



Tracing bilateral security cooperation: the asymmetric deterioration of US–Venezuelan defense relations

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Abstract

The USA and Venezuela enjoyed a robust bilateral defense relationship for much of the twentieth century. By the 2000s, however, security cooperation had deteriorated. What explains these changes, and what were the key inflection points? Taking a descriptive methodological approach, we use official documents, public declarations, and data on arms transfers, joint military exercises, and military training, to show that the erosion of the relationship driven largely by Venezuela—specifically, its government’s anti-Americanism and counter-hegemonic aspirations in the 1999–2006 period—and was further aided by a lack of US engagement. Subsequent attempts at US reengagement have been limited and unfocused, while Venezuela has turned to other states as security cooperation providers. Ultimately, the decay of this bilateral defense relationship holds serious security implications for the Americas and offers lessons for both scholars and policymakers.

Keywords Defense relations · Foreign policy · Security cooperation · USA · Venezuela

Between 1958 and 1999, the USA and Venezuela enjoyed one of the most robust bilateral defense relationships of any two countries in the Americas. Venezuela hosted UNITAS, the US Navy’s longest-running joint maritime exercise, in 1960, and the Venezuelan Air Force participated in two Red Flag joint aerial combat training exercises hosted by the USA in the 1990s. During these decades, the USA was the largest military supplier to Venezuela. Furthermore, US military officers provided personnel training and provision of expertise, advising their Venezuelan

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counterparts on antidrug operations and helping train pilots flying American-made F-16 fighters. Defense relations between the two countries were so close that the US military mission in Venezuela actually operated out of the Fuerte Tiuna military complex in Caracas.

By the 2000s, however, that tenor of security cooperation had changed dramatically. Venezuela withdrew from participation in joint military exercises with the USA, turned to Russia and other states to purchase its military equipment, and sought personnel training from places like Cuba. By 2005, the American military was no longer welcome at Fuerte Tiuna. How did relations sour so quickly? What did the degradation of the relationship look like? What were the key moments or turning points which paved the way for the growing distance—if not antagonism—in the two countries security cooperation? And importantly, could the USA have avoided the rupture with Venezuela, or was President Hugo Chávez's break with the inter-American military system inevitable?

Using official documents, public declarations, and data on arms transfers, joint military exercises, and military training, we describe the erosion of the relationship as driven largely by the cooperation recipient state, Venezuela—specifically, its government's anti-Americanism and counter-hegemonic aspirations—and aided by a lack of proactive US engagement and a confrontational attitude under the George W. Bush administration. As such, the change in defense relations asymmetric: while Venezuela actively disengaged from and antagonized the USA, US policymakers were slow to recognize these changes and make Venezuela a priority. Public statements and official records suggest two turning points during this period: Venezuela's refusal of emergency relief assistance from the US military in 1999, and the Venezuelan government's withdrawal of its military from joint bilateral and multinational military exercises with the USA in 2005, which led to a US ban on arms sales to Venezuela. After this time, however, there was little further change in relations. Indeed, later attempts at defense reengagement on the part of the USA were limited, due to the global war on terror as well as a renewed emphasis on anti-narcotics and counter-terror initiatives in Colombia (Emerson 2010).

To explain this process, this paper heeds numerous calls to bring description and descriptive inference back into political science research (e.g., Keohane 2009; Gerring 2012; Marcus et al. 2016). It does so by aiming to answer the 'who,' 'what,' 'when,' and 'how' of the US–Venezuela defense relationship, questions that are at the heart of descriptive research (Holmes et al. 2023). We use description as a method, combining 'account' and 'associational' approaches to descriptive research. The former refers to analysis of an event or set of events with no explicit attempt to generalize beyond the specifics of a particular case (Gerring 2012: 725), while the latter offers descriptive arguments about multidimensional components of a phenomenon, often in the form of establishing relationships (Gerring 2012: 726). We offer the description of this relationship as an outcome, rather than as a steppingstone for causal work. In describing the relationship, we create temporal categories that bind the nature of the bilateral defense relationship and security cooperation between the USA and Venezuela, in a manner consistent with comparative politics' focus on 'classificatory typologies' (Bennett and Elman 2007: 118). To describe the relationship, we rely on contemporary newspaper accounts,



official policy statements, available datasets, and interviews with experts and key players, but stop short of ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973).

In employing description as a method, our goal is to characterize the defense relationship between these two countries as well as diagnose the ways in which it has evolved, providing context for causal research and helping policy makers and the media, who seek informed and curated description of states of affairs. Our description is particularly useful to understand what led to the inability of US security forces to play a meaningful role in Venezuela’s 2019 crisis, the paucity of US–Venezuelan foreign cooperation in the 2020s, and the policy challenges that exist in rebuilding that relationship. The case also demonstrates the limits to US power and offers lessons to policymakers on the tools that small states may use to steer foreign policy. Delineating the dimensions of security cooperation deterioration also provides a basis for ways in which defense cooperation that can be re-engaged or improved.

The paper proceeds as follows. We begin by defining our concept of interest, ‘security cooperation,’ and its dimensions. Following this, we assess defense relations and security cooperation between the USA and Venezuela during and immediately after the Cold War using public statements and accounts of arms sales and military assistance. The following section then explains how a nearly century-long relationship changed nearly immediately with the election of Chávez and remained that way until at least the Maduro government. Next, we systematically describe the evolution of bilateral security cooperation from 1999 to 2024 using (1) data on Venezuelan participation in hemispheric military exercises; (2) content analysis of annual USSOUTHCOM Posture Statements; (3) official figures for US military assistance to Venezuela; and 4) records of foreign arms sales to Venezuela. The penultimate section evaluates whether deterioration in security cooperation was inevitable by comparing the Venezuelan case to Ecuador and Bolivia. The last section reflects on the implications of our findings and offers ways to improve this bilateral relationship.

Dimensions of security cooperation

The term ‘security cooperation’ refers to military diplomacy or military assistance. Two characteristics distinguish it from other forms of military support. Security cooperation encompasses all activities undertaken by nations to achieve common security goals. It includes the provision of equipment and other material aid, but also training, provision of expertise and advice, contacts and exchanges, deployment of training teams, bilateral or multilateral training exercises, and the appointment of defense attaches. The goal of security cooperation is to ‘help states avoid wars, manage and settle disputes, and establish a stable balance of power’ (Alagappa 2003). Through participation in security cooperation, states can reach their security goals more effectively and efficiently than they could on their own (Cottey and Forster 2004). Security cooperation is a channel through which governments



can advance their national interests. Security cooperation encompasses many dimensions, including:

- Appointment of defense attachés
- Bilateral defense cooperation agreements
- Foreign military personnel training
- Provision of expertise and advice on the control of armed forces, defense management, and military technical areas
- Contacts and exchanges
- Deployment of training teams
- Provision of military equipment and other material aid
- Bilateral military exercises for training purposes

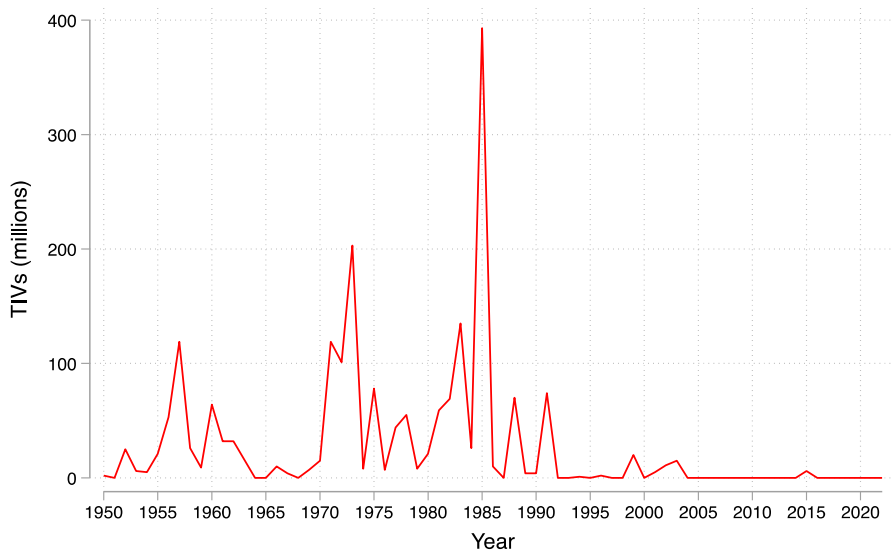
We consider these dimensions in our evaluation of US–Venezuelan security cooperation and defense relations. The primary objective of most security cooperation efforts is external balancing, meaning strengthening partnerships and alliances, against the perceived threat of a competitor. In this sense, security cooperation can be thought of more broadly as a tool of influence. The idea is that military–military relationships developed over extended advisory relationships will lead to increased cooperation and alignment between the provider and the recipient country. In the case of US security cooperation, the goal is often to persuade the other nation to professionalize its military (Metz 2023). Lastly, considered as a component of foreign policy, the goal of peacetime military diplomacy is to bring in greater ‘transparency and confidence in the military sphere’ (Sachar 2003).

Security cooperation and peacetime military diplomacy are means of sharing security ideas with the goal of creating a favorable security environment (Sachar 2003). The mission of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, for example, is to ‘to advance US national security and foreign policy interests by building the capacity of foreign security forces to respond to shared challenges.’ Moreover, it seeks to ‘build defense and security relationships, promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with ‘peacetime and contingency access to host nations’ (Defense Security Cooperation Agency 2023).

1958–1998: a maturing partnership

The USA and Venezuela have long engaged in security cooperation activities, especially from 1958 to 1999. During this time, Venezuela’s perceived security and defense challenges aligned with US interests in the region, making cooperation robust and successful. Two important forces shaped this relationship: Venezuela’s democratic stability and its status as an oil exporter. After the end of dictatorship in 1958, US officials believed that the survival of the nascent democratic regime depended on alleviating the country’s social and economic problems as well as professionalizing the military. Correspondingly, the USA not only supplied some





Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Fig. 1 Venezuelan arms imports from the USA (1950–2022)

\$60 million in military grants and credits between 1961 and 1965, but also trained Venezuelan officers and grew the size of the US military mission in Caracas to become the largest in Latin America (Rabe 1982, pp. 146–147).

As the two countries' economic ties grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s, their defense ties matured. Figure 1 illustrates this evolution as a function of Venezuelan arms purchases from the USA. To allow comparison, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has developed a system to measure the volume of international transfers of major conventional weapons using a common unit, the trend-indicator value (TIV).¹ Figure 1 therefore uses the TIV to plot Venezuelan arms imports from the USA between 1950 and 2023. As it shows, imports were high throughout the late 1950s and again from 1970 to the early 1990s, peaking at nearly US\$400 million in sales in 1985.

The relationship was so strong that Venezuela was the first Latin American country to receive permission from the USA to buy F-16 s, an exception to a de facto US ban on advanced weapons sales to Latin America that President Jimmy Carter (1977–1981) had instituted. As a result of this purchase, at the time Venezuela was the only country in the region to enjoy this type of aircraft.

Of course, security cooperation is also characterized by participation in multinational military exercises. Since 1960, the US Navy has used the UNITAS maritime exercise, to train and increase inter-operability among Latin American navies, enhance security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere, and improve coalition

¹ According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the TIV is based on the known unit production costs of a core set of weapons and is intended to represent the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer.



operations. Throughout the Cold War, the USA relied on Venezuela as a key Latin American partner and participant in this event. The first exercise was carried out in Venezuelan waters, and Venezuela continued to partake into the 2000s (Cohen 2002).

The military relationship remained stout throughout the 1990s, although the nature of cooperation shifted. The change of American strategy at the end of Cold War from an anti-communist orientation toward an anti-narcotics one contributed to a rearrangement of military relations (Romero 2006). Through the new lens of counter-narcotics, the USA continue to envision an important role for the militaries in Latin America. Venezuela's strategic geographic location and porous borders turned it into a primary trans-shipment state for cocaine, primarily from Colombia. As a result, by the end of the 1990s, an overwhelming amount of security assistance was in drug interdiction and counter-drug assistance funding (Fig. 4), while arms purchases from the USA were comparatively small (Fig. 1).

The two countries continued to cooperate in military training. In 1991 and 1992, the Venezuelan Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea Venezolana*, FAV) and the US Air Force realized joint training exercises in Venezuela and Puerto Rico. The relationship was so robust that the FAV was the first air force in the region to be invited to participate in the US-sponsored Red Flag joint aerial combat training exercise at Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, in 1992 and 1996 (Fuguet Gedde 2014). Moreover, American officers advised Venezuelan military officials on antidrug operations and helped train local pilots flying the American-made F-16 fighters.

1999–2006: a partnership spoiled

The election of Chávez in December 1998 marked a radical alteration of US–Venezuela military relations. The charismatic and flamboyant former Army lieutenant colonel, who became well known after leading a failed coup d'état against the Pérez government in February 1992, won the presidency on a platform of 'Bolivarianism,' a reimagining of the state that included economic and political nationalism, democratic socialism, participatory democracy, and a break with Venezuela's previous political and economic systems. Buffeted by high oil prices and broad popular mandate, Chávez won reelection in 2000, 2006, and 2012.

Prior to Chávez's election, Venezuela had never seriously entertained the idea of reducing or avoiding cooperation with the USA. However, under him, the Venezuelan government sought a reduction of its dependence on the USA for national defense, creation of new international alliances, and the promulgation of a multipolar global system (Corrales and Romero, 2013). Central to this was Chávez's personal friendship with Cuban leader Fidel Castro, and Cuba and Venezuela's ideological and strategic partnership (Fonseca and Polga-Hecimovich 2021).

There were at least two transformative moments in terms of security cooperation during this period: the first, in 1999, when Chávez refused emergency relief assistance from SOUTHCOM forces, and the second in 2005, when the radicalized Venezuelan government withdrew the National Bolivarian Armed Force (*Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana*, FANB) from joint bilateral and multinational military



exercises with the USA, and the subsequent US ban on arms sales to Venezuela—which drove the latter to seek arms agreements with Russia and other sellers. These moments were, of course, exacerbated by other events, including a coup d'état against Chávez and the USA's swift recognition of coup leader Pedro Carmona as president in April 2002, actions which further alienated Chávez and his allies from the USA. Subsequently, Venezuela's economic collapse in the 2010s and the USA's 'maximum pressure approach' to remove Nicolás Maduro from the presidency under the presidency of Donald Trump all but precluded a return to pre-1999 levels of security cooperation.

Phase I: eroding relations and a coup d'état

From the time Chávez took office on February 2, 1999, his administration endeavored to eliminate military ties with the USA. Among other measures during his first six months in office, Chávez curtailed US Navy overflights and opposed US anti-narcotic and anti-terrorism objectives along the Venezuela-Colombia border. Specifically, in May 1999, the president suspended the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) flyover agreement with Venezuela for drug flight monitoring, casting the country into a black hole for US counter-narcotics intelligence gathering (Antillano et al. 2016). In doing so, Venezuelan Foreign Minister José Vicente Rangel argued that Venezuela had the drug interdiction situation under control and thus did not need outside interference (Rohteraug 1999).

Chávez later refused US military help during the Venezuela's devastating December 1999 floods. When massive mudslides in coastal Vargas state killed between 10,000 and 50,000 people following weeks of rain, Chávez initially solicited assistance from any country willing to offer, including the USA. In response, SOUTHCOM launched 'Operation Fundamental Response' on 21 December, sending two C-130 turboprop military transport aircrafts with a Reverse Osmosis Water Purification Unit, 727 hygiene kits, blankets, chlorine and iodine tablets, and other supplies (Global Security 2000), and ultimately delivering 673 tons of food and water and distributing more than \$650,000 worth of medical supplies (Brand 2001).

Nonetheless, Chávez would soon rebuff this offer. On December 24, President Clinton authorized the DoD to draw down \$20 million to assist relief operations. US Secretary of Defense William Cohen then signed an order to deploy two ships carrying engineering equipment and personnel, the USS Tortuga and USS Nashville, to help clear roads destroyed by the flooding. Venezuelan Defense Minister Raúl Salazar complied with this offer, but Chávez told Salazar to decline the offer since 'it was a matter of sovereignty' (Brand 2001). In Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's account of the action, when Chávez was offered assistance, he replied 'we'll take your equipment but not your people' (Albright 2018). The two US ships immediately turned around and returned to port in the USA. This marked a radical shift from the defense cooperation that had defined most of the previous 80 years of history between the two countries.



In the following years, the Venezuelan president continued to move away from security cooperation with the USA. By 2001, Chávez had aligned Venezuela with Cuba and publicly voiced support for leftist Colombian guerrilla groups, positioning Venezuela as a counter-hegemonic cudgel to the USA. Notably, in August of that year, his government directed the American military mission to leave the Fuerte Tiuna military headquarters in Caracas that it had occupied for more than 50 years (Reuters 2004).

These provocations were met with little public pushback from the USA, which was occupied with wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and wanted to avoid being goaded into another conflict (Emerson 2010). SOUTHCOM posture statements given to the US Senate Armed Forces Committee in 2000 and 2001 both tout the US response to Venezuela's floods, while the 2002 report benignly notes that, 'In Venezuela, [the United States] seek[s] to maintain military-to-military contacts where we can' ('Posture Statement of Major General Gary D. Speer,' 2002). Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks, US officials became far less accepting of President Chávez's anti-American rhetoric. Subsequently, US defense policy toward Venezuela became less accommodating.

A failed coup against Chávez and the US government's response accelerated the deterioration. There are multiple versions of these events (e.g., Cannon 2004; Nelson 2009). What is undisputed is that on April 11, 2002, amid a general strike, up to one million Venezuelans marched to the presidential palace to demand Chavez's removal. A shootout between pro-government and opposition groups there led to 19 deaths, after which Chávez ordered the implementation of a military plan to mobilize an emergency force to protect the palace in the event of a coup. The military high command refused, demanded he resign, and then arrested him. Venezuelan Chamber of Commerce president Pedro Carmona was declared interim president.

Despite accusations to the contrary, there was no indication the USA was involved in the coup. On April 6, the week prior, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) issued an executive briefing in which analysts recognized efforts from within Venezuela to organize a putsch. The report noted that 'The plotters still lack the political cover to stage a coup, Chavez's core support base among poor Venezuelans remains intact, and *repeated warnings that the US will not support any extraconstitutional moves to oust Chavez probably have given pause to the plotters*' (Central Intelligence Agency 2002, italics our own). The US Embassy in Venezuela later stated that it had informed Chávez of a possible coup, though he ignored their warnings.

Yet, US public statements further damaged relations between the Chávez and Bush administrations (Cole 2007). Crucially, the Bush administration almost immediately recognized the Carmona government. Beyond that, the USA failed to support Chávez during the ordeal, instead opting to express solidarity with the Venezuelan people, commend the military for refusing to fire on peaceful demonstrators, and maintain that undemocratic actions committed or encouraged by the Chávez administration provoked the political crisis. When the Carmona government collapsed and Chávez returned to power two days later, the damage had been done.



Subsequent US actions helped little. In a wide-ranging 2002 interview, Chávez expressed reservations about US democracy funding in Venezuela and the establishment of an Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) by the US Agency for International Development—a criticism echoed by several scholars (e.g., Clement 2005; Gill 2022)—relating them to the failed coup. He argued that the OTI, whose stated goals were to provide critical and timely assistance to maintain democratic stability and strengthen the country's fragile democratic institutions, 'would generate... in some sectors of the opposition, the idea, the perception that this government would be supporting them. It was that sense of feeling supported that encouraged them to do what they did on April 11' (Harnecker 2002, p. 80). Chávez was more critical by 2006, when he alleged in a speech at the United Nations that the 'The United States... planned, financed and promoted a coup d'état in Venezuela. And the United States continues to support coup movements in Venezuela and against Venezuela, it continues to support terrorism' (*Presidente Hugo Chávez en la Asamblea General de la ONU, 20 de septiembre de: 2006; Huele a azufre!*, 2006, authors' translation).

In May 2004, Chávez finally made good on his 2001 threat via Defense Minister Jorge García, and removed the US Embassy's Military Group (MILGRP) from its liaison offices in Fuerte Tiuna (Reuters 2004). According to US Ambassador Charles Shapiro, American attaché staff members were asked to leave offices at military installations across the country, although they could work from the embassy or other rented premises. That same year, the US government barred the completion of any new F-16 support contracts because of Venezuela's failure to take sufficient action against illegal human trafficking in and through its territory. This period was also marked by Chavez's efforts to coup-proof the military, which included decentralization of command, reduced opportunities for training, and non-meritocratic promotion systems (Norden 2021), which the USA found to be incompatible with security cooperation.

Regional events also advanced the relationship's downward trajectory. In 2007, the Colombian government was working on a humanitarian exchange under which the FARC would release hostages in return for prisoners. Piedad Córdoba, a senator from the Liberal Party, asked Chávez to mediate the exchange, a request that Colombian President Álvaro Uribe approved. In November 2007, though, Chávez broke the rules of the exchange by speaking directly to the FARC rather than through previously agreed-upon diplomatic channels. Uribe immediately terminated Chávez's role as a mediator (Cívico 2009). A few months later, Uribe designated the FARC as a terrorist organization, a change from their previous insurgent status. Chávez again inserted himself in this process by insisting publicly that the FARC and the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) 'are not terrorist groups—they are armies, true armies that occupy a space in Colombia' (CNN 2008a).

Washington supported Uribe's policies toward the FARC, including signing an agreement that allowed the US military use of seven bases in Colombia. Although Colombia defended the agreement as a means to fight terrorism, Venezuela deployed troops to the border, raising concerns about a possible conflict between the two neighbors. Venezuelan Ambassador Bernardo Álvarez commented that, 'as usual,



Venezuela is being blamed in Washington for this dispute.’ In response, Colombian Ambassador Carolina Barco explained that, ‘[Colombia’s] relationship with the USA has matured over the years, and the new cooperation agreement builds on and better organizes that relationship’ (Álvarez Herrera and Barco 2009). Ultimately, as Colombia grew closer to the USA through its efforts to address the FARC, Venezuela grew more distant as it positioned itself on the opposite side of this issue.

While Venezuela moved away diplomatically from the USA, it asserted itself as a key international actor through the formation of several regional organizations. Perhaps the most consequential was the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*, ALBA), an ideological bloc that supported the promotion of international solidarity with Chávez’s revolutionary process (Selmeski 2007). Venezuela and Cuba were the first members of ALBA in 2004, after which they were joined by Pink Tide Latin American governments and smaller Caribbean countries.² One particularly resonant ALBA initiative was the formation of PetroCaribe, an alliance of states that purchase Venezuelan oil on conditions of preferential payment. This enabled Venezuela to count on these countries’ diplomatic support in regional and international bodies, such as the Organization of American States (OAS), to balance against the USA, which having emerged as the sole superpower had a significant advantage in that forum (Griffin 2023).

Phase II: US pushback and the end of military cooperation

The continued deterioration of the diplomatic and security relationship resulted in a second important inflection point in the 2005–2006 period. This occurred after a FANB ban on attending combined exercises with US military personnel in April 2005 and the expulsion of the DEA in August of that year. These events helped trigger a forceful response of the USA: a total prohibition on arms sales to Venezuela which not only signified a break between the two countries but Venezuela’s security realignment toward Russia. In summary, two key touchpoints of the relationship, participation in exercises and arms sales, ended in 2005.

Once again, Venezuela played a proactive role in the precipitation of these events. In April 2005, Chávez ordered the cancelation of military cooperation agreements with the USA and the immediate repatriation of US military advisers who were still in Venezuela, supposedly as a response to US personnel engaged in anti-Chávez propaganda (Hernández 2005).³ Nonetheless, at no time did Chávez or anyone else in the Venezuelan government provide any proof of these accusations. As a result, the FANB terminated its participation in the inter-American military cooperation system, as defined by military conferences, work of the Inter-American Defense

² These countries included Bolivia, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Honduras, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia.

³ In his weekly show *Aló Presidente*, Chávez stated, ‘They were making our boys’ ears burn. They were undertaking a campaign against the president of Venezuela and the military high command, which cannot be permitted. We have removed them and suspended all official exchanges until who knows when’ (Authors’ translation).



Board, and joint military exercises with the USA (Romero 2007). Then, in February 2006, Chávez expelled the US Naval Attaché, Captain John Correa, after accusing him of spying for allegedly passing information from Venezuelan military officials to the US government (AP 2006). In a leaked cable, Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin Whitaker of the US mission in Caracas wrote that,

‘Chávez may view the end of bilateral military relations as a natural progression of policy after expelling MILGRP from Fuerte Tiuna in May 2004 and removing US personnel exchange program officers in April 2005. He may also consider such an expulsion prudent, as he treats the US military as a true threat to his presidency’ (Whitaker and US Department of State, 2006).

Nor did Venezuela care to continue to cooperate in drug interdiction. In August 2005, Chávez expelled the DEA, claiming that it was using the fight against drug trafficking as a mask to support it and ‘to spy in Venezuela against the government’ (BBC News 2005). This invited US retribution in the form of obstructing arms sales: in October 2005, the US government pressured an Israeli company to stop updating Venezuela’s FAV F-16 aircraft, and a month later it vetoed the incorporation of US technology to the C-295 aircraft that EADS CASA had sold to Venezuela (Defense Industry Daily 2005).

The final tie of the bilateral relationship broke on May 15, 2006, when the US government prohibited the sale of weapons and war material to Venezuela. Pursuant to Sect. 40A of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA), in May 2006 the US Department of State determined that Venezuela had not cooperated fully with US counterterrorism efforts. Under this provision, defense articles and services were not to be sold or licensed for export to Venezuela during the 2006–2007 fiscal year—a decision that has been renewed annually since that time. A Department of State spokesperson commented that Venezuela was cementing closer intelligence ties with Iran and Cuba, serving as a transit point for arms and individuals of concern, and maintaining links to Colombian guerrilla groups like the FARC and the ELN (Boese 2006). Consequent to this embargo, US pressure prevented the finalization of existing arms sale agreements with at least two other countries: Spain, which had agreed to with Venezuela in the second half of 2005 for the purchase of two type 10C patrol boats and a 296 CN-235 transport aircraft, and Brazil, whose Embraer had sold Super-Tucano aircraft to the Chávez government (Duarte Villa and Viggiano 2012). Chávez was allegedly incensed over the policy decision and threatened to sell the jets and their sensitive systems to Iran (Associated Press 2006).

SOUTHCOM’s posture statements of US defense priorities during this period reflect concern for drug interdiction and the war on terror, but little interest in trying to re-engage Venezuela. The 2004 report, for instance, no longer mentions any defense relationship between the two countries, nor any intention of reestablishing one, instead merely asserting that, ‘the domestic political situation continues to be exceedingly complex’ (‘Posture Statement of General James T. Hill,’ 2004). The following year’s report, meanwhile, made clear US priorities in the region. While it banally noted that, ‘SOUTHCOM supports the joint staff position to maintain military-to-military contact with the Venezuelan military in support of long-term



interests in Venezuela and the region we need a broad based interagency approach to dealing with Venezuela in order to encourage functioning democratic institutions' ('Posture Statement of General Bantz J. Craddock,' 2005), it dedicated an astounding eight sections to security and narcotics in Colombia. By 2006, the report finally recognized that the Venezuelan government had hindered US efforts to work with the Venezuelan military and admitted that military-to-military relations had eroded in the previous 12–18 months. By this time, the door for cooperation had closed.

As a natural consequence of these policies and re-prioritization of US attention, Venezuela turned more heavily toward Russia and other sources for its military technology and weaponry needs. As early as March 2005, Venezuela had concluded deals for 10 military helicopters from Russia and later in the year finalized a deal for 100,000 AK-47 assault rifles from the country (Boese 2005). However, immediately following the US embargo, Russia and Venezuela signed a \$2.9 billion arms contract. As part of it, Venezuela placed an initial order for 24 Su-30MK2 Flankers on July 25 as well as military helicopters and other equipment (Wolland 2006).⁴ Without the embargo, it is likely that the Venezuelan government would still have turned to Russia for its weapons needs, but the US decision made this all but inevitable.

2007–2024: continuity from Chávez to Maduro

The diplomatic and security relationship has not improved since that time, despite some US entreaties and failure on the part of the USA to capitalize on low oil prices and subsequent economic crisis in Venezuela. In September 2006, Chávez made international headlines with his infamous address to the UN General Assembly, in which he called Bush the devil and asserted that 'the hegemonic pretensions of American imperialism imperil the existence of the human race' (EFE 2006). Meanwhile, the US Department of State has annually determined that Venezuela has not cooperated fully with US counterterrorism efforts, repeatedly upholding the 2006 arms embargo while Venezuela continues to purchase Russian and Chinese arms (see Fig. 5). Indeed, in September 2009, Chávez announced that Russia had opened a \$2.2 billion line of credit for Venezuelan arms purchases (Daniel and Rondon 2009).

There were still occasional moments of civility and collegiality in relations between officers from the two countries. In March 2007, an eight-person US Army delegation attended a Conference of American Armies (CAA) seminar on Disaster Relief in Venezuela, the first US military delegation hosted in country since 2003. According to a leaked cable sent by US Ambassador William Brownfield, the US Army delegation to the multilateral conference was generally well considered by Venezuelan officials. Indeed, as with other delegations, the US contingent received

⁴ The first two KnAAPO-built Su-30MKV Flankers were delivered on November 30, 2006, and formally accepted on December 5 by the government-owned Venezuelan Military Industries Company weapons factory. The next two were delivered in late December 2006 followed by four more in March 2007. The last pair of the 24 aircraft was delivered in July 2008.



special treatment upon arrival and departure from Caracas, escort officers, housing in the Military Guest House in Fuerte Tiuna, and an excursion to Margarita Island. Moreover, according to US participants, the Venezuelan delegation abstained from making anti-American remarks during the conference, and even mentioned US relief efforts in 1999 during the Vargas crisis (Brownfield and US Department of State, 2007).

However, the participation of US delegates did not simply reestablish the old American–Venezuelan defense relationship. In August 2008, the State Department prevented sales to the Venezuelan Military Industries Company pursuant to the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act (P.L. 109–353) for allegedly violating a ban on technology that could assist Iran in the development of weapons systems. The sanctions prohibited any US government procurement or assistance to the company, and were re-imposed on 23 May 2011, for an additional two-year period (Sullivan 2013). Less than a month later, Chávez announced the expulsion of US Ambassador Patrick Duddy while recalling the Venezuelan ambassador to Washington (CNN 2008b). Similarly, in 2010, Chávez said he would reject ambassadorial nominee Larry Palmer, leading the US Senate to drop confirmation (Voice of America 2010). As a result, the charge d'affaires became the highest-ranking person at the US Embassy in Caracas.

In spite of his show of power, Chávez was weakening. In June 2011, he revealed in a televised address from Havana, Cuba, that he was recovering from an operation to remove an abscessed tumor with cancerous cells. Over the next two years, he received chemotherapy in Cuba, and he eventually succumbed in March 2013 after winning a fourth term in office.

Chávez's chosen successor, Nicolás Maduro Moros, continued Chávez's policies while navigating economic crisis and tying his political survival to that of senior military officers. Between 2013 and 2020, Venezuela's gross domestic product shrunk by a whopping 67 percent, the largest documented economic depression in Latin American history and one of the ten largest in world history. During this time, hyperinflation decimated purchasing power, poverty rates tripled, and government services collapsed. As a response, more than 7.7 million people—or nearly one-quarter of the population—have emigrated (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2024). In this situation, the military has become an increasingly influential actor (Polga-Hecimovich 2019a). Maduro recognizes the enormous power the armed forces wield, as well as their vested interest in maintaining the status quo, and has named them to cabinet positions, shielded them from foreign indictments, and surrounded himself by senior officers (BBC 2016). This has not aided US–Venezuelan security relations.

Nor have US actions helped. The Donald Trump administration pursued an explicit policy of regime change in Venezuela. Beginning with the 2017 anti-government protests, the USA and other states issued targeted sanctions against Venezuelan government officials and key Maduro allies in an effort to bring the president to the negotiating table. Additionally, the USA issued broader sanctions against Venezuela's state-owned oil company, *Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.* (PdVSA), in January 2019. It then escalated its pressure by blocking all property and assets of the government and its officials and prohibiting any third-party



transactions with them in August 2019, in an attempt to get civilian and military Chavista allies to defect from the government. When asked, if he was considering sending the US military into Venezuela, Trump answered that ‘all options are on the table’ (Reuters 2019). Unsurprisingly, defense and security cooperation in such a context was nearly unthinkable.

Given the nature of bilateral relations, SOUTHCOM has assumed a different role in its interactions with Venezuela. Instead of engaging directly with the Venezuelan government or the FANB, it has worked with other nations in the region to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants through deployment of the USNS Comfort, one of the Navy’s two dedicated hospital ships, as part of ‘Operation Enduring Freedom.’⁵ In October 2018, for instance, Comfort departed for an eleven-week operation in Latin America, with a primary mission being to assist countries affected by the Bolivarian diaspora who received Venezuelan refugees who fled the crisis in Venezuela. The main goal of these missions was to relieve health systems in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Honduras, all of which faced the arrival of thousands of Venezuelan migrants (SOUTHCOM Public Affairs 2018).

Dimensions of defense relations

Additional quantifiable evidence from the 1999–2024 period represents an ‘account’ approach to support the claim that the deterioration in US-Venezuelan defense relations was asymmetrical and resulted from a combination of conscious actions from Venezuelan leaders along with a lack of engagement from US policymakers. We evaluate 1) Venezuela’s repositioning in the Inter-American Military Cooperation System through participation in hemispheric military exercises; 2) official US rhetoric through content analysis of annual SOUTHCOM Posture Statements; 3) the evolution of official US military assistance to Venezuela; and 4) trends in foreign arms sales to Venezuela.

Venezuela and the inter-American military cooperation system

To begin, the Venezuelan state has changed the nature of multilateral military cooperation in the hemisphere since 1999, moving away from a US-centric alignment and toward South–South cooperation. These actions reflected the Chávez government’s broader foreign policy goals of undermining established multilateral organizations and Western institutions and the creation of myriad organizations with counter-hegemonic aspirations (Romero 2007).

The USA leads several types of multinational military exercises for armies, navies, and air forces in the hemisphere. One of these is UNITAS, an annual multinational hemispheric naval training exercise which features port events, live fire exercises at sea, and advanced scenarios in which participants to work together as a multinational force. The sociogram in Fig. 2 shows how far Venezuela has drifted.

⁵ The USNS Comfort is a non-commissioned ship owned by the US Navy but operated by the Military Sealift Command.



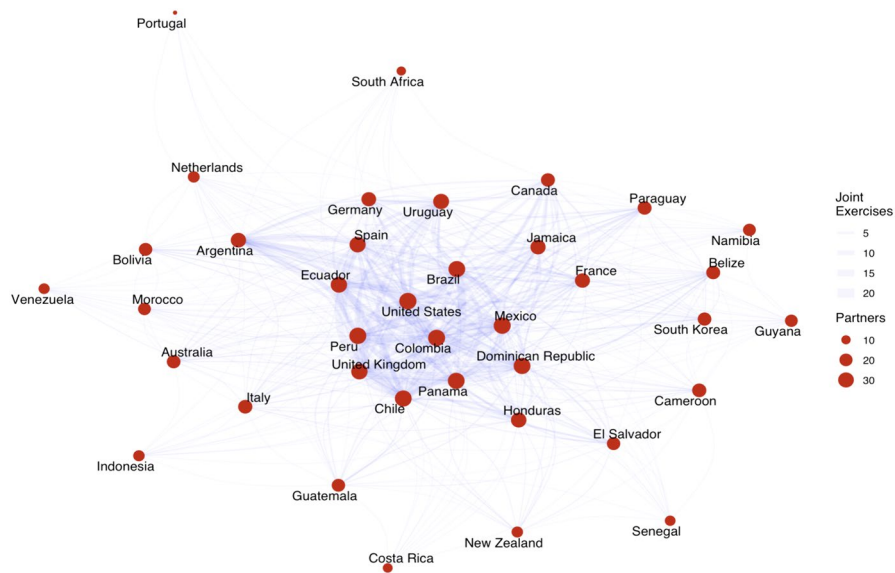


Fig. 2 Sociogram of participation networks in UNITAS exercises (1999–2023)

It visualizes the training exercise’s participation network from 1999 to 2023. The dense core with crisscrossing lines reflects those countries that tend to participate in the highest number of exercises, interacting repeatedly with other navies, as shown by the presence of Colombia, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador around the USA. Those on the periphery, like Venezuela located to the far left-hand side of the graphic, have rarely participated and interacted with few others (see Appendix for full list of UNITAS participants). The sociogram indicates that the Venezuelan Navy is less integrated in the US-led hemispheric defense system than small Caribbean states such as Jamaica and Belize, European countries like Spain, France, Germany, and the UK, and even landlocked Bolivia and Paraguay.

Similarly, after accepting participation in the Red Flag joint aerial combat training exercise in 1992 and 1996, the FAV—renamed the Venezuelan Military Aviation in 2001, and then the Bolivarian Military Aviation in 2007—declined an invitation to participate in 2000 and has not returned (Fuguet Gedde 2014).⁶ Although Venezuela has occasionally participated in multilateral military exercises that include the USA, the Air Force and other branches of the FANB have tended to limit their participation to events with Russia, China, Cuba, and others (Hernández 2018). This is significant: joint military exercises represent a form of nonformal international cooperation and signaling. As Bernhardt (2020) shows, countries that engage in military exercises together exhibit a decreased likelihood of engaging in militarized disputes against each other, an increased likelihood of being on the same side of a

⁶ It is worth mentioning that Venezuela does remain a member of the System of Cooperation Among the American Air Forces, a voluntary international organization between North and South American air forces.



dispute, and an increase in arms sales and transfers. Multinational military exercises can also lead to the development of common doctrine and the alignment of interests and threats (Frazier and Hutto 2017).

As an alternative to inter-hemispheric cooperation led by the USA, Venezuela has also turned to the Union of South American Nations, an intergovernmental regional organization it helped create in 2008. As part of the initiative, the governments of Venezuela and Brazil proposed the South American Defense Council as a mechanism for regional security and military cooperation encompassing all 12 South American countries and excluding the USA. The council's mission was to develop a joint hemispheric defense policy, promote the exchange of personnel among the armed forces of each country, conduct joint military exercises, participate in peace operations, and integrate industrial bases of military equipment (Flemes et al. 2011). In the wake of the creation of the CDS, Venezuela initiated its withdrawal from the Rio Treaty in 2012 along with Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. This action, while largely symbolic regarding the role that the Rio Treaty played in a post-Cold War world, was an equally overt repudiation of the existing collective hemispheric defense framework.

In short, the Venezuelan government since 1999 has not only weakened the bilateral security relationship with the USA but also taken steps to transform inter-American defense relations by emphasizing South–South cooperation and decoupling Latin American defense from the USA.

Venezuela in official US defense rhetoric

Content analysis of official US defense priorities in Latin America over this period shows a muted response by US policymakers to Venezuelan actions. Figure 3 presents a lexical dispersion plot of the words ‘Venezuela,’ ‘Chávez,’ ‘Maduro,’ and ‘Colombia’ in USSOUTHCOM Posture Statements from 2000 to 2023, where each tick mark represents a single mention. The graphic suggests that Venezuela, in blue, was not a strategic priority for the USA from 2000 to the mid-2010s, as shown by the relatively few mentions of the country or its leader in comparison with mentions of Colombia. Over the course of 24 posture statements consisting of 214,866 words, SOUTHCOM commanders mentioned Hugo Chávez four times, Nicolás Maduro 26 times, and the word ‘Venezuela’ or related variants a mere 211 times—8.8 mentions per 8,953-word statement. By contrast, Colombia, in red, was a strategic priority throughout the 2000s and 2010s. It was only after economic crisis began to grip Venezuela under Maduro in 2013 that it began to gain prominence for SOUTHCOM policymakers.

Even when commanders mention Venezuela, it tends to be in the context of other regional concerns. The bidirectional word tree in Fig. 4 gives context to the way they referred to the country. The figure can be interpreted as follows: everything to the left of the word ‘Venezuela’ came before it in the text, while everything to the right came after (the number of words before or after the term is capped at five). The text is scaled, with the smallest font representing a single mention and the largest font representing all mentions. The figure shows that Venezuela is most often spoken of in context with Cuba and Nicaragua, with other countries’ names also coming up.



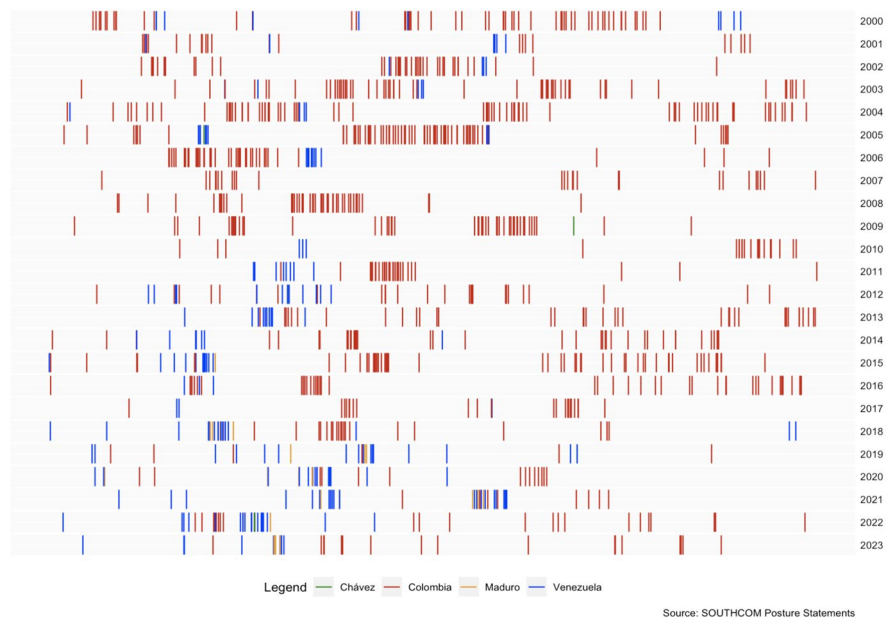


Fig. 3 Lexical dispersion plot of keywords ‘Venezuela,’ ‘Chávez,’ ‘Maduro,’ and Colombia in USSOUTHCOM Posture Statements (2000–2023)

Concerns for the bilateral security relationship in the form of the phrase ‘Expanded economic and security cooperation with Venezuela’ appear only twice in 24 years.

In other words, rebuilding or recovering historic levels of security cooperation with Venezuela was not a first-order priority for US policymakers during the 2000s. Its import to SOUTHCOM increased only after Venezuela was reassessed as a threat to US interests beginning in the mid-2010s.

The evolution of US military assistance

A numerical breakdown of US military assistance, especially in the form of International Military Education and Training (IMET) spending and counter-narcotics expenditures, also helps illustrate changes in the US–Venezuelan military relationship. US military assistance to Venezuela declined precipitously from the late 1970s to 2023. In particular, as Fig. 5 shows, there is a sharp decline from FY2003 to FY2004, coinciding with the post-coup expulsion of US military personnel from Venezuelan military installations and FANB reluctance to participate in joint training exercises with the US military.

One consistent component of these expenditures was IMET for Venezuelan officers. Except for 1979 and 1980, the USA provided IMET assistance to Venezuela annually from 1960 until 2003. Through this program, US soldiers participated with the FANB in military-to-military contacts, coordinated visits by Venezuelan military personnel to the USA and other countries, and combined training and exercises. The





The remainder of the spending shown in Fig. 5 comprises drug interdiction and counter-narcotics assistance—something that helps explain the sharp drop in 2004 and 2005, after Chávez scaled back counter-narcotics efforts and then booted out the DEA. The figure shows a steady decrease in this type of assistance from 1999 until 2011, dropping from nearly US\$12 million in 1999 to just over US\$350,000 annually by 2010 and 2011 before hitting zero from 2012 to 2022. In short, the decline in US rhetorical interest in reestablishing a strong security relationship with Venezuela was mirrored by a decline in and eventual end to its military assistance.

Lastly, patterns of Foreign Military Sales (FMS) neatly illustrate Venezuela's pivot away from the USA and toward authoritarian allies. The USA was a longtime weapons supplier to Venezuela as authorized under the AECA and under the control of SOUTHCOM. As described above, the USA was Venezuela's primary supplier of weapons during the Cold War, and even granted Venezuela an exception to purchase F-16s in the early 1980s. However, as with IMET and counter-narcotics expenditures, the arms trade between the USA and Venezuela also fell sharply after Chávez took office before disappearing altogether after 2003; the US embargo in 2006 marked a formalization of an existing practice.

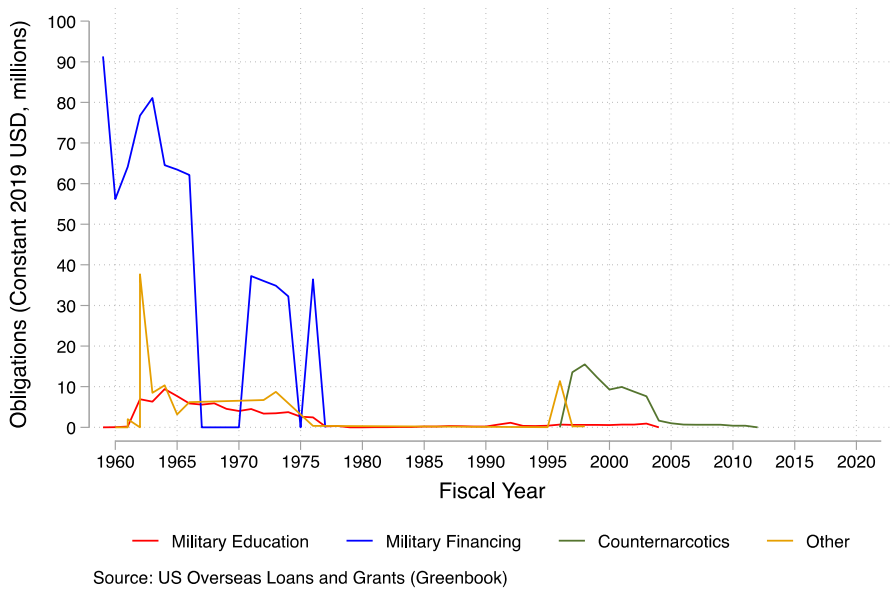
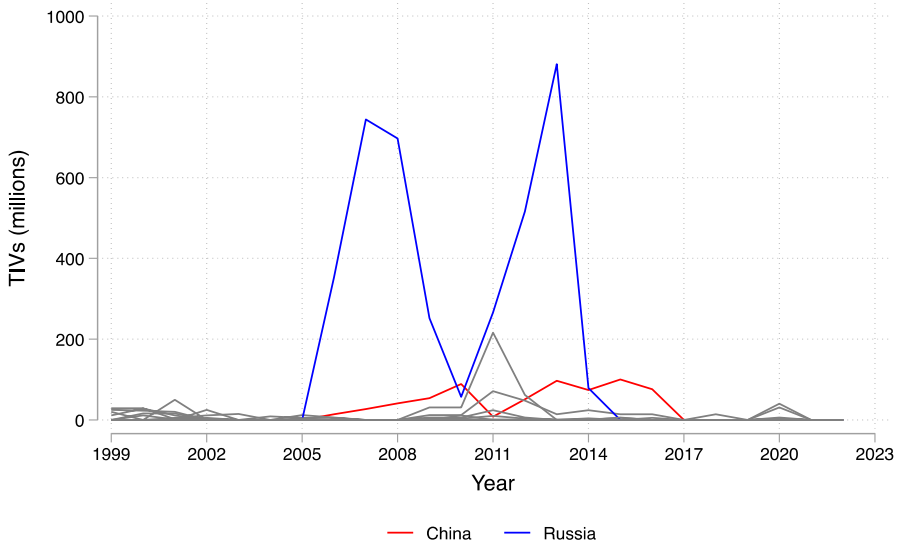


Fig. 5 US Military Assistance to Venezuela, by type (1959–2022)

Other countries have stepped up to fill the void left by the USA. Chávez and Maduro pursued closer relationships with authoritarian states that had not traditionally been Venezuelan partners, such as Cuba, Russia, Iran, and China (Arnson 2021). Despite the US arms embargo, the Venezuelan government was the principal importer of arms in the region and ninth in the world in 2007, spending a total of US\$887 million, after placing seventeenth in the world in 2006 (SIPRI 2018).⁷ This was made possible by Russia and to a lesser degree China, who have become Venezuela’s two largest suppliers of arms. As Fig. 6 shows, imports from those two countries, denoted by the blue and red lines, far outpaced all others, plotted in gray in the graphic. In July 2006, for instance, Chávez purchased more than \$1 billion in Russian-made Sukhoi high-performance fighter jets and military helicopters—in addition to a previous order for 100,000 Kalashnikov AK-103 rifles (Wolland 2006). As the country’s economy and inflation rose, the military’s official budget shrank every year from 2013 to 2019. Maduro responded by circumventing National Assembly controls and redirecting off-the-books funds from the National Development Fund to the military; however, arms transfers and purchases were essentially nil (Tiang and Lopes da Silva 2019). Venezuela no longer purchased new Russian military equipment, although Russia dispatched a pair of its nuclear-capable Tu-160 bombers to Venezuela in 2018, and in 2022, Maduro pledged ‘powerful military cooperation’ with Russia (Garcia Cano 2022).

⁷ While other countries in the region, like Chile, have tended to purchase the most advanced military technology available for professional military personnel, Venezuela has often made purchases to arm nonprofessionals in the civilian militia.





Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Fig. 6 Venezuelan arms imports (1999–2022)

Foreign military groups have also penetrated the upper echelons of the Venezuelan government. Russia's mercenary Wagner Group provided protection for Maduro while he faced threats to his survival in 2019 (Tsvektova and Zverev 2019), while Cuba has lent military and intelligence support to the Maduro regime since the mid-2000s. Two agreements signed by Cuba and Venezuela in May 2008 provided for Cuban assistance in overhauling Venezuela's Directorate of Military Intelligence, the training of Venezuelan intelligence officers in Cuba, and the provision of Cuban advisors to train and inspect Venezuelan military units (Berwick 2019). Under Maduro, Cuban intelligence and counterintelligence are particularly important for the president to snuff out threats from within the FANB, the political elite, or the political opposition (Fonseca and Polga-Hecimovich 2021).

Inevitable rupture?

Given Venezuela's ideological goals and US hegemony, deterioration in US–Venezuelan security cooperation was probably inevitable. Nonetheless, the definitive break may have been avoidable. To this first point, anti-American and anti-imperialist language was an explicit part of the discourse of the Latin American left in the 2000s as well as its foreign policy (Souza et al. 2020). Yet even within this milieu, Venezuela was an outlier. As Matthew Cleary observed at the time, 'With the possible exception of Cuba's Fidel Castro, no leader [in the Americas] is more antagonistic to the USA than Chávez' (Cleary 2006, p. 44). Indeed, Sagarzazu and Thies (2019) use time-series analysis of rhetorical data scraped from the entire corpus of Chávez's weekly *Aló Presidente* addresses to show the great extent of this anti-imperialist rhetoric. Beyond



public statements, Chávez made it clear that he sought ‘defense sovereignty,’ including a reduction in dependence on the USA (Corrales and Romero, 2013). Ultimately, these goals ran counter to a US-led hemispheric order, and US defense relations with several left-wing Latin American governments suffered in the 2000s.

However, a definitive break may not have been inevitable, as demonstrated by the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia. Left-wing leaders in these two countries also espoused defense sovereignty and expelled diplomats and anti-narcotics agents the 2000s, yet security cooperation recovered. In Ecuador, the government of Rafael Correa (2007–2017) expelled the US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement attaché in February 2009, and declared the US Ambassador *persona non grata* two years later. Despite this, the relationship did not suffer long-term consequences. A new US Ambassador arrived in Quito in 2012, and the relationship between the two countries continued as before. Quito still hosts a US Ambassador and a MILGRP, something Caracas has not seen in over two decades.

Like his counterparts in Venezuela and Ecuador, Bolivian President Evo Morales (2006–2019) expelled the US Ambassador as well as all DEA agents in 2008, claiming they supported the opposition. As in the case of Venezuela, the USA retaliated by expelling Bolivia’s Ambassador to Washington and, a few days later, President Bush ‘decertified’ Bolivia for not cooperating with the USA in its counter-narcotics efforts. Since then, no new ambassadors have been named, the DEA has not returned, and there is no security cooperation office. Yet, even under these difficult circumstances, the USA ‘refrained from taking an openly confrontational stance, continued cooperation with Bolivia including with the central government, and, in the area of development aid and democracy assistance, showed remarkable flexibility in adapting to the Bolivian government’s demands’ (Wolff 2011, p. 3).

In short, US relations with Bolivia and Ecuador did not erode to the degree that they did with Venezuela, suggesting that a break in the security relationship was not inevitable. The Correa and Morales governments were ideological allies with Chávez, were openly critical of the USA, and expelled diplomats and embassy personnel while in power. Nonetheless, the countries continued to cooperate in several dimensions of foreign relations and the defense and security relationship has recovered. Indeed, current Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa has ratified military cooperation agreements with the USA as he seeks to address a difficult security situation in Ecuador (Valencia 2024), while the door for cooperation remains open in Bolivia.

Security implications and lessons

After decades of familiarity and cooperation, the defense relationship between the USA and Venezuela has become treacherous and increasingly frail, mirroring the broader foreign policy relationship between the two countries (Corrales and Romero, 2013). There are no defense trade or arms transfers between the two militaries, no bilateral institutional capacity building, and no international education and training programs, to say nothing of the fact that the USA has placed targeted sanctions on more than a dozen current and former Venezuelan military officers. As such, the role



of SOUTHCOM and the US military in Venezuela consist entirely of unsolicited humanitarian assistance to counter a small part of the fallout from the country's devastating economic crisis and resulting flood of migrants across the region.

Heeding the call to bring descriptive research back to political science work (e.g., Gerring 2012), this article traces the strength of security cooperation between the USA and Venezuela from the second half of the twentieth century to 2023. The first part relies on public statements, news accounts, and official records to establish the high degree of security cooperation between 1958 and 1999, while the second uses this same approach to show not only how Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez distanced the Venezuelan armed forces from the USA, but how US policymakers responded by disengaging from Venezuela in the 2000s. The third part describes a period of stasis between 2007 and 2024, as security cooperation between the two states remained nonexistent, an outcome that was not inevitable. We further support this interpretation of events through systematic data on Venezuelan participation in hemispheric military exercises, content analysis of annual USSOUTHCOM Posture Statements, official figures for US military assistance to Venezuela, and records of foreign arms sales to Venezuela.

This relationship and its deterioration matter. Historically, Venezuela and the USA have been aligned in their security interests. Their militaries have trained together, shared intelligence, and enjoyed similar values. The types of activities these countries' militaries used to engage in together—from bilateral military exercises to cooperation agreements to simple contacts and exchanges—is a type of diplomacy that may help to prevent conflict. Since relations have deteriorated, both Chávez and Maduro have frequently claimed that the USA is planning an invasion or a coup d'état—claims that may have acquired some veracity under the Trump administration (Reuters 2019). A stronger bilateral military relationship, or really any relationship, would go a long way toward mollifying these tensions. This is important to the region as a whole: corrosion of this security cooperation has important implications for counter-narcotics and transnational organized crime not just in Venezuela, but Colombia, the Caribbean, and Central America (Polga-Hecimovich 2019b).

The US–Venezuela relationship deserves careful study as a case in which the recipient country, Venezuela, experienced regime change, slowly becoming one of the few autocracies in the Americas (Corrales 2023). The study of this relationship also sheds light on the factors that play a role in security cooperation in cases in which countries have a low likelihood of participating in inter-state conflict. Venezuela is not alone among countries in Latin America in distancing itself from the USA as a security provider. Understanding why and how this has happened can be useful to policymakers as they attempt to prevent a similar decay elsewhere. Specifically, our associational account of the its decay usefully describes the various aspects of contact between the two countries that contributed to the spoiling of what was once the strongest relationship in the region.

Conflict of interest

Authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.



Appendix

See Table 1

Table 1 UNITAS participants 1999–2023

Year	Participants and observers
1999	Argentina, Brazil, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay, USA
2000	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Netherlands, Peru, Spain, UK, Uruguay, USA
2001	Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Peru, Spain, Uruguay, USA
2002	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela, USA
2003	Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Netherlands, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, USA
2004	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, Uruguay, USA
2005	Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, USA
2006	Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Spain, USA
2007	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Spain, USA
2008	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, USA
2009	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Germany, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, USA
2010	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Germany, Mexico, Peru, South Africa, Uruguay, USA
2011	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, USA
2012	Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Dominican Republic, France, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, UK, USA
2013	Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Germany, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Peru, UK, USA
2014	Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, UK, USA
2015	Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, Senegal, USA
2016	Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, UK, USA
2017	Argentina, Australia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Spain, UK, USA
2018	Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, UK, USA
2019	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, UK, USA
2020	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Peru, Uruguay, USA
2021	Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Morocco, Panama, Peru, Spain, UK, Uruguay, USA
2022	Belize, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Namibia, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, South Korea, Spain, UK, Uruguay, USA
2023	Belize, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Spain, South Korea, UK, Uruguay, USA

Source: Personal communication, LtCom Scott Kerns, Public Affairs Planner/Training Program Manager, US Naval Forces Southern Command/US 4th Fleet



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