

# The House of Terror: How Cuba Has Exported Death and Chaos for Six Decades

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Cuban regime has been trying to mortally wound the United States since the communist utopia burst on the scene on New Year's Day 1959.

Today, Cuba's communist regime is the mastermind of Caracas's plan to destabilize U.S. streets through narco-trafficking and political unrest.

More than ever, Americans need to understand that Havana is ground zero for communist terrorism, destabilization, and social destruction.

Venezuela is rightly getting all the attention after the arrest of dictator Nicolas Maduro, but it is important to bear in mind that Cuba's communist regime is the mastermind of Caracas's plan to destabilize U.S. streets through narco-trafficking and political unrest. The majority of the fighters in Venezuela killed by the U.S. forces who arrested and extradited Maduro were Cuban soldiers who were part of his personal detail. According to former senior Venezuelan officials serving time in U.S. prisons for participating in what they admitted was "a narco-terrorism conspiracy," the Cuban plan was to dismantle the moral fiber of America from within.<sup>1</sup> This is nothing new. Cuba's Revolution has been trying to mortally wound the United States since the communist utopia burst on the scene on New Year's Day 1959.

While many Americans may dismiss this ideological dinosaur as toothless, thinking that no threat could

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come from a regime lobbing insults from a city in ruins, Havana remains a house of hatred; its crumbling architecture a testament to smoldering rage. From training Marxist terrorists in the 1960s, to the pro-Hamas mayhem at U.S. universities in 2024 and 2025, to the spread of transnational crime syndicates in U.S. cities, Cuba's rulers have long plotted America's demise. Today, more than ever, Americans need to understand that Havana is ground zero for communist terrorism. On this 60th anniversary of the first Tri-continental Conference in Havana, which Castro organized as a spearhead against what he called "Yanki imperialism," and which he used to rewrite the rules for third-world militancy, The Heritage Foundation provides this timetable of the havoc the Revolution has wreaked. This *Backgrounder* only covers the Western Hemisphere, excluding Cuba's many incursions in other continents.

## Cuban Terror Chronology

Following is a chronology of Cuban terror and chaos since 1959.

**Year Zero, 1959.** The Cuban rebels-turned-dictators had not yet shaken the mountain dust from their fatigues when they started plotting how to make their revolution universal. Less than a month after taking power, Fidel Castro went on his first foreign trip, to Venezuela on January 23, where he met Venezuela's new president. The communist Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was even on hand to help to give Castro a hero's welcome. In Caracas, he began to plot how to launch class struggle first in the Caribbean basin, then throughout Latin America.<sup>2</sup> Within mere weeks, he set off a frenzy of attempts at revolt, all resulting in immediate failure. On April 19, the 109th day of the revolution, "Cuban and Panamanian guerrilla troops conducted an attempted invasion of Panama with the objective of replicating the revolution that had triumphed in Cuba a few months earlier," wrote Matías Jove and John Suarez in a paper published in Spain on May 13, 2025.<sup>3</sup> Panama was important, as it was the location of the U.S.-built Panama Canal, and the site of a large U.S. Army base. "The operation consisted of a group of around 82 Cubans, two Panamanians and one US citizen, and it was a failure from the very beginning."<sup>4</sup> Undeterred, the Revolution then tried to invade Cuba's Caribbean neighbor, the Dominican Republic. On June 14, 1959, "a group of exiled Dominicans aided by the Cuban government lead an unsuccessful invasion of the island."<sup>5</sup>

The forces of the dictator Rafael Trujillo "were able to quell the invasion, and they brutally tortured and murdered all survivors," which numbered almost 200.<sup>6</sup> Next came Haiti, which shares the island of Hispaniola with

the Dominican Republic. A small group of Cubans, Haitians, and two Venezuelans set sail from Cuba and landed in August. “Out of all the combatants, only six survived, four Dominicans and two Cubans,” wrote Jove and Suarez. Castro and Guevara also tried to launch an invasion of Nicaragua in the summer, and also failed miserably.

**Puerto Rico, New York City, and Hartford, Connecticut, 1961.** The Cuban revolutionaries from the start saw Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory in the Caribbean, as an easy way to harm the United States and thus as an attractive target for the export of terrorism. The cause of Puerto Rican independence had been a special interest of Castro’s going back to 1947, when “as a 21-year-old university student, Castro chaired a Committee for the Liberation of Puerto Rico.”<sup>7</sup> Cuban intelligence thus made a long-term investment in 1961 by recruiting the Puerto Rican terrorist Filiberto Ojeda Rios,<sup>8</sup> who went on to help to found the armed guerrilla group the Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario en Armas (MIRA, Armed Independent Revolutionary Movement). In 1961, Ojeda, who resided in New York, went to Cuba clandestinely and there he also joined the Movimiento de Independencia (MPI, Independence Movement) of Puerto Rico.<sup>9</sup> He stayed in Cuba for several years, becoming an officer in the Cuban intelligence services and receiving training in Marxist ideology and the use of explosives. He was named Puerto Rico’s “alternate delegate” to the Tricontinental Congress held in Havana in 1966, which brought together communists and terrorist groups from around the world (see below, under “Tricontinental Conference, Havana, 1966”). Ojeda returned to Puerto Rico in 1968 and thereafter he and his MPI took part in more than 300 terrorist bombings. After MIRA broke up, Ojeda founded the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN, Armed Forces of National Liberation), “a new terrorist group that primarily targeted locations in the United States, especially New York and Chicago.”<sup>10</sup> It was Ojeda’s FALN that in 1975 set off a bomb in historic Fraunces Tavern in Manhattan’s Battery Park, where George Washington had bid farewell at the end of the Revolutionary War, killing four people and injuring 63. From all these disparate groups emerged in 1976 the bloodiest of all Puerto Rican terrorist groups, the Ojeda-organized and Cuban-supported Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Puertorriqueños–Ejército Popular Boricua (Revolutionary Party of the Puerto Rican Workers Party–Popular Puerto Rican Army), known colloquially as the *Macheteros*—the machete-wielders. In September 1983, “the Macheteros highjacked a Wells Fargo truck in Connecticut...and stole \$7.2 million,” the largest cash robbery in the country in 1983.<sup>11</sup> The heist was financed by Cuba and supported by Castro’s diplomatic and intelligence

services. It was led by New York-born and Hartford-raised Victor Gerena, who drove the Wells Fargo truck that had the money. Gerena made it on the FBI's "Most Wanted Fugitives" list the following year, and is one of several fugitives on the list believed to be holed up in Havana.

Jorge Masetti, a Cuban diplomat who later defected, said he delivered \$50,000 to the Macheteros on orders from the Communist Party of Cuba's Central Committee's Department of the Americas, led by the feared Manuel Piñeiro. The money, he said, was used for the motor home that Gerena used to escape to Mexico. Masetti said he gave Gerena a Cuban passport "and arranged his flight from Mexico City to Havana."<sup>12</sup> The FBI finally caught up with Ojeda in 2005, gunning down the Cuban stooge at his home in Hormigueros, Puerto Rico. He was eulogized at the Karl Marx Theater in Havana, with Castro sitting in the front row.<sup>13</sup> Puerto Rican terrorism, created and financed by Castro, took "more American lives and inflicted more damage" than any other international terrorists until the al-Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center in 1994 and 2001, wrote retired CIA officer Brian Lattel.<sup>14</sup>

**New York, 1962.** Barely a year after recruiting Ojeda, Castro began plotting to sow terror in the heart of New York City itself. The plot was thwarted by the FBI, which discovered Cuban plans to denote more than 1,100 pounds of explosives at Macy's, Gimbels, Bloomingdale's, and Grand Central Station on Black Friday and traced it to five Cubans who were immediately arrested. Two of them, the husband-and-wife team of Jose Gomez and Elsa Montera Maldonado, Cuban state security agents posing as diplomats at the Cuban mission at the United Nations, were expelled. The other three "were prosecuted, and later traded for Americans jailed in Cuba."<sup>15</sup>

**Uruguay, 1963.** The Cuban Revolution was not even five years old when it started subverting "the Switzerland of Latin America," Uruguay, by influencing, training, and financing one of the most dangerous guerrilla warfare organizations in Latin America, the terrorist Tupamaro group. It was in 1963 that, "discouraged by the poor returns for their electoral and union activities and influenced by Fidel Castro's insistence that Latin American revolutionaries make revolutions" not political campaigns, Tupamaro founder Raul Sendic "turned to a campaign for political violence."<sup>16</sup> Wrote syndicated columnist Jack Anderson: "the Tupamaros' impact on Uruguay was both pervasive and perverse. Their terrorist acts created a crisis, which enabled the Uruguayan military to seize control in 1973."<sup>17</sup> After cutting a deal with Fidel Castro in 1966, Sendic went "to Cuba for military training together with other militants, mostly students and also young members of the labor unions, the Communist and Socialist Youth, and other leftist parties.... The Cubans welcomed the leaders of five (competing) Uruguayan movements."<sup>18</sup>

**Colombia, 1964.** Castro had had an interest in Colombia dating back to the 1940s, when he helped to organize an anti-American regional student conference to be held in Bogota in 1948. The 22-year-old Castro, a law student, had created and planned the Congreso Latinoamericano de Estudiantes (Latin American Student Conference) as a leftist alternative to thwart the Panamerican Conference, the precursor to the Organization of American States (OAS), which President Harry Truman was in the midst of founding to rally the hemisphere against the global threat of communism. On April 9, the young Castro had an appointment to meet the socialist politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, but the latter was gunned down just before the meeting. The assassination triggered days of street bloodshed called *El Bogotazo* (loosely translated as “the Bogota Event”), which unleashed a 10-year civil war simply called *La Violencia* (The Violence).

Castro’s student conference was never held. Instead, “armed with rifles from a police station, he wandered the streets of Bogotá distributing anti-American propaganda. Pursued by the police, he managed to reach the Cuban Embassy, where they made arrangements for his return flight to Havana.”<sup>19</sup> But as soon as he became Cuba’s leader, he began funding, training, and even creating terrorist groups in Colombia. Guerrilla rebels from Colombia who started training in Cuba soon after the triumph of the Revolution formed the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN, National Liberation Army) in Colombia in 1964. Likewise, with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia), which originated among peasants during *La Violencia* but then was reconstituted as a communist insurgency in 1964, and the Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19, April 19 Movement), created in 1970. All were Marxist or Marxist–Leninist, and all their members attended training camps in Cuba. According to a CIA report:

Many leaders of the April 19 Movement...including the founder, Jaime Bateman (who also attended a communist cadre school in Moscow) were trained in Cuba. Leaders of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Moscow-oriented Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) also received Cuban instruction. Cuban assistance to Colombian guerrillas was stepped up after the February 1980 seizure of the Dominican Republic Embassy in Bogota. A number of diplomats, including the U.S. Ambassador, were taken hostage by M-19 terrorists.<sup>20</sup>

John Otis, a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation journalist writing soon after Castro’s death in 2016, cites Otty Patiño, an M-19 founder, as saying that

Castro constantly advised unity among the three groups, but that the rebel leaders ignored his pleas to form a “single, powerful insurgency.”<sup>21</sup> Colombia’s current president, Gustavo Petro, was a member of M-19 who has been very open about Castro’s involvement with the terrorist movement. “Fidel Castro helped M-19 in many of its Colombian actions and, we should admit it, M19 troops trained in Cuba, which split the Cuban and Colombian government. Relations were broken,” Petro said in an interview in 2016.<sup>22</sup> The loose-lipped Petro has also revealed that Mexico’s new President Claudia Sheinbaum was also a secret M-19 asset, calling her “a collaborator and militant of M-19 in Mexico...M-19 has given us two presidents in Latin America.”<sup>23</sup>

**Brazil, 1964.** Castro began financing armed terrorist groups in Brazil during the presidency of the leftist President João Goulart in the early 1960s. After Goulart was overthrown in a military coup in 1964, Castro turned his attention to the hastily formed Movimento Nacionalista Revolucionário (MNR, Revolutionary Nationalist Movement).<sup>24</sup> Leonel Brizola, founder of the MNR and Goulart’s brother in law, sent guerrilla fighters to train in Cuba as early as 1964.<sup>25</sup> These guerrillas then infiltrated Brazil’s states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo in 1967. In that year, however, the Brazilian army decimated the MNR. From then on, Castro turned his attention to a group set up in that same year by Carlos Marighella, the head apparatchik for the Brazilian Communist Party’s powerful São Paulo regional section. The group was called Ação Libertadora Nacional (NLA, National Liberation Action).<sup>26</sup> Castañeda says that Marighella’s tactics and writings inspired the Italian Red Brigades, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and the Red Army Faction (Germany’s Baader-Meinhof gang), three of Europe’s most murderous Marxist terrorist groups. Marighella sent guerrillas to be trained in Cuba. In one of its most famous actions, the NLA in 1969 kidnapped U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Charles Burke Elbrick, exchanging him for 15 prisoners. Marighella was gunned down by police later that year and the group disbanded a few years later.

**Tricontinental Conference, Havana, 1966.** It is impossible to overstate the significance of this gathering, used by Castro to proclaim to the world the revolutionary crusade he had launched since coming to power, and to forge and give coherence to a new anti-Western axis. Though the term “third world” had been coined in 1952 by the French economist Alfred Sauvy to describe those countries not aligned with either the United States or the Soviet Union at the start of the Cold War, ideological third-worldism and today’s vogueish “global South” were birthed at this event. The conference, held in Havana from January 3 to 16, brought together Marxist–Leninist organizations and terrorist groups from Latin America and two continents



that were then in the midst of decolonization—Africa and Asia. In attendance were most of the trademark terror groups of the Sixties, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, South Africa’s African National Congress, Guatemala’s Rebel Armed Forces, Mozambique’s FRELIMO (Liberation Front), Thailand’s Patriotic Front, Venezuela’s Front for National Liberation, Puerto Rico’s Movimiento Independentista Revolucionario en Armas (MIRA, Armed Independent Revolutionary Movement, represented by Ojeda), and Angola’s MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola). Even Venezuelan “Carlos the Jackal,” the best-known terrorist of the era, was in attendance.<sup>27</sup>

Cuba supplied all of them with “the organizational structure to support terrorist, anti-American groups in the Middle East and Latin America.”<sup>28</sup> Castro also consciously used the conference to bring Latin America into the Afro-Asian “anti-imperialist” revolutionary orbit. This was a novel idea, as Latin American countries, unlike those in Asia and Africa, had thrown off colonialism in the 19th century, and many had modeled their independence on the American Revolutionary War. Castro created at the Tricontinental Conference a vehicle to give Latin American Marxists a seat alongside Asia and Africa in the emerging anti-Western militancy, the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America (OSPAAAL). The ultimate goal of all this effort was explicit: to allow Marxist radicals and terrorists in all three continents to collaborate and focus on his obsession—the fight against “Yanki imperialism.”

Castro then brought this shared angst and vocabulary to U.S. streets, astutely analogizing revolutions in the three continents to the violence being carried out by U.S. radicals in American cities, identifying it as the same struggle. The conference’s final declaration thus stated that armed revolution in the three continents was raising “the political consciousness of the people of the United States.”<sup>29</sup> In turn, the expectation was that the emergence of “class struggle” in the United States would feed revolutionary fervor in the third world, in a revolutionary feedback loop. Violence was the only means to achieve the desired change, the delegates agreed. The gathering’s political resolution stated: “This Conference is convinced that, in the face of the imperialist violence, the peoples of the three continents must strike back with revolutionary violence.”<sup>30</sup> And the conferees left no doubt that “imperialism” meant the U.S.; the phrase “imperialism, headed by the United States” appeared several times in the documents and speeches. In his written message to the conference from the mountains of Bolivia, Che Guevara went further and even spoke openly about the use of hatred as an instrument of revolution:

Hatred as a factor in struggle; uncompromising hatred of the enemy, which drives us beyond the natural limitations of human beings and turns us into effective, violent, selective, and cold-blooded killing machines. Our soldiers must be like this; a people without hatred cannot triumph over a brutal enemy.<sup>31</sup>

Like Marx before him, Castro confidently predicted that these violent revolutions would spread like wildfire, overthrowing bourgeois regimes throughout the Western Hemisphere. “In many other American nations condition exists for revolutionary armed battle,” he told the delegates in his closing speech,<sup>32</sup> echoing Marx and Engels’s call for the “forcible overthrow of all existing conditions.” The conference was attended by 500 delegates from 82 countries, including “the people of Palestine,” whom Castro singled out in his speech.<sup>33</sup> The conference put a stamp on Cuban protagonism in worldwide subversion. Castro told the delegates that “the solidarity movement, which began in Africa and Asia... has now extended to the third continent of the world that is oppressed and exploited by imperialism.”<sup>34</sup>

The conference Declaration then invited “the working class and progressive movements in the capitalist countries of Western Europe and in the United States...to strengthen even more the fraternal ties of solidarity with the people of the three continents so as to fight together against imperialist monopolies.” It was not the last time that Cuban revolutionaries would seek to spark mayhem on U.S. streets to destroy the United States from within. Castro told the delegates that what they all had in common was “the struggle against imperialism...whose center, axis, and principal support is Yanki imperialism.”<sup>35</sup> Also like Marx, Castro was wrong—revolutions did not spread organically. The only terrorist violence that did emerge had to be engineered by him, and would bring about military dictatorships throughout the region that quashed the revolutionaries.

**Chile, 1967.** Castro wasted no time expanding his push to subvert democratically elected governments in the Western Hemisphere. One year after Tricontinental, urban young men and women influenced by Castro’s constant revolution ideas established Chile’s Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR, Movement of the Revolutionary Left), an urban guerrilla group. MIR cadres received training in Cuba, according to many sources, including former Mexican foreign minister Jorge Castañeda.<sup>36</sup> The MIR cadres, who were mostly from the middle class, established themselves in the shantytowns of Santiago, before they were driven off by the army after the 1973 coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende (who had been a Chilean delegate at the Tricontinental Conference and whose nephew,



Andres Pascal Allende was a MIR leader) and established Augusto Pinochet as military dictator. The CIA stated in a 2019 report that:

Between 1970 and 1973 Cuba's security services moved arms and agents into Chile. At the same time, Cubans helped organize President Allende's personal security and trained many leaders of the Chilean Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR).... Throughout the 1970's, members of the MIR received training in Cuba—and in some cases instructed other Latin American revolutionaries. This training ranged from political indoctrination and instruction in small arms use to sophisticated courses in document fabrication, explosives, code writing, photography, and disguise. In addition, Cuban instructors trained MIR activists in the Mideast and Africa. With its renewed commitment to armed struggle, Cuba increased its training of Chileans beginning in 1979. By mid-1979, the MIR had recruited several hundred Chilean exiles and sent them to Cuba for training and eventual infiltration into Chile.... The training in some cases lasted as long as seven months and included organization and political strategy, small unit tactics, security, and communications. Once training was completed, Cuba helped the terrorists return to Chile, providing false passports and false identification documents, by late 1980, at least 100 highly trained MIR terrorists had reentered Chile, and the MIR had claimed responsibility for a number of bombings and bank robberies.<sup>37</sup>

After being driven from Chile, the MIR sent some of its fighters to join the Marxist Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, which in 1979 overthrew Anastasio Somoza with Cuban help and direction.

**United States, 1969.** Castro was as idolized by American radicals as by revolutionaries in the rest of the Western Hemisphere, and he soon used that adulation to sow violence in the heart of the country he so despised. Havana was the first foreign city visited by members of the domestic terrorist group the Weather Underground after the group was created (originally as Weathermen) in 1969. Weathermen leader and founder Bernardine Dohrn, who later that year would become girlfriend to another founder, Bill Ayers, and is today his wife, led a large Weathermen delegation to Cuba, in August, just one month after the group's founding. There, she learned directly from revolutionary leaders from the communist island, and from Vietnam, Mao's China, and North Korea, how to bring the Revolution home to America. According to *The New York Times's* Lucinda Franks, representatives of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front "advised them [the Weathermen delegation] to build a street-fighting guerrilla force."<sup>38</sup> Bryan Burrough writes that "the Cubans treated Dohrn like visiting royalty, featuring her in

government magazines and introducing her to dignitaries from throughout the revolutionary world.” Ayers himself personally “enjoyed contacts with Cuban diplomats that would endure for years to come.”<sup>39</sup> The Cuban consulate in New York became a liaison office for the terrorist group. Castro’s Cuba also extended asylum to several members of another terrorist group, the Black Panthers. The cop killer Joanne Chesimard, a member of another terrorist group, the Black Liberation Army (BLA), who went by the *nom de guerre* Assata Shakur, died of old age in Havana in 2025. She was a role model for the founders of Black Lives Matter (BLM).

**Argentina, 1970.** In 1970, Castro created the Argentine version of the Tupamaros, the Montoneros. As a Montonero leader, Ernesto Jauretche, once put it, “the command, and the direction of the Montoneros lies in Cuba. The Montoneros are born and die in Cuba.”<sup>40</sup> As Britannica puts it, the group

was known for violent urban terrorist actions such as political kidnappings and assassinations. Primarily composed of young men and women of the middle class, the Montoneros were dedicated to the overthrow of the government in Argentina. They funded themselves through bank robberies and with the large ransoms paid to them for the release of their kidnap victims. In the early 1970s they also received funds from Cuba.<sup>41</sup>

An expert at Oxford University further explains that, “between 1970 and 1983, the Montoneros carried out small- and large-scale armed actions, embedded themselves in public institutions and governmental structures, and developed their own network of publications, clandestine printworks, and arms factories.”<sup>42</sup> This subversion led to a military coup in 1976 and the establishment of yet another military dictatorship—a recurrent pattern after Cuban involvement—after which “the Montoneros leadership in exile forged links with sectors as diverse as the Palestine Liberation Organization, the international human rights movement, and European social democratic parties.”<sup>43</sup> Between 1976 and 1977, with the military junta decimating their ranks, the Montonero leadership transferred to Havana some \$70 million in cash and documents, an amount that the Castro regime placed in European and American banks, pocketing the interest. Late in 1977, the Castro regime forced the Montoneros to give \$1 million of that money to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The Argentine Army demolished the Montoneros in 1979, and following that, some of the \$70 million went to radical groups in Central America: the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador got \$200,000, Guatemala’s Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) got the same,

and Honduras's People's Liberation Movement (colloquially, the *Cinchoneros*) and Lorenzo Zelaya Fuerzas Populares Revolucionarias (Popular Revolutionary Forces named for Zelaya, a peasant leader) also received \$200,000.<sup>44</sup>

**Nicaragua, 1979.** Nicaragua proved to be the only success in Castro's two-decade-long crusade to provoke bloody revolutions to overthrow his neighbors' governments and dismantle their societies. As usual, Castro was involved in the revolutionary effort from the start. According to a 1982 Heritage Foundation study, the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (FSLN, Sandinista Front for National Liberation) was "formed in 1961 by several communist activists" and "was composed of three factions: the Marxist-Leninist Prolonged Popular Struggle (GPP), the Trotskyite Proletarian (TP), and the Castroite Terceristas. These three Sandinista splinter groups, which initially were plagued by internal disputes, united in response to Fidel Castro's promise of assistance to a unified Sandinista movement."<sup>45</sup> A State Department analysis said that Castro achieved some sort of unity finally after the World Youth Festival in Havana in 1978.<sup>46</sup> All nine leading commanders of the newly formed group came from the three components and were self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninists.

The State Department analysis, written in 1978, one year before the Sandinistas overthrew dictator Anastasio Somoza, explained that "[s]ince the FSLN was formed in the early 1960s, the Sandinistas have looked to Cuba for ideological inspiration, strategic guidance, tactical training, material support, and sanctuary," and indeed the Sandinistas received all they asked for. "Throughout the FSLN's existence, Cuba has been a training site." In 1977, said the analysis, "60 Sandinistas were there in various stages of training. Cuba is also both a safehaven and propaganda base."<sup>47</sup> The Sandinistas succeeded in 1979 in overthrowing the Somoza dictatorship, and the Carter Administration misguidedly "provided Nicaragua with massive financial assistance in efforts to win their friendship."<sup>48</sup> By the end of 1980, the U.S. had become the Sandinistas' biggest financial supporter. But this was another wrongheaded policy by Carter. As the Heritage paper put it,

in spite of this U.S. aid, the Sandinistas remained hostile to the United States and suppressed democratic movements and dissent in Nicaragua. Most alarming, the Sandinistas have forged a Nicaraguan connection which actively arms and trains Marxist-Leninist guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala. The Sandinistas have identified their government as a Marxist-Leninist regime and adopted a foreign policy aligned with the Soviet Union. The government has repressed freedom of the press, harassed the Catholic Church and increased human rights violations.<sup>49</sup>

In the early 1980s, said the CIA, Cuba “quietly increased its presence to 5,000 personnel, including more than 1,500 security and military advisors.”<sup>50</sup> Thirty thousand to 50,000 Nicaraguans were killed, and tens of thousands were exiled.

**El Salvador, 1980.** The Somoza dictatorship fell on July 17, 1979. Castro wasted no time in replicating what had worked in Nicaragua, and in a few months followed the same strategy next door by ordering fractious Salvadoran rebels to unite. Starting in December 1979, Castro “facilitated negotiations being carried out in Havana between Salvadoran guerrilla groups” to forge the different groups into the Frente Farabundo Martí Para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN, National Liberation Front named for the Salvadoran revolutionary Martí), “by conditioning his support on the success of unity among them,” according to a paper by a Mexican academic sympathetic to the rebels.<sup>51</sup> The paper said that Castro, together with the head of Cuban intelligence, Manuel Piñeiro—one of the key implementers of Castro’s revolutionary export strategy—also convinced the rebels and the Communist Party to launch an armed struggle. Everything was in place by January 1980, and armed struggle intensified. The rebel subversion had the opposite effect that guerrillas had always produced elsewhere in Latin America, however. Rather than military juntas, President Ronald Reagan backed the free election of a democratic candidate, Jose Napoleon Duarte. Combined with strong military action, the FMLN was never able to succeed. In 1992, its members turned in their arms, and the group became a political party.

## An About Face

It was at this point, the early 1990s, that world events converged to force Castro to take a 180-degree change of course. Simply put, what he had tried for the past 30 years had left a trail of tears throughout the hemisphere—hundreds of thousands of people killed, others imprisoned and tortured, the suspension of democracy, mass migration, families torn asunder, and in the U.S., the disruption of society—and had produced only one revolutionary victory, in the Central American backwater of Nicaragua.

President Reagan had convinced military juntas throughout South America to return power to the people through the ballot box. Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and other South American countries were again budding democracies by the end of the 1980s. Even the Sandinistas, acting against Castro’s own advice, had held elections in February 1990—and lost them. In El Salvador, the FMLN was becoming a political party. Eastern Europe, too, had famously thrown off the shackles of communism, and the Soviet Union was crumbling, eliminating Castro’s sugar daddy.

None of this reality made Castro rethink his aversion to democracy or forced him to reassess his commitment to Marx. In 1986, shortly after Mikhail Gorbachev visited Cuba, Castro said of his attachment to Marxism: “We have nothing to learn and we will not deviate one iota from this path.”<sup>52</sup> But the end of Soviet subsidies and reversals on the field did convince him that he had no other choice but to make use of electoral politics, not to deliver freedom and better living conditions to the people, of course, but to realize Marx’s dream of bringing about the “forcible overthrow of all existing conditions.” Henceforth, he would advise Marxists to conceal their ideology and take up the fight at the ballot box. The aging communist jettisoned the approach he had unveiled to the world at the Tricontinental Conference, but only procedurally. The aim was still the same.

The chronology continues:

**Foro de São Paulo (the São Paulo Forum), Brazil, 1990.** The turning point came at another international conference, this one held in São Paulo, 24 years after Tricontinental. On July 4, 1990, of all dates, members of 48 socialist, communist, and terrorist groups from all over Latin America met in the Brazilian financial metropolis at the invitation of Fidel Castro and Brazil’s future president Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, then the president of Brazil’s Workers Party. According to Brazilian socialist and Foro leader between 2005 and 2013, Valter Pomar, Castro suggested creating the forum to Lula when the Brazilian labor leader visited Havana in 1989.<sup>53</sup> Castro “was worried about the neoliberal offensive in the region,” Pomar told BBC Brazil.<sup>54</sup>

At the São Paulo Forum, the gathered Marxists took stock of the momentous events shaking the world, decided to set up a formal organization with a permanent infrastructure, and most important, to use the ballot box to achieve their ends. The closing manifesto used the usual tortured, deceptive language to explain what had happened: “The meeting reaffirmed in practice the willingness of the left-wing, socialist, and anti-imperialist forces of the sub-continent to share analyses and assessments of their experiences and of the current state of affairs in the world.”<sup>55</sup> “We assessed the crisis in Eastern Europe” and “reviewed the revolutionary strategies of the left and the objectives that the international situation places on us.” The São Paulo meeting, it said, was but “a first step in identifying and approaching our problems.” Socialist victory, conceded the manifesto, “demands an active commitment to the exercise of human rights and democracy and popular sovereignty as strategic values.” All of that was socialist-speak for deceptively using democratic means to achieve communist ends, which had been Antonio Gramsci’s prescription back in the 1920s. In the negotiations for the second meeting, in Mexico City in 1991, the organizers studiously avoided

any mention of the word “left,” because “one couldn’t be ‘of the left’ and at the same time aspire to govern,” as Pomar wrote years later.<sup>56</sup>

The formula that ended up emerging over the next two decades was in fact heavily Gramscian, with its emphasis on infiltrating and capturing national institutions, and then realizing cultural changes. From that point on, communists and socialists in Latin America would put down their weapons and try to get elected on “reformist” and “populist” platforms, de-emphasizing their Marxism or even concealing it. Once elected, however, these Marxists would erect constitutional assemblies, rewrite their constitutions, and make other changes to ensure that socialist principles would be imposed on the population. One example was in 2021 with then-Colombian presidential candidate Gustavo Petro. When asked during his campaign whether he was still a Marxist, Petro, a former M-19 terrorist, said, “I have stopped looking at politics in that manner. As a young man I wanted to make armed revolutions, but a lot of things have happened in Colombia and in the world.”<sup>57</sup>

Since his election in 2022, Petro has been pushing for a new constitution, however. This formula worked in 1998 in Venezuela with the election of Hugo Chavez, the Foro’s first triumph and a dictator who went on to use his country’s oil wealth to keep Castro’s Cuba afloat. Lula was then elected president of Brazil in 2003, Evo Morales president of Bolivia in 2005, Rafael Correa of Ecuador and Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2006, and Ollanta Humala of Peru in 2011, all Marxists who to one degree or another equally obscured their ideology and ran as reformists, and all Foro participants. From the United States, BLM, the Democratic Socialists of America, Alerta NYC, the Communist Party USA, Code Pink, Workers United of Washington, DC, and the ANSWER Coalition, a group that organizes pro-Hamas demonstrations and riots on U.S. campuses to this day, have all been invited to various Foro conferences.

Though the Foro advises winning elections rather than trying to shoot one’s way to power, it has not abandoned armed struggle wherever it thinks it can succeed. Over the past three and a half decades it has become one of the main structures through which Havana and its proxy state in Venezuela export terror and drugs to the world. Peru’s murderous Shining Path Maoist terror group had representatives at the 1990 founding conference, according to Brazilian member of parliament Eduardo Girão, as did Colombia’s FARC and ELN.<sup>58</sup> Through the years, other terrorist groups, such as Mexico’s Zapatista movement, Chile’s MIR, and Colombia’s M-19 have adhered to the Foro. In an incisive analysis for the National Defense University in 2020, Douglas Farah and Caitlyn Yates wrote that many of the Foro’s participants support violence:



There are, however, many organizations and actors that attend the forum annually who espouse armed revolution and the demise of the United States among their primary objectives. Attendees include remnants of armed insurgencies in Latin America, international terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Basque ETA separatists, remnants of the IRA, the Italian Red Brigade, the Polisario Front of West Africa and smaller but ideologically likeminded organizations. The FDSP [the Foro] serves as the central organizing structure of these ideologically similar but often operationally dissimilar groups.<sup>59</sup>

**Venezuela, 1998.** Castro picked out Chavez for regional stardom soon after the failed coup that brought him notoriety, and the Venezuela–Cuba relationship has haunted the United States to this day. Army Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías launched a coup d’état against the elected President of Venezuela Carlos Andres Perez on February 4, 1992. The coup attempt lasted 12 hours and Chavez surrendered after Perez promised him that he would be able to speak to Venezuelans directly on TV. The Colombian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez, a Castro enthusiast who lived in Havana, was to write in 1999 that Chavez’s appearance on TV that day was “a political triumph. He served two years in prison and then was given amnesty by President Rafael Caldera,” and everyone saw the speech as “the first of the electoral campaign that took him to the presidency” in 1998.<sup>60</sup> Perez was impeached on corruption charges on August 31, 1993, further raising Chavez’s profile among his countrymen. Not seven months later, on March 26, 1994, Chavez was released from prison.

By December 14, he was in Havana, ostensibly for a talk on Simon Bolivar, but being welcomed at the airport with full honors by Castro himself. Castro spent years grooming the young soldier, bringing him into the Foro fold. In May 1995, Chavez attended his first Foro meeting, in Montevideo, Uruguay, and became one of the Foro’s main pillars. In many ways, he personalized the Foro’s approach, having hidden his Marxism from the start. “Hugo Chávez understood, from his days as a cadet, that in the Armed Forces it was impossible to promote a conspiracy movement using ideas of Marxist origin as a banner, so he changed his revolutionary and Marxist discourse to a patriotic, Bolivarian and nationalist discourse,” wrote Patricio Haro Ayerve in 2023.<sup>61</sup> Chavez kept this dissimulation in his 1998 presidential campaign, winning the presidency on a populist platform. But within hours of being sworn in in 1999, “Chavez issued a decree calling for a referendum on a constituent assembly to rewrite the Venezuela constitution.”<sup>62</sup>

The radical constitution passed after much legal wrangling, creating a “plurinational” state where racial collectivities, not the individual, are the

legal actors, and where the separation of powers becomes moot. The Venezuelans received technical advice from communists from Spain, academics from the University of Valencia grouped under the Center for Political and Social Studies (CEPS) Foundation. Chavez repaid the favor by giving them millions of euros so they could set up a Marxist party in Spain, Podemos, which is currently in the Spanish government.<sup>63</sup> The new constitution allowed Chavez to remain in office, and he was president until his death from cancer in 2013. During that time, he used Venezuela's ample oil money to prop up not just Castro, but every Marxist initiative around the world. In October 2025, this author spoke with a former senior Venezuelan official who was very close to Chavez and who has since defected to the United States. The defector, who is cooperating with U.S. security agencies, said he was in the room at the presidential palace in Caracas in late 2012 when Chavez gave Opal Tometi, one of the African American activists who months later would go on to co-found BLM, suitcases stuffed with dollars. "Chavez ordered his people to hand the suitcases to them, suitcases filled with dollars, at least \$20 million," the defector said. "Chavez told them that the money was to project the Bolivarian revolutionary project on U.S. streets," he said, using Chavez's term for Venezuelan Marxism.<sup>64</sup>

Chavez's successor Nicolas Maduro continued this support for BLM, meeting with founder Tometi several times. In turn, BLM has been a strong backer of the Bolivarian Revolution, lauding specifically its "participatory democracy,"<sup>65</sup> by which communists mean the supposed superiority of the Soviets' "councils" system over representative, parliamentary democracy. Maduro's involvement inside the U.S. is worrisome, not least since Venezuela has joined Cuba as the hemispheric staging ground for Iran, Russia, and China, all sworn enemies of the United States. But Maduro became, in many ways, a prisoner of his Cuban keepers while in office. Former Mexican foreign minister Jorge Castañeda is one of many observers who believes that one of the reasons Maduro had not been able to accept a deal to leave power after clearly fraudulent elections in 2024, or that he has not been overthrown by the military, is the presence of thousands of Cuban operatives in the country. As Castañeda wrote in 2024:

Ever since the Venezuelan military tried and failed to overthrow Chávez in 2002, Cuba has posted thousands of doctors, nurses, sports instructors, security advisers, and intelligence agents in the country, in exchange for Venezuelan oil at subsidized prices. Current estimates put the number of Cubans at around 15,000, but it has been as high as 30,000 in the past. These workers are tasked with coup-proofing Maduro, as they did for Chávez, largely by monitoring the

Venezuelan army from top to bottom.... But most important is the absolute loyalty of the Cuban contingent in Venezuela—not to Maduro, but rather to the Cuban government. This underscores how unusual the situation is. One could hardly imagine the Secret Service, the FBI, or the CIA operating in a foreign country in the service of an authoritarian leader, but answering only to America.”<sup>66</sup>

Cuban officials spent years lying about the Cuban regime’s sizeable palace guard in Caracas. Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, one of many, said, for example, in a speech in Havana on February 19, 2019: “The accusation by the President of the United States that Cuba maintains a private army in Venezuela is outrageous. I challenge him to present evidence. Our government rejects this slander in the strongest and most categorical terms.”<sup>67</sup> On January 4, 2026, one day after Maduro’s extradition, Cuba’s government announced on Instagram, however, that, “As a result of the criminal attack perpetrated by the United States government against the sister Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela...32 Cubans lost their lives in combat operations while carrying out missions on behalf of the revolutionary armed forces and the Ministry of the Interior.”<sup>68</sup> Since Trump Administration sources told this author that U.S. soldiers killed between 40 and 50 people in the operation, this would mean that most of those killed were Cubans. This obviously raises the question of who was in charge in Caracas of some of the worst actions to destabilize the United States from within—the Venezuelans or their Cuban minders.

The presence of the Venezuelan Tren de Aragua (TdA), a U.S.-designated terrorist organization operating inside the United States, is a case in point. The FBI, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, and President Donald Trump believe that TdA coordinated its actions with the Maduro regime, something that Venezuelan emigres confirm. A Trump proclamation issued in March 2025, stated that

TdA operates in conjunction with Cártel de los Soles, the Nicolas Maduro regime-sponsored, narco-terrorism enterprise based in Venezuela, and commits brutal crimes, including murders, kidnappings, extortion, and human, drug, and weapons trafficking. TdA has engaged in and continues to engage in mass illegal migration to the United States to further its objectives of harming United States citizens, undermining public safety, and supporting the Maduro regime’s goal of destabilizing democratic nations in the Americas, including the United States.<sup>69</sup>

**Chile, the United States, and Colombia, 2019, 2020, and 2021.**  
There has been, in fact, much evidence of Cuba and Venezuela attempting to

destabilize the United States and its allies in the Americas, and coordinating their nefarious actions with the Foro and such narco-terrorist organizations as FARC, which, as mentioned earlier, has received training in Cuba since its inception in 1964. Farah and Yates write that after some years without much action, the Foro reactivated in 2019, a year with many conferences, including a workshop in New York in late June which was attended by the radical group Alerta NYC, El Salvador's FMLN, and representatives of Mexico's Morena Party, now ruling.<sup>70</sup>

Our research across the region with sources familiar with the FDSP [the Foro] found that the coordinated strategy of using FARC-aligned groups to provoke violence in the social unrest in Chile, Ecuador and Colombia was designed at the July FDSP meeting and subsequent smaller conferences over the next four months.<sup>71</sup>

From that point on, countries in the Western Hemisphere suddenly started experiencing street riots that led to political change. Chile and Colombia in 2019 saw major street protests, which were repeated and magnified in Colombia in 2021. Both led to political changes, with the election of the Marxists Gabriel Boric as president in Chile in 2019 and Petro in Colombia in 2022. In the United States, the George Floyd riots in 2020 almost came close to leading to societal overhaul. Aside from the long-standing relationship between BLM and Maduro, and Bolivia's Marxist President Evo Morales, BLM has taken parts in Foro conferences, including one in the Washington, DC, area on July 17, 2017, one of whose goals was to create "strategic links" with groups inside the United States.<sup>72</sup> Boric and Petro presented themselves as reformists, hiding their Marxist past, as did the BLM leaders, with a helping hand from U.S. media. A study conducted by Farah and Yates found that the street protests in Chile and Colombia had been organized with the help of social media accounts based overseas. At a Foro meeting in Caracas on December 2, 2019, keynote speaker Florencia Lagos Neumann, a Chilean Communist Party member, denied that the riots in Chile were spontaneous, stating, "we are organized, we are more than 100 organizations whose goal is to overturn the current political structure 'imposed by the United States.'"<sup>73</sup> Lagos Neumann was Chilean consul in Cuba under the Marxist President Michelle Bachelet, another Foro participant.

**Campuses and Streets, United States, 2023–2025.** Cuba and Venezuela continue to play a hand in attempts to destabilize the United States to this day, acting directly or through the Foro. On October 8, 2023, one day after Palestinian terrorists launched an invasion of Israel that saw the

massacre of 1,200 people, mostly civilians, many of them American citizens, and taking hundreds of hostages, demonstrators took to Times Square in New York to hold a pro-terrorist rally. Israel had not yet retaliated, so the demonstrators could not have been supporting the civilians of Gaza. They were marching *in support of the massacre*. That demonstration was organized by a Midtown Manhattan outfit called the People's Forum, which is headed by a Cuban agent named Manolo De Los Santos.<sup>74</sup> De Los Santos is also a researcher at another organization called the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, named after both the Tricontinental Conference and the Frankfurt School that turned Marxism cultural in the mid-20th century. He is a New York City-residing Dominican who has been going to Cuba for indoctrination for the past two decades. His bio at yet another group he has ties to, the Black Alliance for Peace, says,

based out of Cuba for many years, Manolo has worked toward building international networks of people's movements and organizations. In 2018, he became the founding director of the People's Forum in New York City, a movement incubator for working-class communities to build unity across historic lines of division at home and abroad.<sup>75</sup>

De Los Santos is open about his goals. In January 2024, he said, "When we finally deal that final blow to destroy Israel. When the state of Israel is finally destroyed and erased from history, that will be the single most important blow we can give to global capitalism and imperialism in our lifetime."<sup>76</sup> De Los Santos has for years taken groups to Cuba, including BLM chapters. More importantly, De Los Santos, who has twice tweeted out photos of himself with Cuban dictator Miguel Diaz-Canel, had a direct hand in the violence at Columbia University in April 2024. He held a rally for more than 100 keffiyeh-clad protesters at the People's Forum headquarters on the night of April 30.

A *Free Beacon* reporter watched the rally on Zoom and wrote that the meeting was delayed in order to give straggling protesters time to arrive from Columbia. De Los Santos gave a rousing, Cuban-style speech to those gathered, urging them to repeat 2020, and "make it untenable for the politics of usual to take place in this country." The Columbia students, he said, had decided that "resistance is more important than negotiations." He urged those present to "go back out. We have to be the bodies willing to stand between the police and our students." Breakout sessions on "resistance" followed the speech and the rally ended at 9:30 p.m., three hours before protesters stormed Columbia University's Hamilton Hall.<sup>77</sup>

The People's Forum is hardly the only organization with Cuban or Foro ties to be involved in the violence on American streets. The 2017 Foro meeting in the Washington, DC, area featured not just BLM and the Democratic Socialists of America, but a lesser known group, the ANSWER Coalition.<sup>78</sup> ANSWER has ties to the Party for Socialism and Liberation and the Workers World Party, two communist organizations in the United States, and has organized many of the marches and riots that have taken place since the Hamas attack on Israel.<sup>79</sup> ANSWER has, through the years, also had many, many ties to both Cuba and Venezuela.<sup>80</sup>

But American radicals do not need intermediaries to get their marching orders from the Cuban and Venezuelan regimes. They send their senior officials here to communicate. On September 28, 2024, the Cuban and Venezuelan foreign ministers, Bruno Rodriguez and Ivan Gil Pinto, addressed a packed Apollo Theater in Harlem alongside the executive director of the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, Vijay Persad. Rodriguez, speaking without a hint of irony, spoke in Harlem, telling the same lies he is used to telling the Cuban people:

The U.S. government and its intelligence agencies know only too well that Cuba does not practice, support, or sponsor terrorism. Imperialism keeps dreaming about the end of the Cuban revolution. They dream several times in history. It has made the mistake of assuming that the end of the Cuban revolution is near. Life has shown that this is a terrible, misguided and recurring error.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, in December 2025, two Venezuelan generals in prison in the U.S. after pleading guilty to having participated in “narco-terrorist activities,” Hugo “El Pollo” Carvajal, Venezuela’s spy mastermind, and Cliver Alcala Cordones, the highest Venezuelan military officer behind bars in the U.S, both separately wrote letters to President Donald Trump airing bales of dirty laundry on narco-trafficking to the United States. Both wrote that Cuba’s regime hatched the plot to flood U.S. streets with drugs, to undermine America’s moral fiber from within.<sup>82</sup> The conspiracy, wrote Carvajal, “was suggested by the Cuban regime to Chávez in the mid-2000s.” It was “successfully executed with help from FARC, ELN [both Colombian guerilla groups], Cuban operatives, and Hezbollah,” he wrote.

## Conclusion

The United States has known of Cuba’s activities inside the United States and the rest of the Americas for years, and worked, not always successfully,



to counteract them on the ground. Now that the Trump Administration has acted decisively to arrest Maduro and extradite him to the United States to face justice, he has turned his gaze to the Cuban regime, the snake head of problems in the Western Hemisphere. A day after the U.S. captured Maduro, the President told reporters aboard Air Force One, “Cuba is ready to fall. Cuba looks like it’s ready to fall. I don’t know if they’re going to hold out. But Cuba now has no income. They got all of their income from...the Venezuelan oil. They’re [The Cubans are] not getting any of it. And Cuba is literally ready to fall.”<sup>83</sup> President Trump has shown that he takes the challenges that America faces seriously, especially the toll exacted by narcotics smuggling and street mayhem. President Trump could achieve successes in this area that has eluded his predecessors, as he has on so many fronts.

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