taught to dehumanize Iraqi people. When he made the decision, while deployed, to start “really seeing” Iraqi people after an experience hearing the call to prayer, he says everything changed. “My war had changed: I went from going through the motions to questioning,” he said.

After his discharge, Ramon faced seizures and mental health problems, and at one point had suicidal ideations. He declared, “I wish I could express to you how sorry I am for what happened in Iraq, and I’m dedicating my life to making things right.”

Savabieasfahani pointed out that “very little work has been done on the mental effects of this war” on the Iraqi population.

“Imagine the kinds of mental, emotional and physical impacts there are on the population of Iraq,” she stated.

Said Mohammed, “You get devastated out of fear. You have no hope.”

### Justice and Reparations

Speaker after speaker repeated the call for reparations and accountability — including research into the toxic legacy of the U.S. war in Iraq, and a “clean-up” of these sites. [...] Veterans repeated the “Right to Heal” call for true care for returning veterans, and Savabieasfahani also spoke about the need for combating racism in the U.S.

Speakers also urged that the real solution is ending the U.S.-led wars responsible for creating the trauma and devastation in the first place.

“The war brings us here today,” said Pam Spees, senior staff attorney for the Center for Constitutional Rights, in an address delivered in Arabic for the Iraqi audience — including those remotely watching a live-stream of the event. “There is nothing that can compensate for the damage that this war has caused, but we are committing ourselves to seeking justice.”

“We are looking for solutions and answers for how not to let it happen again,” said Mohammed. “We will not surrender to sadness. We will not surrender to subjugation. We will have our say.”

## Toll of U.S. Invasion Haunts Iraq

*Lauren Carasik, International Human Rights Clinic, Western New England University*

Washington’s reconstruction and remediation plan pales in comparison with the destruction left behind.

Eleven years ago, on March 19, 2003, the U.S. launched its “shock and awe” attack against Iraq. [...] Many criticized the preemptive war in Iraq as a violation of international law. Last week, President Barack Obama distinguished the U.S. invasion of Iraq from Russia’s actions in Crimea, stating that “we ended our war and left Iraq to its people, and a fully sovereign Iraqi state could make decisions about its own future.” These sentiments echoed those he expressed to mark the final U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, when he said, “We’re leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq.”

Facts belie Obama’s self-congratulatory assessment of a stable and democratic country. Iraq ranked 11th out of 178 countries in the 2013 “Failed States Index,” making it more stable than Somalia and Afghanistan but less so than Syria. [...] The rights of women, minorities and other vulnerable groups continue to deteriorate. Millions have been dispossessed.

More than a decade after President George W. Bush’s premature “mission accomplished” victory exultation, the Iraq War is increasingly seen as a failure. A Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey in January found rising pessimism about the war,

with a majority of Americans saying the U.S. did not achieve its goals in Iraq and the use of military force was a mistake.

The staggering human and financial costs of the war make it unpopular for good reasons. The U.S. has spent \$815.8 billion in Iraq since 2003. In a May 2013 report, Brown University’s Watson Institute for International Studies concluded that the final price tag, including the costs of caring for veterans for the next 40 years, would exceed \$2.2 trillion, not including interest. While the U.S.

coffers are drained by the war, military contractors amassed more than \$138 billion.

Many people know that 4,488 American

soldiers lost their lives in combat. But most assessments of the Iraq War grossly underestimate the full human toll of the invasion. Official estimates of more than 30,000 wounded in combat discount the tens of thousands of veterans who suffer from devastating physical, psychological and moral injuries and thousands of suicides after vets return home. A recent study by American, Canadian and Iraqi health experts found that 500,000 Iraqi deaths were attributable to the war. The tally includes death from indirect causes, such as failures of health, sanitation, transportation, communication and other systems. Still missing from this accounting is the fate of millions of Iraqis and Americans whose lives were rent asunder by the conflict — the families who lost loved ones and those struggling to

## Reparations Are Owed



support traumatized and ailing family members. Iraq's incapacity to rebuild its ravaged health and safety infrastructure extends the costs of the war into the distant future.

The U.S. should support Iraqis stricken by an unparalleled health crisis and clean up the environmental catastrophe we left in our wake.

The invasion of Iraq brought neither stability nor democracy to the region. Gains in curbing post-invasion violence proved ephemeral. After the U.S. withdrew its forces, the carnage faded from the headlines. But, according to the United Nations, more than 7,800 civilians were killed in Iraq in 2013. [...] While Al-Qaeda was not present in Iraq before the invasion, it recently claimed control over Fallujah and Ramadi. Iraq is now experiencing its largest refugee crisis since the height of the war, with hundreds of thousands fleeing the fighting in Anbar province, located west of Baghdad near the border with Syria, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The instability now threatens to escalate into full civil war.

An unprecedented public health crisis in Iraq is also attributable to the war's legacy of chemical and incendiary weapons, depleted uranium and burn pits. Iraqi doctors report unprecedented spikes in birth defects, infant mortality and elevated pediatric cancer in Fallujah and its environs. The U.S. does not concede the causal connection between its use of novel munitions and the health crisis. But Dr. Chris Busby, a chemist from the University of Ulster who conducted two studies about the correlation between the use of weapons and the rates of disease in Iraq, said the findings revealed "the highest

rate of genetic damage in any population ever studied."

Despite the devastation the U.S. left behind, Washington's reconstruction and remediation plan for Iraq was woefully inadequate. Planning focused more on securing and upgrading oilfields for foreign investment than providing humanitarian support and cleaning up the lethal waste left behind. The lack of accountability and oversight of reconstruction efforts has allowed pervasive corruption and squandered much of the \$60 billion allocated to reconstruction by the United States.

Afflicted Iraqi citizens and American veterans are left with depleted resources and little recourse. But there is an increasing demand for a full accounting and reparations. The Right to Heal campaign, led by a coalition of advocacy groups including the Center for Constitutional Rights, the Organization of Women's Freedom in Iraq and Iraq Veterans Against the War, has brought much-needed attention to the ongoing suffering through comprehensive documentation of the war's enduring harms.

Many observers now concede that the war was a humanitarian and political disaster. But that admission alone is not enough. The U.S. should support Iraqis stricken by an unparalleled health crisis, clean up the environmental catastrophe we left in our wake and provide services for our vets bearing visible and unseen wounds. [...]

*(Lauren Carasik is Professor of Law and Director of the International Human Rights Clinic at Western New England University School of Law)*

### FORT HOOD, LARGEST U.S. BASE

## Government Denies Soldiers and Veterans 'Promise' of Benefits and Health Care

*FireDogLake*

President Barack Obama announced at the White House that it was "time to turn the page on more than a decade in which so much of our foreign policy was focused" on fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly ten thousand troops would remain in Afghanistan until being reduced by half in 2015 and then mostly withdrawn by 2016.

Obama celebrated the "men and women in and out of uniform who serve in Afghanistan today and who have served in the past." He said as "many of them begin to transition to civilian life, we will keep the promise we make to them and all veterans and make sure they get the care and benefits that they have earned and deserve." However, a recent report on Fort Hood, the largest Army installation in the country, suggests the government is not only failing to keep a "promise" made to veterans but working against veterans so the government does not have to provide care or benefits to them after the wars.

The report is the product of a long-term project by Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Civilian-Soldier Alliance, and Under the Hood Cafe and Outreach Center, in Killeen, Texas. It includes testimonies from soldiers and veterans who served or lived at Fort Hood for months and in some cases many years. Some have spent

time at inpatient psychiatric wards. Others have gone AWOL or become conscientious objectors. "Twenty of the 31 testifiers served multiple deployments" including in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait and in Iraq during the first Gulf War.

"Although each story tells of unique struggles faced by each soldier—arising from their own unique experience in the military," according to the report's findings, there is a "striking consistency in the ways these lives have been stressed, strained, and injured by the last decade of military service. Many of these abiding patterns are enshrined in policies determining how the military has responded to—and alternately ignored—the needs of its service-members and their families."

[Among the main findings of the report are: "The high rates of traumatic injuries—including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) — that are the legacy of the era of multiple deployments; the policies and practices allowing—and even promoting—the redeployment of injured and traumatized soldiers; the disciplining and discharging of injured soldiers during the course of the drawdown; the abuse of the Medical Evaluation Board process; the routine violation of soldiers' medically-verified work restrictions, i.e. 'profiles'; the culture of stigma

that discourages many soldiers from seeking care at all; a systemic lack of adequate health care and routine violations of medical ethics; the overuse of prescription medications and under-diagnosis of soldiers' illnesses; the lack of remediation following exposure to toxics during military service; and the absence of accountability and survivor-support in sexual assault cases.”]

Since ending the Iraq War, the Defense Department has worked to reduce Army forces from 570,000 in 2010 to 490,000 by 2017. Testimonies of soldiers and veterans indicate that this is being accomplished by disciplining, punishing and discharging soldiers for “infractions that were previously ignored, including behavior resulting from traumatic injuries.”

“Soldiers and veterans testified that commands are determined ‘to get rid of soldiers by any means necessary,’” according to the report. “As swiftly as soldiers were required to re-deploy to combat operations irrespective of their medical needs when forces required, the Army has drawn down its forces by strategically discharging soldiers irrespective of ongoing treatment needs and justified service benefits.

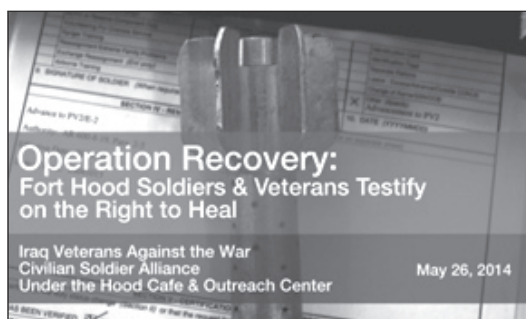
“The Army’s use of discharges to skirt its responsibility for providing health care and compensation to suffering soldiers is even more egregious considering many of these same soldiers who served multiple deployments experienced command-overrides of their needs for treatment at the time of re-deployment.” [...]

A Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) process is apparently being manipulated to deny soldiers treatment. Terrell said he was “getting more help” before the Board was involved in making decisions.

The report further indicates, “Throughout the drawdown, commanders at Fort Hood have heavily relied on the use of disciplinary measures rather than proper treatment to address behavior commonly understood to result from traumatic injuries—such as substance abuse.”

“At other times, soldiers have been disciplined for issues directly resulting from their treatment—such as oversleeping while on heavy medications used to treat TBIs. In other instances, soldiers were discharged for being overweight—even when they had previously deployed at the same weight. These demonstrations of soldiers’ disposability, as well as a dire lack of effective pathways for redress, have contributed to a climate in which soldiers are afraid to even request care.” Most active duty soldiers who contributed testimony to this report were afraid if they did not do so anonymously they would be punished.

Soldiers at Fort Hood are often subject to commanders or supervisors, who have no medical or mental health training, yet exercise “total discretion” over their medical and mental health care.



There is a cultural stigma in the military that leads numerous soldiers to “wait to seek care until their injuries or

## DEMANDING THE RIGHT to HEAL

mental health concerns are so severe that they have no other choice.” For soldiers like Curtis Sirmans, this can make it even more difficult to receive care.

The Veterans Affairs Department would not acknowledge his post-traumatic stress disorder because it “was not reflected in his Army medical records.”

“Soldiers enduring this stigma,” the report states, “felt doubly betrayed, for being stigmatized despite their service and sacrifice, as well as for being denied the care they were promised.” It is worse for women, who face a “sexist workplace culture” that makes it even harder for them to seek care if they are suffering.

Rebekah Lampman was raped and started to abuse alcohol. She entered a program in the military, the Army Substance Abuse Program. She was struggling because her assailant was not moved out of her barracks. She had to deal with a commander who told her at ASAP counseling, “If you had not been drinking that night, you would never have been raped. It is your fault, because you were drinking. You could’ve stopped it, if you had not had alcohol.”

She said she broke down and started crying. It contributed to her blaming herself for what happened for a “really long time.”

Obama and other Pentagon officials like to talk about how proud soldiers should be. That alone contributes to trauma.

A white US Army veteran identified as Brandon Harris, who served four deployments, has concluded:

“...I think the major cause of the soldier’s trauma is there’s nothing to be proud of. That’s my personal belief. I don’t even think that everybody understands that that’s what it is. But I think, deep down, everyone knows that there is no reason for the Iraq War. [...] At this point, you almost have to be willfully ignorant; you have to actually put on blinders to not see it.[...]

Anyone deployed to Iraq could look at the country now and see rampant violence and a brutal regime that subjects citizens to torture and arbitrary executions. They could see images of children suffering from birth defects that come from depleted uranium and read stories of families ill from pollution caused by military occupation.

Likewise, veterans of the war in Afghanistan may discover details of indefinite detention of Afghan prisoners subject to torture and killings of civilians. There is certain to be violence between groups in Afghanistan during drawdown and withdrawal and anyone who was deployed may have trouble dealing with their responsibility in perpetuating conflict. So, what can any soldier really be proud of doing?

The way whistleblowers are coming forward to describe how VA offices have conspired to deny soldiers care shows the “promise” is empty. The men and women are used and when they cannot be used any more they are disposable. [...]

(For the full report go to: [http://forhoodtestimonies.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/fhreport\\_findingsanalysis.pdf](http://forhoodtestimonies.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/fhreport_findingsanalysis.pdf).)



# U.S. Imperial Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean

*Manuel E. Yepe, América Latina*

In light of the recent and ongoing military activities of the United States in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are increasing reasons to question the claim that — because of the crisis over Ukraine, Syria and the suspension of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians — the region has lost importance in the imperial strategic design of the superpower.

U.S. Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, has just visited Guatemala after participating in the Second Conference of Defense Ministers of North America, which was held in Mexico.

Mexico's armed forces had been hosting the "Chimaltalli 2014," international competition, a military training contest for cadets of the United States, Brazil, Colombia, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Mexico held on the premises of the Heroico Colegio Militar de México.

With advice from the U.S. Southern Command, special force units of the Trinidad and Tobago Defense Forces held an air and sea military simulation assault exercise on the supposed headquarters of a drug lord. It was announced that this exercise was part of a larger month-long training exercise designed to strengthen the response capability of the local authorities against terrorist activities.

The "Bravo" joint assault force of the Southern Command, based in Honduras, along with the U.S. Army 7th Special Forces Group, executed a very peculiar training session at Lake Yojoa. While the helicopter pilots practiced their overwater operations exercising their capacity to operate at low altitude, the members of the strike force practiced jumping from helicopters at a height of ten feet above water.

In Belize, in the same Central American region, the "New Horizons 14" exercise took place (a continuation of a similar exercise held in 2013), organized by the U.S. Southern Command. It consisted in the construction, during military training exercises by American and Belizean forces, of a hospital ward and a school. This was the second consecutive year that Belize hosted "New Horizons" which the United States presents as a "humanitarian military operation."

On March 15, the U.S. Air Force 571 Mobility Support Advisory Squadron (MSAS), stationed at Travis Air Force Base, California, conducted a military training at the La Aurora airbase in Guatemala City. It included members of the Army, Air Force and Navy as well as Marines deployed in Guatemala. There, seminars on communication strategies, intelligence capabilities and aircraft maintenance were organized. Among their recommendations, one indicated the need to improve aviation safety techniques through the continuity of permanent coordination



between Guatemala and the United States.

From 17 February to 20 March, the U.S. 20th Special Forces Group and the Dominican Republic Special Operations Forces (SOF) participated in a combined program of training, exchange and joint deployment (JCET) "focusing on air operations, marksmanship and medical skills". In one of the exercises, the Air National Guard of Puerto Rico (PRANG) and the U.S. 95th Civilian Affairs Brigade combined their work with Dominican personnel in an air operation.

It was also learned that members of the aforementioned U.S. Air Force MSAS had completed a temporary assignment in Santiago de Chile, participating in discussions and exchanges with their Chilean counterparts on the support to be provided in aero-medical evacuation emergencies. They also operated a booth at the International Air and Space Fair (FIDAE).

It was also reported that some sixty soldiers of the Texas Air National Guard and twelve of the U.S. Southern Air Force Command, participated in exchanges with the Chilean Air Force, and at FIDAE in static exhibitions of freighters C-130 Hercules and fighters F-16 Fighting Falcon.

At the beginning of April 2014, as part of an agreement signed in July 2012 between the government of Colombia and the South Carolina National Guard, members of the U.S. Southern Command and Colombian military participated, in courses to elevate the emergency response capacity of Black Hawk aircrews in Bogota and Melgar.

Unfortunately, the persistence of these exchanges denotes great interest in extending and intensifying interference rather than on terminating it, as is the wish of the countries of Latin America and Caribbean.

*(A CubaNews translation. Edited by Walter Lippmann.)*

Command (AFRICOM). It is estimated that 5,000-8,000 U.S. troops are on the ground in Africa, intervening in the internal affairs of many countries as part of securing U.S. interests on the continent. Special forces are being used to “train” African troops. Experience in Latin America and the Middle East already show this means more U.S. backed trained and armed “death squads” will be unleashed.

As has become common, the U.S. is intervening in the name of “stopping terrorism” and providing “humanitarian” assistance. While the peoples in Nigeria, Africa and worldwide condemn the kidnapping of the young girls and all terrorism against civilians, they also know all too well the results of U.S. intervention. Wherever this has occurred, whether Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, the U.S. has unleashed a humanitarian disaster. Its drones and other bombings and troops systematically massacre civilians, attack civilian infrastructure like water, sewage and hospitals, and impose conditions of anarchy and chaos. U.S. intervention has not contributed to solving problems, while the examples of intervention causing great harm and devastation can be found worldwide.

It is also the case that it is the U.S. that is the biggest terrorist worldwide, with use of force its weapon of choice.

Diplomacy, resolving conflicts without use of force, respect for sovereignty, are not utilized by the U.S. Further, it is the U.S. that commonly arms and trains the various forces using terrorism against the people. As one example, the U.S. is responsible for filling Libya with weaponry and backing terrorist groups and creating conditions of chaos there, which have now extended into other parts of Africa. Intervention now in Nigeria will not produce different results. It will lead to greater control by the U.S. and greater ability to establish a larger, more permanent military presence in Africa. As part of this, the U.S. recently secured a ten-year lease to remain at Camp Lemonnier.

The U.S., like Britain and France, also has responsibility for the legacy of slavery and colonialism. What would assist the peoples of Africa would be for the U.S. to pay reparations for slavery and all its crimes on the continent, present and past. Removing all U.S. troops and ending all interference would also contribute to the peace and security of the region. The peoples of Africa are fully capable of determining their own affairs and using their own traditions and thought material to develop their own means of governance. What is needed is: *U.S Out of Africa! Pay Reparations Now!*

### BEHIND UNFOLDING EVENTS IN NIGERIA

## **White House Escalates Interventionist Plans**

*Abayomi Azikiwe, Pan-African News Wire*

A video purportedly released by the armed Boko Haram sect based in northeastern Nigeria showed what was said to be school girls who have been held by the group for a month. The Boko Haram leader said that the young women could be released in exchange for the prisoners belonging to their organization being held by the Nigerian government.

With the convening of the World Economic Forum for Africa in Abuja, the political capital of Nigeria, during the week of May 5, international media attention was focused on the country. The issue of internal security in Nigeria was also paramount since the detonation of two deadly bombs in Abuja during a three week period, which resulted in the deaths of over 80 people.

Simultaneously the story involving the missing high school students from the village of Chibok in Borno state in the northeast, which has been under a government-imposed state of emergency for months, was utilized to mobilize the intervention of military and intelligence personnel from Washington, London, Paris and Tel Aviv. The problems of the Boko Haram insurgency has existed since 2009 when the government deployed police and soldiers to attack the headquarters and residences of the group which had functioned for several years with the public support of some prominent northern-based politicians.

The plight of the missing students is part and parcel of the overall security crisis inside the northeast region of the country

and which is spreading to Abuja and other areas. Thousands have been killed in the fighting over the past five years and many more have been displaced.

Despite Nigeria’s designation by the western-based financial publications as having the largest economy in Africa, there is still tremendous poverty and unemployment inside the West Africa state, the continent’s most populous. This wealth generated in the recent period has obviously not trickled down to the working class, youth and poor since the country over the last two years has been the scene of strikes in the oil, medical, educational and public service sectors of the national economy.

The deliberations surrounding the WEF represented the same type of investment-driven approach to economic development in Africa. At the opening reception during the gathering, President Goodluck Jonathan welcomed the intervention of the imperialist states in resolving the return of the students and stated that “terrorism” would not interfere with the current political trajectory of the government.

### **The Role of Imperialism and the Legacy of Colonialism**

The Boko Haram group is a manifestation of the regional conflicts in Nigeria that were inherited from the British colonial system and the continuing political dominance by the United States in the foreign and internal affairs of the oil-rich state. This year represented the

centennial of the consolidation of colonial rule by Britain.

A system of indirect rule for decades left the country divided at the time of national independence in 1960. Two military coups in 1966 lead to a civil war during 1967-70, when a section of the national bourgeoisie in the southeast attempted to form its separate nation of Biafra.

Since the 1970s, a succession of both military and civilian governments have been largely dominated by military interests most of whom originate in the north of the country. The oil wealth is largely found in the southeast and increasingly offshore in the Gulf of Guinea.

Adding to this regional problem that has not been resolved since 1960, the Muslim population of Nigeria is heavily based in the northern region. Due to the policy of the British colonialists, many people from the northern region were recruited into the military and were utilized to suppress resistance to imperialism throughout the country.

Based upon these regional differences, which permeate the political parties and governing structures of the country, a cohesive administrative strategy remains elusive. The country is the largest exporter of crude oil from Africa into the U.S. Since 1956, the petroleum industry has been dominated by Britain, Europe and the U.S.

A recent editorial published by the Guardian, a leading national newspaper in Nigeria, stated in response to a memo written by Adamawa State Governor Murtala H.Y. Nyako, that "The indubitable truth is that insecurity in the land is transforming into a hydra-headed monster. That the President does not appear to grasp gravity of the problem his administration, and the country face is daily advertised by his sometimes frivolous words and deeds." (May 7)

The editorial goes on saying "Many Nigerians now find no reason to believe that this government has their 'security and welfare' as its 'primary job. Nyako may have used a wrong medium and foul language, [nonetheless,] his frustrations resonate with most Nigerians. President Jonathan should do all within his enormous presidential powers to prevent a groundswell of popular anger against his government."

Jonathan, who comes from the Ijaw ethnic group based in the south, is facing re-election in 2015 amid the worsening security crisis inside the country since the 1960s. During the 1990s, an insurgent group called the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) came into existence demanding adequate compensation for the southern region where oil is exploited.

MEND, which has condemned the abductions of the high school students, engaged in sabotage operations against the oil industry and presented an effective public relations campaign that accompanied

its actions. Their efforts were coupled with mass demonstrations by women and youth also demanding that the large western-based oil firms such as Shell-BP, Chevron and ExxonMobil clean up the environmental damage in the southern region and invest profits into the structural development of the Niger Delta.

MEND was later offered an amnesty which included monetary compensation, scholarships and other amenities. The armed actions in the southern region have declined significantly but security still remains a serious concern.

However, the Boko Haram campaigns have targeted civilians and Christian churches. They also claimed responsibility for the bombing of the United Nations offices in Abuja during 2011.



Demonstration in South Africa opposes U.S. crimes, 2013

### **"Terrorism" and Imperialism in Africa**

There have been many questions raised about the origins and support for Boko Haram. Some informed Nigerians claim that the group still maintains support among sections of the northern political and economic elites.

The tactics of the group has shifted since 2009 as well. They have suggested an alliance with Al-Qaeda and the character of the violence carried out inside the country in the northeast and other

areas are strikingly similar to the bombing operations in other countries such as Iraq.

Interestingly enough the U.S. administration under President Barack Obama had refused to label Boko Haram a terrorist group even after the UN bombing. Hillary Clinton, who was Secretary of State at the time under Obama, has been seen making statements of concern about the missing children, however, during her tenure with the administration she would not categorize Boko Haram as a terrorist organization.

These actions by Boko Haram and the failure of the Jonathan administration in Abuja to effectively respond has provided the imperialist states, led by the U.S., an opportunity to deepen their involvement inside the country. Just recently joint naval operations in the Gulf of Guinea between the Pentagon and several West African states, including Nigeria, were conducted as part of the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and European Union Forces (EUFOR) interventionist project.

In another article published in the Nigerian Guardian by Laolu Akande, it states that "Senator Susan Collins, a Republican from Maine, is leading 20 female U.S. Senators to demand for U.S. military assistance. In an interview with CNN last week, she specifically asked for Special Forces Operations. At a global press conference also in Washington D.C. about the same time, the Christian Association of Nigerian-Americans, (CANAN) leaders also made the request that Special Forces be deployed to Nigeria to rescue the



Chibok girls.” (May 11)

This same article goes on to report that “According to Collins, ‘I would like to see Special Forces deployed to rescue these young girls’. And later at an international press conference in Washington DC, the President of CANAN, Dr. James Fadele, on behalf of the association asked the U.S. president to consider ‘sending Special Forces units as already suggested by a sitting U.S. Senator Susan Collins. CANAN added that the ‘U.S. should use every available tool within its arsenal to trace, track and terminate’ Boko Haram operations.”

These statements by leading members of the U.S. Senate and spokespersons who claim to represent the sentiment of the Nigerian expatriate community must be viewed in conjunction with the role of the corporate and government-controlled media based in the West. An upsurge in demonstrations of outrage and shock is portrayed as a means of justifying imperialist military intervention

in Nigeria.

Yet with the recent history of these interventions led by the U.S., France and other NATO states along with Israel, they have not brought about peace and security in Mali, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Libya and other affected regions. The problems of internal security within Nigeria must be viewed within the context of the inherited capitalist relations of production, the burgeoning class divisions within the society which imperialism fosters and the need for a genuine national democratic revolution and socialist economic construction.

It is the quest for dominance by the imperialist states that motivates their actions towards Nigeria and other African states. Anti-war, social justice, women’s and human rights organizations must take into consideration the potential impact of a deeper and longer-term military and intelligence intervention in Nigeria. (*May 13, 2014*)

## U.S. Sends 80 Troops to Chad

The United States military has now deployed 80 troops to Chad (which is bordered by Libya to the north, Sudan to the East and shares a small border with Nigeria). President Barack Obama said the U.S. unit “will remain in Chad until its support in resolving the kidnapping situation [in Nigeria] is no longer required.” The group will provide support for “the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance aircraft” flying over northern Nigeria and the surrounding area, the White House said.

Pentagon officials added that additional troops will operate and maintain the unarmed Predator drone currently flying over Nigeria and the region, collecting information of all kinds. These and the troops in Chad are a further escalation of U.S. intervention. Two weeks ago, the U.S. sent about two dozen military and civilian forces to also conduct spying and surveillance operations and provide law enforcement agents. These include about thirty specialists from the Departments of State and Defense and the FBI. About half are military with medical, counter terrorism, intelligence, and communications specialties.

The reality that U.S. intervention in Africa and elsewhere has contributed to arming and unleashing various terrorist and military forces against the peoples can be seen in the effort by the Pentagon to claim they are not now doing so.

“We are very, very careful to ensure that we are only providing assistance to those who will not use it in ways that may affect

civilians or otherwise violate international human rights standards,” Alice Friend, the Pentagon’s principal director for African affairs, recently told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The U.S./NATO invasion of Libya brought huge amounts of weaponry to the country and armed numerous forces now using these weapons against civilians in various parts of Africa. The general chaos and anarchy unleashed by the U.S. and its interventions is readily apparent in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. So too is the reality that it routinely arms and trains terrorist and military and para-military forces whenever it suits their purpose. This includes Al-Qaeda when the U.S. used it for its own purposes against Russia, as well as death-squads in Colombia and elsewhere in Latin America. The aim is securing and extending U.S. interests as it seeks world empire.

The U.S. also made this clear when officials said, “We’re not talking about U.S. military operations in Nigeria to go find these girls.” The official added, “That’s not the focus here.” Indeed, like other U.S. interventions, the focus is not in any way humanitarian but rather to further secure its military and economic interests in Africa. Gathering intelligence and sending troops in the name of the kidnapped girls is just another excuse to escalate U.S. intervention in the region. As peoples worldwide have long experienced, their interests are best served by demanding that the *U.S. Stay Out!*

### HORN OF AFRICA

## U.S. Secures Military Base in Djibouti

The United States recently reached agreement with the government of Djibouti to keep its military base, Camp Lemonnier, in the country. The base has been central to U.S. interventions in East Africa, such as against Sudan and Somalia. It has also served as a main launching point for the illegal U.S. drone strikes throughout the region, including those against Yemen.

President Obama announced the agreement at the White House

during a meeting with Djibouti’s president, Ismail Omar Guelleh. As Obama emphasized

“Camp Lemonnier is extraordinarily important not only to our work throughout the Horn of Africa but throughout the region.” An administration official said the U.S. would pay \$630 million over the next decade to Djibouti to lease the base. Showing its desire to secure the 10-year lease, at \$63 million per year, the fee

is almost double the \$38 million the U.S. has been paying.

Camp Lemonnier houses 4,000 personnel. Its establishment, in 2001, was part of the U.S. military expansion in both the Middle East and Africa. Since its establishment the base had become one of the most active sites for launching drone strikes outside the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

The base shares a civilian airstrip. Last year, a series of crashes made clear that civilians could be killed at the airport. The U.S.

then relocated most of the drone operations drones to more remote parts of the country, expanding their military presence while maintaining the base.

According to the terms of the base agreement, the U.S. and Djibouti can renew the lease for another 10 years at the same rate of \$63 million a year. They can then renew the lease for another 10 years at a renegotiated rate. At the meeting, Obama also pledged to increase financial aid to Djibouti outside of the base agreement.

## Washington Spends \$137 Million Creating Intelligence Hub for AFRICOM in Britain

*The Independent (Britain)*

Royal Air Force (RAF) Croughton, a US Air Force (USAF) base near Milton Keynes, which has a direct cable link to [Britain's] Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) at Cheltenham, is to be the site for an ultra-secure intelligence center staffed by up to 1,250 personnel and covering operations in Africa, a current focus for US counterterrorism activities.

The \$317 million (£189 million) project, which includes an installation for the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Pentagon's main military espionage service, underlines RAF Croughton's position as a center for clandestine and classified US communications in Britain.

Once complete in 2017, the facility will be comparable in number of personnel and operational importance to RAF Menwith Hill, the National Security Agency (NSA) listening station in North Yorkshire. Like Menwith Hill, it is likely to be co-staffed with representatives of British intelligence, including GCHQ.

A USAF briefing document makes it clear that the facility at RAF Croughton will be at the front line of intelligence activities and will include personnel from unnamed British agencies. The facility will be the principle intelligence center for the US AFRICOM – or Africa command.

*The Independent*, the sister title of *The Independent on Sunday*, revealed last year that RAF Croughton was used to funnel back to Washington data from a global network of spy bases inside US embassies, including the secret Berlin facility alleged to have been used by the NSA to listen in on the mobile phone of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

The British base, which currently serves as a relay station for CIA agent communications, is also at the center of claims that it is used as a support site for US drone strikes operated from Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti against al-Qaeda targets inside Yemen.

Campaigners and senior politicians yesterday said the massive investment in RAF Croughton raised fresh questions about the oversight of US bases in Britain, which are governed by a 1950s agreement with Washington drawn up in a different age of surveillance technologies. [...]

Details of the RAF Croughton project obtained by this newspaper show that the upgrade will involve the "consolidation" of six existing US intelligence groups, currently based at RAF Molesworth in Cambridgeshire, into a single facility at RAF Croughton.

The Pentagon said the project was required to move intelligence staff out of outmoded and unsuitable accommodation at Molesworth, saving at least \$75 million a year. The move will lead to "divestiture," or closure, of the Cambridgeshire base and its neighbor RAF Alconbury, which are estimated to contribute £40 million (\$67.4 million) a year to the local economy.

The result will be a substantial further concentration of US intelligence firepower at RAF Croughton, whose stated purpose is to provide "world-class combat support" for activities including "global strike operations" and has recently had its security arrangements tightened.

It emerged last year that British Telecom provided a high-speed fiber-optic line between RAF Croughton and Camp Lemonnier, the counterterrorism operations base used for drone strikes in Yemen and the Horn of Africa.

The existence of the communications link has caused concern that RAF Croughton is used to relay command and control data from drone operators, possibly based in the US, to Djibouti. The Ministry of Defense (MoD) has stated that US personnel at the base "neither fly nor control any manned or remotely piloted aircraft anywhere in the world".

Lindis Percy, co-coordinator of the Campaign for the Accountability of American Airbases, said: "This massive new development at Croughton is clearly of great importance to the American military and government, but what say has the British Parliament or the Ministry of Defense had? It is high time that the issue of what goes on on US bases is debated in Parliament so there is a meaningful and credible debate and oversight on behalf of the British people."

The MoD insisted that all activities on US bases were subject to British approval. A spokesman said: "There are no circumstances under which UK military assets, including those bases made available to the US, could be used operationally by the US without the agreement of Her Majesty's Government."



# Militarized Humanitarianism in Africa

*Joeva Rock, Inter Press Service*

As the world remains transfixed by the kidnapping of almost 300 Nigerian girls, there have been increasing calls for international intervention in the effort to rescue them. But what many people don't know is that the U.S. military has been active in the region for years. [...]

It is becoming increasingly apparent — from interviews with generals, recommendations from influential think tanks, and private conversations with military personnel — that Africa is the U.S. military's next frontier.

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), the newest of the U.S. military's six regional commands, has rapidly expanded its presence on the African continent since its establishment at the end of the Bush administration.

Emphasizing a “3D” approach of “defense, diplomacy, and development,” the White House describes AFRICOM's charge as coordinating “low-cost, small-footprint operations” throughout the African continent.

Yet despite efforts to market AFRICOM as a small operation, recent reports have revealed that the command is “averaging more than a mission a day” on the continent, and has anywhere from “5,000 to 8,000 U.S. military personnel on the ground” at any given point.

Rather than the “shock and awe” of Iraq, the military has attempted to put a friendly face on its expedition to Africa. This past March, writing in the *New York Times*, Eric Schmitt marveled at AFRICOM's Operation Flintlock, a multinational and multi-agency training operation in Niger.

Schmitt wrote glowingly about fighting terrorism with mosquito nets: “Instead of launching American airstrikes or commando raids on militants,” he wrote, “the latest joint mission between the nations involves something else entirely: American boxes of donated vitamins, prenatal medicines, and mosquito netting to combat malaria.”

Humanitarian and development missions like the ones outlined in Schmitt's article are at the forefront of AFRICOM's public relations campaign. But promoting AFRICOM as a humanitarian outfit is misleading at best.

To put it simply, these projects are more like a Trojan Horse:

dressed up as gifts, they establish points of entry on the continent when and where they may be needed.

## A Staging Ground

Under the auspice of development and conflict prevention, AFRICOM regularly undertakes humanitarian projects in countries unmarked by permanent war or conflict. AFRICOM relies heavily on social media to showcase these projects and to portray itself as collaborative with African partners, dedicated to humanitarian aid, and trustworthy in the eyes of local peoples.

The command's Facebook and Twitter accounts are updated daily, and include postings on anything from participation in global humanitarian campaigns such as World Malaria Day (#malariabuzz) to reports on medical missions, sound bites from local recipients of AFRICOM aid, and photos of troops distributing toys to children.

Less is said about the expansive presence of American military personnel and

technology on the ground and in the skies. AFRICOM conducts aerial and ground operations with U.S. troops, private military contractors, and proxy African military operatives trained and equipped by the United States.

Operation Flintlock is just one of the many training exercises AFRICOM provides for country partners, and Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti is a well-known staging ground for drone strikes in Yemen and Somalia.

Not surprisingly, given the ongoing U.S. interest in securing new fuel sources and growing concerns over China's influence in the region, many of AFRICOM's efforts are located in oil-rich regions — specifically Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and the Gulf of Guinea.

The Gulf of Guinea, which hugs the Western coast of Africa, has received heightened interest of late given its proximity to the Sahel and Mali, an alleged increase in pirating, and notably, both on- and off-shore oil deposits.

In Takoradi, Ghana, for example — a place affectionately nicknamed “Oil City” — AFRICOM trains Ghanaian troops, conducts humanitarian missions, and meets with local chiefs,





non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and fishing communities.

Of course, wary of lingering skepticism about U.S. motives in Iraq, spokesmen have attempted to distance the United States from any interest in the region's oil.

A recent report from the Army War College dismissed claims that AFRICOM is protecting U.S. oil interests, but nonetheless argued that private American oil companies are the "best corporate citizens that African leaders and their publics could hope for."

One need not look far — from the polluted waters of Nigeria's Niger Delta to Equatorial Guinea's inequitable oil-driven development — to see how egregiously false that claim is.

#### **A Sign of What is to Come**

AFRICOM is insistent that its end-goal is to empower local forces to find African solutions to African problems. But its daily operations and talk of "sensitizing" West African nations to the idea of a permanent Marines "crisis unit" in the region make clear that a more permanent U.S. presence on the continent is its true intention.

Humanitarian projects allow military personnel to train in new environments, gather local experience and tactical data, and build

diplomatic relations with host countries and communities.

As activists with Women for Genuine Security have explained, this use of relief and humanitarian aid to "further larger geopolitical and military goals" — a practice they have dubbed "disaster militarism" — is a general strategy employed by the U.S. military worldwide.

For example, a 2010 report from the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University found that in Kenya, humanitarian projects by the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, a multi-branch military operation in East Africa, provided "an entry point" to "facilitate a military intervention, should the need arise."

Similarly, as David Vine has shown with regard to the U.S. military's "lily pad strategy" of speckling the globe with tiny military installations — much like AFRICOM's "small-footprint operations" — small-scale troop build-ups allow the United States to establish "goodwill" with local communities, planting the seeds for larger concentrations of troops and activities later on. [...]

We should approach AFRICOM's humanitarian undertakings not as gestures of goodwill or conflict-deterrence, but rather as signs of what is to come for the militarized U.S. approach to foreign policy in Africa.

## **Boko Haram a Blessing for Imperialism in Africa: U.S. Training Death Squads**

*Glen Ford, Black Agenda Report*

The American [government] now admits they are training battalions of African Rangers and counterinsurgency troops. The next step is the proliferation of death squads in West Africa, as the U.S. did in Southeast Asia and Latin America. Nigeria's schoolgirls may or may not be rescued, but U.S. and European "humanitarian" military interventionists have already gained more than they could have imagined. [...]

The pace of U.S. penetration of West Africa has quickened dramatically since 2011, when Obama bombed Muammar Gaddafi's Libyan government out of existence, setting a flood of [armed groups] and weapons streaming east to Syria and south to destabilize the nations of the Sahel. Chaos ensued — beautiful chaos, if you are a U.S. military planner seeking justification for ever-larger missions. NATO's aggression against Libya begat the sub-Saharan chaos that justified the French and U.S. occupation of Mali and Niger. [These North African groups] empowered by American bombs, weapons and money, trained and outfitted their brethren on the continent, including elements of Nigeria's Boko Haram. The Hausa-speaking Islamic warriors then bequeathed AFRICOM a priceless gift: nearly 300 schoolgirls in need of rescuing, perfect fodder for "humanitarian" intervention.

Nobody had to ask twice that Obama "Do something!"

The heads of Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Benin and Cameroon were summoned to Paris (pretending it was their idea) where they declared "total war" on Boko Haram, as "observers" from

the U.S., France, Britain and the European Union (Africa's past and future stakeholders) looked on. French President Francois Hollande said "a global and regional action plan" would come out of the conference.

Of course, the five African states have neither the money, training, equipment nor intelligence gathering capacity for such a plan. It will be a Euro-American plan for the defense and security of West Africa — against other Africans. Immediately, the U.S. sent 80 troops to Chad (whose military has long been a mercenary asset of France) to open up a new drone base, joining previously existing U.S. drone fields in Niger, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Somalia, the Seychelles Islands, Djibouti (home to a huge French and American base), and CIA sites that need not be disclosed.

The new West African security grouping became an instant imprint of NATO, an appendage to be shaped by imperial military planners to confront enemies chosen by Washington and Paris.

What a miracle of humanitarian military momentum! The girls had only been missing for a month, and might not be rescued alive, but five neighboring African countries — one of them the biggest economy on the continent — had already been dragooned into a NATO-dominated military alliance with other subordinate African states.

It soon turned out that AFRICOM already had a special relationship with the Nigerian military that was not announced

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## OPPOSE U.S. INTERVENTION IN AFRICA

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until after the schoolgirls' abduction. AFRICOM will train a battalion of Nigerian Rangers in counterinsurgency warfare, the first time that the Command has provided "full spectrum" training to Africans on such a scale. [...]

The *New York Times* reveals that the U.S. has been running a secret program to train counterterrorism battalions for Niger and Mauritania. Elite Green Berets and Delta Force killers are instructing handpicked commandos in counterinsurgency in Mali, as well. The identity of one *Times* source leaves little doubt that the previously secret operations are designed to blanket the region with U.S. trained death squads. Michael Sheehan was until last year in charge of Special Operations at the Pentagon – Death Squads Central – where he pushed for more Special Ops trainers for African armies. Sheehan now holds the "distinguished chair" at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center. In the 1980s, he was a Special Forces commander in Latin America – which can only mean death squads.

U.S. Army Special Forces have always been political killers, most often operating with the CIA. The Phoenix Program, in Vietnam, which killed between 26,000 and 41,000 people and tortured many more, was a CIA-Special Forces war crime. From 1975 to deep into the 80s, the CIA and its Special Forces muscle provided technical support and weapons to killers for Operation Condor, the death squads run by a consortium of military governments in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, Bolivia and Brazil, believed responsible for 60,000 killings. Sheehan was probably involved in Operation Condor and its Central American component, Operation Charly, and has perfected the art of political killing, ever since. If he is happy and feeling vindicated by events in Africa, then U.S.-trained death squads are about to proliferate in that part of the world. [...]

There is no question that Obama is enamored of Special Ops, since small unit killings by professional killers at midnight look less like war – and can, if convenient, be blamed on (other) "terrorists." [...]



Ugandan leader Yoweri Museveni, a friend of the U.S. since Ronald Reagan, committed genocidal acts against his rivals from the Acholi tribe, throwing them into concentration camps. Joseph Kony was one of these Acholis, who apparently went crazy. Kony has not been a threat to Uganda or any other country in the region for years, but President Obama used a supposed sighting of remnants of his Lords Resistance Army to send 100 Green Berets to the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Just last month, Obama sent 150 more troops and four aircraft to central Africa, again claiming that Kony was lurking, somewhere.

Actually, the American troops were deployed near South Sudan, which the U.S, Britain and Israel had destabilized for decades in an effort to split it off from the larger nation of Sudan. South Sudan became independent, but it remained unstable – not a nation, but a place with oil that the U.S. coveted. Many tens of thousands more are certain to die in fighting in South Sudan. [...]

The death squads the Americans are training in Nigeria, Niger, Mauritania and Mali, and those that will soon be stalking victims in Cameroon and Benin, will not be limited to hunting Boko Haram. Death squads are, by definition, destabilizing; they poison the political and social environment beyond repair, as Central Americans who lived through the 80s can attest.

Yet, that is U.S. imperialism's preferred method of conquest in the non-white world. It is what the American [government] actually does, when folks demand that they "Do something."



Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina are among the many Latin American organizations that opposed U.S.-backed dictators and death squads, which kill and disappear those who resist. Similar death squads are being organized for Africa

HAKIM ADI, AFRICA WORLD PRESS, 2013

# **Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and Diaspora, 1919-1939**

*Workers' Weekly, Britain*

This ground-breaking book, based on research undertaken in the archives of the Communist International (Comintern) in Moscow as well as archives in France, Britain, the US and West Africa, documents the activities of the Communist International in relation to Africa and the African diaspora. It focuses on a period when the world was in flux, with inter-imperialist rivalry at its height, when African and Caribbean countries, amongst others, were under colonial domination. Black people in Africa, the Caribbean and other western countries were officially considered inferior, had few rights and racism was at the level of open state policy from so-called "Jim Crow" laws and lynching in the US, to pass laws and segregation in South Africa and the color bar in Britain.

In these circumstances many were inspired by the creation of the Soviet Union, following the October Revolution Russia in 1917, and the creation of the Communist International in 1919. From its founding under Lenin's leadership, the Comintern sought to inspire and support the oppressed black people throughout the world to organize and empower themselves and break the shackles of imperialism. The book points out that it was the Communists who were at the forefront of the struggle against colonial rule in this period.

The book plays an important role in chronicling the many African, Caribbean and African American Communists who took up the struggle at that time, in particular those connected with the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), established in 1928 under the auspices of the Comintern. The ITUCNW acted to strengthen the work of the Communist Parties to take up for solution the question of how the liberation of Africa and the African diaspora might be achieved. The book points out that in that period many key activists gravitated towards or organized in unity with the international communist movement, including Lamine Senghor in France, Isaac Wallace-Johnson in West Africa, Elma Francois in Trinidad and Jacques Romain in Haiti. In this period the Communists were often in the forefront of major international struggles, for example, to oppose fascist Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 or to demand the release of the nine African American youth arrested in Scottsboro, Alabama in 1931.

The book also examines several areas of controversy and disinformation about the role of the international communist movement in relation to African liberation. Significantly the information outlined in Dr Adi's book highlights that disinformation has often become accepted wisdom and part

of continuing efforts to undermine the crucial role of Communists of African descent and of the Soviet Union itself in this period. Using his extensively researched material the writer outlines the facts about the activity and demise of the ITUCNW, as well as the changing tactics and analysis of the Comintern in the period leading to the outbreak of World War II, and leaves the reader to make an independent judgment.

This book makes an important contribution to an area of African and Caribbean, as well as Communist history that has long been neglected and which many people are unaware of. Its focus on the activities of African, African American and Caribbean Communists in the period 1919-1939 is to be welcomed. It is an area about which there remains a great deal of confusion not only with regard to the facts but also concerning the lessons to be drawn from this experience.

Dr Adi focuses his attention on the efforts of ordinary African and Caribbean people who decided to take a stand and address the many problems that confronted them in their time. Problems such as Jim Crow in the USA, and racism and violation of human rights all over colonial Africa and the Caribbean disfigured the lives of millions of people. The Communists took up this struggle with the idea of finding a revolutionary solution to it and with an understanding that solving it would be bound up with the struggle of all oppressed people for their freedom. At great personal sacrifice, these activists made a significant contribution to the mass movements for African liberation, which were to burst out in the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Civil Rights movement, the Black Power movement and the independence struggles in Africa and the Caribbean. The progress that has been achieved in the struggle for African liberation to date is due in no small part to the efforts of those individuals featured in this book. It shows what a significant impact we can have on changing the world in which we live when we take up the challenges facing us and try to find solutions to them.

This book has great significance for those who are today involved in trying to find a solution to the many problems that continue to confront Africans both on the continent and in the diaspora. The point is not that we should simply repeat what was done in 1919 – 39 when people were grappling with the problems of the world as it was then. Rather, it is that we should be inspired by their example to courageously take up the challenge of changing the world today and using the scientific approach which modern communism offers us. (<http://www.rcpbml.org.uk/wwie-14/ww14-14.htm#lead>)



### I • No Sanctions Against Venezuela

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President Obama to freeze assets and ban U.S. visits by any current or former Venezuelan government official the U.S. claims is responsible for “directing significant acts of violence or serious human rights abuses against persons associated with the anti-government protests in Venezuela.”

They also allow the White House to sanction government officials in Venezuela who acted to prevent death and violence and by arresting violent anti-government forces in Venezuela, including those responsible for deaths. The U.S. considers this “undemocratic” and is opposing the prosecution of violent demonstrators, including those plotting to implement U.S. plans to overthrow the elected government of President Maduro. Sanctions are also to be imposed on anyone the U.S. says provided assistance, including financial support, for the arrests.

The bills would commit \$15 million in additional funds for the various opposition forces acting against the Venezuelan government (see p. 21).

The U.S. has long been organizing to defeat the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela, first by targeting Hugo Chavez, with coup attempts and funding and backing protests and disruptions

of various kinds. Each time the people of Venezuela stood firm and blocked U.S. efforts, repeatedly organizing to defend their sovereignty and their right to chart their own course independent of the U.S. It is this determined resistance that has angered the U.S. and brought continued efforts to impose a government of its liking in Venezuela. The sanctions are one more means to try and accomplish this. They are being widely opposed not only in Venezuela but through out the Americas, as the peoples stand united against U.S. interference.

The U.S. has no business interfering in the internal affairs of other countries, dictating which governments are to remain and which to be removed; which protests are acceptable and which are not. The double standards are also clear. The military in Egypt for example, came to power in a coup and was responsible for killing hundreds of peaceful protesters, but the U.S. continues to fund and support them. In Venezuela, where the government has acted to defend the people and also engage in a dialogue with the opposition, the U.S. wants them removed and plans sanctions.

All sanctions against Venezuela must be opposed. It is by defending the right of Venezuelans to decide their own affairs that the people of the U.S. can contribute to peace and progress.



## U.S. House of Representatives Ignores Latin American Consensus, Passes Sanctions Against Venezuela

*Arlene Eisen, May 28, 2014*

Despite emphatic opposition from the Union of South American States (UNASUR, with 12 member states), Caribbean Community (CARICOM, with 15 member states and 5 associate members) the Organization of American States (OAS, with 35 member states) the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations (NAM, with 120 member states and 17 observers), the Venezuelan President, the Venezuelan National Assembly and Venezuelan public opinion, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly for sanctions. A last ditch appeal by Representative John Conyers of Michigan and 13 other progressive Democrats who opposed sanctions and called for restoration of diplomatic relations between the two nations was also ignored.

On May 9, representatives of both parties on the Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Representatives voted to recommend the bill that imposes sanctions on Venezuela and authorize increased money to fund opposition organizations. Today, after 20 minutes of debate, the full House, which includes

435 members, voted by voice to support the bill.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, headed by Florida politician Marco Rubio, has also voted in favor of the bill. Next, the full Senate must vote and then President Obama would have to sign the bill before it becomes law.

However, as Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro reminded his radio program listeners, “(U.S.) laws do not have jurisdiction outside of U.S. territory. The North American government cannot approve legislation to sanction the inhabitants of another country. Any sanctions law approved by the U.S. is spurious. We reject it and will confront it in forums worldwide.” He warned that the “interfering conduct” of the U.S. will continue to evoke international repudiation.

Last week the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) condemned U.S. “interference,” approved the peace process initiated by the Bolivarian government and declared U.S. meddling an obstacle to national dialog.

May 27, the Movement of Nonaligned Countries (NAM), which represents 188 countries, meeting in Algiers, also condemned U.S. violation of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of another country. Moreover, NAM agreed to hold their 2015 Meeting in Caracas when Venezuela will assume the presidency of the Nonaligned Movement. Further, the Organization of American States, once under greater U.S. influence, has also rejected possible interference in the Venezuelan peace process.

Venezuela's foreign minister Elias Jaua also plans to call for a condemnation of U.S. interference at the Summit of the G-77 plus China, which meets in Bolivia, June 14-15, and at the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (CELAC) which meets next month.

The respected Hinterlaces Venezuelan polling organization, based on questions asked May 10-12, found that 73 percent of Venezuelans oppose sanctions when the ostensible reason is for "limiting press freedoms" and 67 percent do when it is for "human rights abuses."

Since the opposition's movement of protests and often violent unrest erupted in February, the hard-line wing of which openly calls for Maduro's ouster, various Venezuelan officials have exposed what they say is US government collusion with the domestic opposition to overthrow the Bolivarian government.

Today, Maduro illuminated new evidence that Kenneth Whitaker, the U.S. Ambassador to Columbia, has been involved in a plot to destabilize the government. It has been suggested that, in a symbiotic relationship, U.S. threats of sanctions en-

courage the violence of the opposition while the Venezuelan rightists' disruptive violence further encourage and "justify" U.S. intervention.

Some observers have argued that it is no accident that after a lull in violence in the wealthy eastern areas of Caracas there was a resurgence of violence when U.S. sanctions were first tabled, while the opposition MUD coalition quit peace talks being held with the government in the wake of the initial Congressional Committee's vote to approve sanctions.

Vicente Bello, a representative of the opposition's MUD coalition, told the *Miami Herald*, May 27, that he supports sanctions, "as long as they don't hurt the general population." Various right-wing Venezuelan groups with bases in Miami have lobbied hard for sanctions. While Obama has made some statements against sanctions, his reasons do not appear to have to do with support for the principle of non-intervention. Rather, it is likely he recognizes that if the U.S. moves unilaterally against Venezuela, it will incur greater resistance on the part of other Latin American countries he is currently courting.

Meanwhile, during the debate and various denunciations made, little mention has been made of the increased and open financial support the bill would give the Venezuelan opposition. While the sanctions against the people the State Department may put on a list of "human rights violators" will not likely affect existing political support for the government, the fact of the sanctions and millions of extra funding flowing to opposition organizations may continue to erode the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the conflict. [...] ([venezuelanalysis.com/news/10707](http://venezuelanalysis.com/news/10707))

## UNASUR Rejects Planned U.S. Sanctions on Venezuelan Officials

*El Universal, Venezuela, May 24, 2014*

The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) on May 23 rejected a legislative initiative, which is being processed in the United States in order to impose sanctions on Venezuelan officials in connection with the protests facing the South American country in the last three months. [The sanctions have passed the House and are to be debated in the Senate in the coming weeks. The Senate must pass the bill, any differences worked out and voted on, and then President Obama needs to sign before it becomes law — *VOR* Ed. note]

UNASUR foreign ministers and officials — gathered at the Ecuadorian Galapagos Islands — signed a statement remarking that the intended sanctions violate the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of other states and undermined the current process of dialogue between the Venezuelan government and opposition.

Such sanctions are also "an obstacle" for the Venezuelan people "to overcome their hardships with independence, peace and democracy," the foreign ministers stressed in their resolution.

Earlier, during the meeting held on Thursday and Friday, the UNASUR foreign ministers received a report from the regional

bloc's taskforce mediating in the government talks with the opposition in Venezuela, which comprises the foreign ministers of Ecuador, Ricardo Patiño; Brazil, Luiz Alberto Figueiredo, and Colombia, María Ángela Holguín.

Meanwhile, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua said the US initiative has been approved by the Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate to punish "officials who have been leading the restoration of public order and the guaranteeing of peace and stability for the Venezuelan people." Protests and violent unrest in Venezuela over the last three months have left more than 40 people dead.

The targeted officials include military and police officers, governors of Venezuelan states and Venezuela's Attorney General Luisa Ortega Díaz, Jaua said during a press conference at the end of the ministerial meeting.

He added that the US initiative also provides for \$15 million to fund Venezuelan opposition groups, regardless of "whether they engage in politics peacefully" or act violently.

(UNASUR includes 12 member states: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, Uruguay and Venezuela.)

# Venezuela's Maduro Announces Reforms to Widen Social Programs

*Ewan Robertson, Venezuelanalysis.com*

Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro has announced a series of reforms to the system of state-run social programs, known as “missions”, in order to improve their reach and performance.

Key initiatives include unifying the missions' administration, merging programs with similar aims and beneficiaries, and passing a law to ingrain the mission system into the nation's legal framework.

Maduro said the reforms would be carried out this coming month to unify the missions into an integrated national welfare system.

“I'm going to declare June the month of the National System of Missions and Great Missions. The whole month is going to be dedicated to launching, re-launching and widening the spectrum of benefits for the Venezuelan people through the missions,” he said last week on his radio program *Contact with Maduro*.

The first missions were launched by former president Hugo Chavez in 2003 as programs funded by oil income and aimed at directly addressing the various social needs of the population. They sought to guarantee free medical attention, widen access to free education, and eliminate hunger and illiteracy.

Later programs have been added to the system, such as public housing construction, social welfare payments, employment and cultural programs, anti-crime strategies, and an animal welfare scheme. A total of thirty-seven missions are currently in operation.

Critics have either labeled the missions as “populist” and designed to buy the political support of the poor, or as ill thought out “largesse” in public spending. Supporters meanwhile point out that both government supporters and opponents benefit from the missions, and that the programs have improved the quality of life of the nation's majority.

Nevertheless the missions' popularity has meant that the conservative opposition now rarely dares to criticize the programs publicly. Further, the missions have been hailed as one factor behind the reduction in household poverty, which fell from 55% in 2003 to 27% currently. The country has also been praised by various United Nations organizations for achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals early.

President Maduro announced last week that the missions will now be overseen by a unified Administration and Direction System in order to reduce bureaucracy and corruption. The



Venezuelan President Maduro at a demonstration defending sovereignty and the gains made by the Bolivarian revolution

system will also help families find out what missions they are eligible to benefit from.

The missions themselves will be grouped into seven areas for sub-administration: education, public health, labor, social security, food, basic services, and housing and security. Each area will be overseen by a specific government ministry.

As part of this change, missions with similar aims and beneficiaries will be merged, also with the aim of increasing efficiency. For example, all programs focused on child and family well-being will be fused into a new program called Homes of the Nation.

The Venezuelan president argued that the mission system was at the heart of the country's development model. As such, in addition to “ending poverty and misery”, he said that overall aims of the mission system were “the construction and generation of a new socialist model”, “to convert Venezuelan into a productive economic power”, and “to contribute to peace and life”.

“The missions and great missions acquire the character of building a socialist society I convoke all mission members to go from simple beneficiaries to protagonists in the construction of socialism,” Maduro exhorted to listeners.

Finally, Maduro announced that he will use presidential powers to pass a law to grant greater legal protection to the mission system. The law will have “organic status”, meaning that it will enjoy the same legal power as the national constitution and can only be reformed or annulled by a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

The president argued this was necessary because, “The bourgeoisie want to torpedo [the mission system] whenever they are able to.”



# Dirty Hand of National Endowment for Democracy in Venezuela

*Eva Golinger, Postcards from the Revolution*

Anti-government protests in Venezuela that seek regime change have been led by several individuals and organizations with close ties to the U.S. government. Leopoldo Lopez and Maria Corina Machado — two of the public leaders behind the violent protests that started in February — have long histories as collaborators, grantees and agents of Washington. The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have channeled multi-million dollar funding to Lopez's political parties Primero Justicia and Voluntad Popular, and Machado's NGO Sumate and her electoral campaigns.

These Washington agencies have also filtered more than \$14 million to opposition groups in Venezuela between 2013 and 2014, including funding for their political campaigns in 2013 and for the current anti-government protests in 2014. This continues the pattern of financing from the U.S. government to anti-Chavez groups in Venezuela since 2001, when millions of dollars were given to organizations from so-called civil society to execute a *coup d'etat* against President Chavez in April 2002. After their failure days later, USAID opened an Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Caracas to, together with the NED, inject more than \$100 million in efforts to undermine the Chavez government and reinforce the opposition during the following 8 years.

At the beginning of 2011, after being publicly exposed for its grave violations of Venezuelan law and sovereignty, the OTI closed its doors in Venezuela and USAID operations were transferred to its offices in the U.S. The flow of money to anti-government groups did not stop, despite the enactment by Venezuela's National Assembly of the Law of Political Sovereignty and National Self-Determination at the end of 2010, which outright prohibits foreign funding of political groups in the country. U.S. agencies and the Venezuelan groups that receive their money continue to violate the law with impunity. In the Obama Administration's Foreign Operations Budgets, between \$5-6 million have been included to fund opposition groups in Venezuela through USAID since 2012.

The NED, a "foundation" created by Congress in 1983 to essentially do the CIA's work overtly, has been one of the principal financiers of destabilization in Venezuela throughout the Chavez administration and now against President Maduro. According to the NED's 2013 annual report, the agency channeled more than \$2.3 million to Venezuelan opposition groups and projects. Within that figure, \$1,787,300 went directly to anti-government groups within Venezuela, while another \$590,000 was distributed to regional organizations that work with and fund the Venezuelan opposition. More than \$300,000 was directed towards efforts to develop a new generation of youth leaders to oppose Maduro's government politically.

One of the groups funded by the NED to specifically work with youth is FORMA (<http://www.forma.org.ve>), an organization led by Cesar Briceño and tied to Venezuelan banker Oscar Garcia Mendoza. Garcia Mendoza runs the Banco Venezolano de Credito, a Venezuelan bank that has served as the filter for the flow of dollars from the NED and USAID to opposition groups in Venezuela, including Sumate, CEDICE, Sin Mordaza, Observatorio Venezolano de Prisiones



Mass demonstration in Caracas supports government and opposes U.S. interference, calling for peace and an end to violence by U.S.-backed anti-government forces.

and FORMA, amongst others.

Another significant part of NED funds in Venezuela from 2013-2014 was given to groups and initiatives that work in media and run the campaign to discredit the government of President Maduro. Some of the more active media organizations outwardly opposed to Maduro and receiving NED funds include Espacio Publico, Instituto Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS), Sin Mordaza and GALI. Throughout the past year, an unprecedented media war has been waged against the Venezuelan government and President Maduro directly, which has intensified during the past few months of protests.

In direct violation of Venezuelan law, the NED also funded the opposition coalition, the Democratic Unity Table (MUD), via the U.S. International Republican Institute (IRI), with \$100,000 to “share lessons learned with [anti-government groups] in Nicaragua, Argentina and Bolivia...and allow for the adaptation of the Venezuelan experience in these countries.” Regarding this initiative, the NED 2013 annual report specifically states its aim: “To develop the ability of political and civil society actors from Nicaragua, Argentina and Bolivia to work on national, issue-based agendas for their respective countries using lessons learned and best practices from successful Venezuelan counterparts. The Institute will facilitate an exchange of experiences between the Venezuelan Democratic Unity Roundtable and counterparts in Bolivia, Nicaragua and Argentina. IRI will bring these actors together through a series of tailored activities that will allow for the adaptation of the Venezuelan experience in these countries.”

IRI has helped to build right-wing opposition parties Primero Justicia and Voluntad Popular, and has worked with the anti-government coalition in Venezuela since before the 2002 *coup d'état* against Chavez. In fact, IRI's president at that time, George Folsom, outwardly applauded the coup and celebrated IRI's role in a press release claiming, “The Institute has served as a bridge between the nation's political parties and all civil society groups to help Venezuelans forge a new democratic future “

Detailed in a report published by the Spanish institute FRIDE in 2010, international agencies that fund the Venezuelan opposition violate currency control laws in order to get their dollars to the recipients. Also confirmed in the FRIDE report was the fact that the majority of international agencies, with the exception of the European Commission, are bringing in foreign money and changing it on the black market, in clear violation of Venezuelan law. In some cases, as the FRIDE analysis reports, the agencies open bank accounts abroad for the Venezuelan groups or they bring them the money in hard cash. The U.S. Embassy in Caracas could also use the diplomatic pouch to bring large quantities of unaccounted dollars and euros into the country that are later handed over illegally to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

What is clear is that the U.S. government continues to feed efforts to destabilize Venezuela in clear violation of the law. Stronger legal measures and enforcement may be necessary to ensure the sovereignty and defense of Venezuela's democracy.

# Venezuelan Government Exposes Plot to Assassinate President Maduro

*Z.C. Dutka, San Francisco, May 30, 2014*

On May 28, Venezuelan authorities publicized correspondences between opposition leaders and U.S. diplomats, which, they say, constitute a plan to assassinate president Nicolas Maduro and overthrow his administration.

Jorge Rodriguez, mayor of Libertador municipality and leader of the governing political party, presented data collected by Venezuelan intelligence agencies, which point to opposition figure Maria Corina Machado as the principle strategist of the proposed “annihilation” of Maduro.

“I believe the time has come to join forces, make the necessary calls, and obtain the financing to annihilate Maduro and the rest will come falling down,” read one of Machado's emails intercepted by government security agencies.

Opposition spokespeople have alternately challenged the authenticity of the emails and cast doubt that their content serves as evidence of a fully formed plot. Machado was already facing charges for incitement and crimes against the homeland earlier this year, and was linked to the failed 2001 *coup d'état* on Hugo Chavez.

Since February, Machado has called for Maduro's immediate ouster in public rallies, and repeatedly encouraged the

“street action” that led to violent street blockades in many Venezuelan cities, which have resulted in the deaths of 42 people. The victims include pro and anti government demonstrators, nonpartisan citizens, numerous security personnel and the additional destruction of universities, transit and other public property.

In March, Machado began to petition for foreign intervention against Venezuela in numerous press conferences from Washington to Brasilia. She has asked for similar interference by the Organization of American States (OAS) and the European Union, on the grounds that the Maduro government is committing “severe crimes against humanity” regarding its treatment of anti-government protestors.

In a May 23 email, Machado reportedly complained that the international strategy was not working, because it was “taking too long.” The email read; “I'm fed up with waiting. We have to take out this trash, starting with the one heading it and by taking advantage of the world situation with Ukraine and Thailand as soon as possible.”

The message was sent to former Venezuelan diplomat Diego Arria, once a member of the pro-U.S. conservative



government that preceded Hugo Chavez, known as the Fourth Republic.

In correspondence with Gustavo Tarre Briceño, former leader of the right-wing Social Christian Party (COPEI), Machado cited the U.S. ambassador to Colombia as an ally.

“[Ambassador] Kevin Whitaker has already reconfirmed his support and he pointed out the new steps.” When it comes to “breaking international security,” she said, “We have a bigger checkbook than the government thanks to their giving away Venezuelan peoples’ money like presents.”

Mayor Rodriguez publicly called on the U.S. government to clarify whether it was aware of Whitaker’s contacts or if the official encouraged Machado on his own.

In the same email Machado touted her own importance by claiming that hardline opposition ally, the imprisoned Leopoldo Lopez, was “isolated and humiliated.” Other politicians, she said, are just sending formal statements and tweets, while she is “exposing herself” and intends to “struggle until the end.”

Her plans for struggle rely on continued street action, and “ungovernable activist action in the subway, Metrobus, Bolivarian high schools, public universities, and everywhere... We will invade everywhere with women expressing despair at living in a country with no freedom.”

Mayor Rodriguez released additional emails that pointed to the involvement of a number of other people in the plot. They include former U.S. ambassador in Venezuela, William Brownfield, former exterior director of PDVSA Pedro Mario Burelli (now based in Washington), house deputy and ex-governor of Carabobo state Henrique Salas Romer, and numerous self-exiled Venezuelan businessmen, some of whom left to avoid arrest for fraud charges, or arrest for previous coup attempts, such as Eligio Cedeño and Robert Alonso.

### Reactions and Sanctions

At first, Machado denied she wrote the emails. Still maintaining that position, she later pressed charges against the government for unlawful spying, slander, violation of civil liberties and for the framing her for treason.

National public defender Luisa Ortega Diaz insisted yesterday that the files were obtained by legal means. “The Bolivarian Intelligence Service was commissioned to intercept or record private communications by a court order,” Diaz explained.

Although Venezuelan law requires that no information procured by security agencies may be released to the general public, Ortega said the data in question is a matter of national security, and therefore must be treated differently.

“We cannot continue unaware of an attempt on the stability and peace of this country,” Diaz said.



Ramon Aveledo, spokesperson for opposition alliance, Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), challenged the validity of the accusations, asking, “How are we to know if these emails are true or false?”

“Although yesterday’s announcement was more of a farce than an operetta, the theatrical setting was equally appropriate for such a spectacle,” said Aveledo, referring to Rodriguez’s announcement, which took place in Caracas’ National Theater.

Meanwhile Maduro extended his gratitude to the “Twenty governors and 255 mayors who today formally rejected the plan for my assassination.”

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua noted the parallels between the crisis in Ukraine and the protests and Venezuela, “The United States’ plan to isolate and manipulate Russia and Venezuela will not succeed, given that the U.S. government no longer has the capacity to determine the fate of the majority of the world’s countries.”

Jaua took a similar stance in response to the sanctions approved by the United States House on May 28.

“They are completely illegal,” he emphasized yesterday to reporters, while on a diplomatic visit to Moscow. “There is nothing in international law that authorizes the U.S. government and its legislature to employ unilateral sanctions, the only body authorized to do so is the Security Council of the United Nations.”

However, the significance of the measures, which include frozen assets and U.S. travel bans for select Venezuelans, are more symbolic than anything else, said Jaua. “These are psychological messages they [the US government] try to send to countries that have taken a path toward independence, toward sovereignty, toward self-determination.” [...]