

[View this email in your browser](#)



January 2020

The VRIC Monitor is a one-of-a-kind, monthly report from the Center for a Secure Free Society tracking extra-regional influence in Latin America. VRIC stands for **V**enezuela, **R**ussia, **I**ran, **C**hina where Venezuela represents the Bolivarian Revolution and the broader Bolivarian Network. Likewise, Iran represents the Iranian Revolution and a growing presence of Middle Eastern actors in Latin America, namely its chief proxy, Hezbollah. The monitor is comprised of open source information selected by SFS analysts and fellows. This is not a complete list of media reports on VRIC presence in Latin America, but a snapshot of open-source media highlighting the major areas of VRIC influence.

Disclaimer: The VRIC Monitor does source a limited amount of media reports from state-owned or -controlled media outlets from VRIC nations. These media reports are carefully selected and solely intended to report on cultural, diplomatic, economic, or military activities that are not reported on by other media and relevant for understanding VRIC influence in the region. Given the inevitability that state propaganda will be mixed into these articles, we ensure that reporting from state-media outlets is no more than 20 percent of the overall VRIC Monitor and exclude any opinion pieces or anti-US (anti-West) declarations of any kind.

Your support enables SFS to further our mission of advancing freedom and security in the Western Hemisphere and around the world. SFS is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Please consider making a charitable, tax-deductible donation to support SFS to continue providing timely, unique research and analysis, such as our VRIC Monitor.

[SUPPORT SFS](#)



OVERVIEW

2019 ended strongly, setting the stage for the tense showdown between the U.S. and Iran in early 2020. The U.S. military drone strike killing Major Gen. Qasim Suleimani, the commander of the feared Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC-QF), prompted a retaliation attack by Iran on two military bases in Iraq, ultimately without any casualties. Gen. Suleimani's death is a huge blow to Iran, as he was responsible for strengthening the VRIC alliance by bridging the IRGC with Russian military and paramilitary forces, most notably seen in Syria where the two nations collaborated to support the Assad regime.

Suleimani's impact was demonstrated when Russia, Iran, and China conducted, for the first time ever, joint naval drills in late December in the Gulf of Oman and Indian Ocean. At the same time, Iran announced it would send its ships into the Atlantic, in a potential provocation to U.S. maritime security in the Western Hemisphere. The Islamic Republic, however, has already crossed the "proverbial Atlantic" with its strategic penetration of Latin America; Suleimani led Iran's covert military operations throughout the region. Though Suleimani has been replaced by Gen. Esmail Gha'ani, the former number two of the Qods Force, the power projection of Suleimani's international image is nearly irreplaceable. His death at the hands of a laser-guided Hellfire missile, sent a strong message to the VRIC: the U.S. will counter this alliance as it seeks to escalate tensions worldwide.

This important development came just as VRIC activities in Latin America have become more aggressive. Colombia's Vice President highlighted foreign influence in their militant protests in a speech on December 11th, stating:

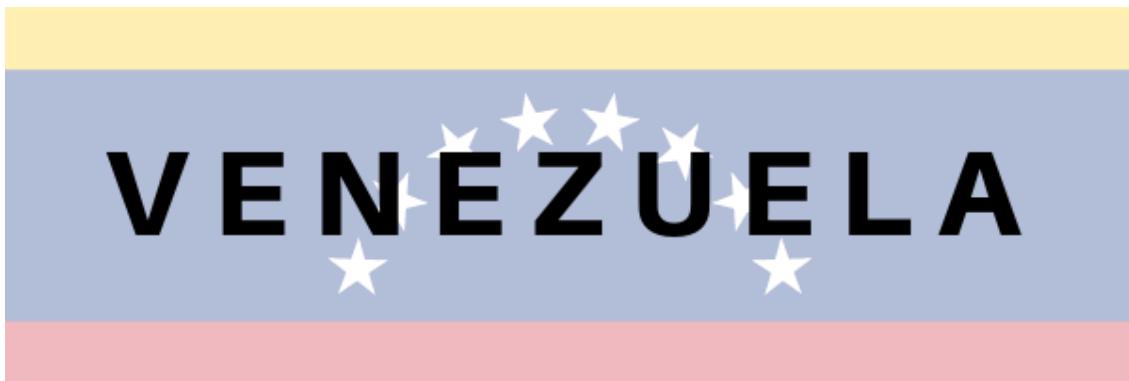
"We know that there is an international project, we know that there is an international support network to stimulate this social unrest" and "certainty that there are platforms that from Venezuela and from Russia have been moving a part of these messages in social networks."

Like Colombia, Bolivia and Chile have experienced Russian cyber influence in recent months and Ecuador blamed Venezuela for fueling its protests last year. Along with inciting violence in other nations, Venezuela has also become more militant itself, with the expansion of its citizens militia.

Recent elections in Latin America have potentially shifted VRIC influence, making it stronger in some nations, and potentially weaker in others. The recent election in Uruguay signals a promising new U.S. ally, while the return of the Fernandez's to power in Argentina is beneficial for the VRIC.

MUST READS

- [Soleimani's Latin America Terror](#) by Mary Anastasia O'Grady, Wall Street Journal
- [Russia, China and Iran launch Gulf of Oman war games](#) by Najmeh Bozorgmehr and Henry Foy, Financial Times
- [Dispelling myths about the battle for democracy in Bolivia](#) in The Hill by Joseph Humire, SFS Executive Director
- [Morales Made Bolivia a Narco State](#) by Mary Anastasia O'Grady, Wall Street Journal
- [Mexico Frees Accounts of Maduro Ally Linked to Food Program Corruption](#) by Sabrina Martín, PanAm Post
- [Venezuela: U.S. National Security and the Threats of Russia and China](#) in Townhall by Ken Blackwell
- [Colombian Vice President says Russia played a role in instigating protests over social media](#) in El Tiempo (content in Spanish)
- [4 ways China is gaining ground in Latin America](#) by Christopher Woody, Business Insider
- [China Exports Its 'Social Credit' System To Venezuela](#) in Eurasia Review by Doug Bandow, Acton Institute
- [China signs on for 'gigantic' investment in El Salvador infrastructure](#) in Reuters by Nelson Renteria



Regional attitudes toward Nicolás Maduro have shifted slightly since the National Guard blocked the Venezuelan opposition from conducting its vote on January 5th to elect a new legislative leader. Traditional allies in Mexico and Argentina publicly condemned Maduro for temporarily blocking Venezuelan congressman from holding quorum, nonetheless, hours later the opposition found its way inside the National Assembly and successfully voted Juan Guaidó to another year as the interim president of the country.

Time will tell if this will break the stalemate between the VRIC-supported Maduro and the Lima Group-supported Venezuelan leader, Juan Guaidó. In the meantime, the Trump administration is doubling down on its “maximum pressure” strategy against Maduro with the announcement of new sanctions against Venezuelan congressmen who helped orchestrate the congressional coup earlier this month. This small victory reinvigorated many of Guaidó’s supporters in Venezuela, however,

the rest of the region is still in a stalemate as to how to solve the country's political, economic, and humanitarian crisis.

The 16 signatories of the Rio Treaty (ITAR) have made strategic diplomatic moves to counter the Maduro regime by restricting the access and transit of 29 people linked to the regime in the territories of the signatory nations. Now a possible naval blockade is being discussed of Venezuelan oil being shipped to Cuba and Russia.

Meanwhile, there is a drastic shift in leadership in some countries in South America; Bolivia, under President Jeanine Añez, left MERCOSUR and the Bolivarian Alliance (ALBA), while Argentina, with the inauguration of President Alberto Fernández and Vice President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, has returned toward the VRIC's orbit. The recent election in Uruguay signals a promising new U.S. ally in President-elect Luis Lacalle Pou, slated to take office in March. This swaps one key vote in favor of Maduro with the new Argentine government for two new U.S. allies in Uruguay and Bolivia after the departure of Evo Morales.

On November 10, 2019, Evo Morales resigned as the President of Bolivia, leaving the country in chaos and ignited VRIC networks throughout the region, as he traversed from Mexico to Cuba to his final place of asylum: Argentina. His prolonged absence hasn't spared Bolivia conflict, when earlier this month, Spanish special-operations police attempted to force their way into the Mexican Embassy in La Paz. Bolivia expelled three Spanish and Mexican diplomats, raising tensions between the three countries.

VENEZUELA AID TRACKER

<u>United States</u>	\$213 million dollars
<u>Argentina</u>	Help unit
<u>Canada</u>	\$53 million dollars pledged
<u>Chile</u>	17 tons of food & medical supplies
<u>China</u>	200 tons of medicine & supplies
<u>Cuba</u>	Medical aid to transplant patients
<u>EU</u>	€65 million euros + <u>€120 million euros pledged</u>
<u>Germany</u>	€5 million euros
<u>Iran</u>	Unspecified pledge & medical aid
<u>Italy</u>	€2 million euros & medical aid to transplant patients
<u>New Zealand</u>	\$500,000 dollars
<u>Palestine</u>	Surgical team
<u>Russia</u>	335 tons of food & medical supplies
<u>South Korea</u>	\$3 million dollars
<u>Spain</u>	€2 million euros
<u>Sweden</u>	\$7 million dollars
<u>Taiwan</u>	\$500,000 dollars
<u>Turkey</u>	Medical aid to transplant patients
<u>UAE</u>	Dh10 million
<u>UK</u>	£6.5 million pounds

- Venezuela's authoritarian leader, Nicolás Maduro, moved to consolidate his grip on power by taking control of the country's last independent institution and sidelining the lawmaker who had staked a rival claim to the presidency. - **New York Times on 05-JAN**
- Venezuela will sell oil and part of the gold it produces for its national petro cryptocurrency, Maduro said. - **Yahoo Finance on 04-JAN**
- Venezuela created a network of accounts in Syria, Russia, Iran, and Germany to move money and evade sanctions. This was the structure designed by Maduro to move billions of dollars around the world without raising suspicions and, above all, to avoid possible sanctions from countries such as the United States. - **NIUS on 04-JAN**

- Senior Trump administration officials discussed plans to “increase pressure” over the coming year on Venezuela’s embattled ruler, Maduro. The State Department hosted four of Venezuela’s largest opposition parties, starting with one-on-one sessions that began earlier this week before all the parties gathered together. - [**McClatchy DC on 18-DEC**](#)
- Venezuela is using “invisible” tankers to secretly export its oil reserves, enabling a renewed uptick in exports that could help Nicolás Maduro withstand the pressure of international sanctions. - [**InSight Crime on 17-DEC**](#)
- Nicolás Maduro announced in a televised national broadcast yesterday that his government is prepared to give away a one-time benefit of 0.5 petro (roughly \$30 USD, or five times the monthly minimum wage) to all retirees, pensioners, public sector workers, military personnel, and other eligible citizens of the country. - [**Decrypt on 14-DEC**](#)
- The sanctions applied by Argentina on the Maduro regime under the Reciprocal Assistance Treaty (TIAR) lasted less than a week. After Alberto Fernandez took oath, Argentina welcomed the recently sanctioned Chavista Jorge Rodriguez in its territory, making it evident the country is disregarding the measures that countries of the region are taking against Chavismo. - [**PanAm Post on 12-DEC**](#)
- Nicolás Maduro is using his monopoly on gun ownership in the country to arm millions of civilian “militiamen,” announcing that he is seeking to elevate the number of armed socialists to 4 million by the end of 2020. - [**Breitbart on 09-DEC**](#)
- Citgo Petroleum Corp’s directors are unlikely to bow to pressure this week to resume dividend payments, two sources close to the discussions said, as the refiner cannot yet help Venezuela’s interim government ease creditors’ claims against its parent PDVSA that also are threatening its assets. - [**Reuters on 04-DEC**](#)
- Representatives from over a dozen nations that are signatories to a Cold War-era defense treaty for the Americas moved to further isolate close allies of Maduro with targeted sanctions. - [**Washington Post on 03-DEC**](#)
- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Cuba and Venezuela of attempting to hijack democratic protests in Latin America, vowing that Washington would support countries trying to prevent unrest in the region from turning into riots. - [**Reuters on 02-DEC**](#)

THE BOLIVARIAN NETWORK

- Bolivia's armed forces hit out at exiled former president Evo Morales after he said he would introduce armed local militias similar to those in Venezuela if he returns home. - [**Yahoo News on 13-JAN**](#)
- Bolivia's interim government said it would launch a corruption probe into nearly 600 officials of the former government. The probe will include ex-president Evo Morales, vice-president Alvaro Garcia Linera, ministers, vice-ministers, heads of cabinet, and public administration officials. - [**France24 on 08-JAN**](#)
- Spanish special-operations police, their faces covered with balaclavas and their weapons visible, attempted to force their way past Bolivian police at the Mexican Embassy in La Paz on Dec. 27. The effort failed but it left behind troubling questions about whether rogue interests inside the Spanish government are working with Mexico on behalf of former Bolivian officials, some of whom face criminal charges. - [**Wall Street Journal on 05-JAN**](#)
- The US imposed sanctions on Cuba’s Defense Minister, accusing him of human rights violations and supporting Maduro, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said. - [**Reuters on 02-JAN**](#)
- Mexican officials say they plan to file a formal complaint in the International Court of Justice against Bolivia’s interim right-wing government over the presence of security forces outside Mexico’s Embassy in La Paz. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador granted longtime Bolivian President Evo Morales asylum in Mexico in November. - [**Democracy Now on 27-DEC**](#)
- Mexico called on the Bolivian government to cease what it said was police harassment of its diplomatic facilities and staff in La Paz, where it has given political asylum to nine Bolivians. - [**Wall Street Journal on 26-DEC**](#)

- Diana Lacayo never imagined that a hunger strike held in a church would turn into a nine-day siege, with the police outside and the electricity and water cut off inside. But to the Nicaraguan authorities, even this modest protest was a challenge to be crushed. - **New York Times on 26-DEC**
- Prosecutors in Bolivia have issued an arrest warrant for former president Evo Morales, accusing him of “sedition, terrorism, and the financing of terrorism” in the turbulent weeks following his resignation in October and escape to Mexico. - **Financial Times on 18-DEC**
- On December 9, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke about the final report issued by the Organization of American States (OAS). The report addresses the presidential elections held in Bolivia on October 20, in which Morales was allegedly re-elected in the first round, and includes data on the existence of two hidden servers used to process the results that were not controlled by Supreme Electoral Court personnel, which, according to the audit, facilitated data manipulation and electoral fraud. - **Dialogo Americas on 12-DEC**
- Bolivia's exiled ex-president Evo Morales arrived in Buenos Aires where he sought political asylum, Argentina's Foreign Minister Felipe Sola announced. - **France24 on 12-DEC**
- In just a year, 9,000 doctors from Cuba's “medical brigades” have trooped home after former allies turned them out, delivering a financial and political blow to the cash-strapped government. - **Jamaica Observer on 11-DEC**
- Evo Morales, the self-exiled former president of Bolivia, was in Cuba for a medical appointment, an aide to the former leader said. - **AP News on 06-DEC**
- Mexico unblocked the accounts of Maduro's ally, Alex Saab, and at the same time, allowed the illegal money laundering business to continue within the framework of the importation of the subsidized CLAP food boxes. - **PanAm Post on 03-DEC**

RUSSIA

Russia's increased involvement in Venezuela has caused some U.S. officials to publicly state that they may have underestimated Moscow's support to the Maduro regime. Meanwhile, the Kremlin continues to send military personnel to Venezuela, as it now controls more than 70 percent of Venezuelan oil.

Russia is also arming Maduro's allies in the region. Amidst a new wave of U.S. sanctions on Nicaragua, Russia sent a delegation to Managua in December to celebrate 75 years of friendship. Moscow has also been supplying Managua with arms as President Ortega comes under continual pressure from political opposition to step down from power. Russia is also engaging with Paraguay, sending top security officials to the country to inaugurate a new framework for counternarcotics cooperation.

The Russian state visit to Asuncion came at an innocuous time in neighboring Bolivia, as the new transitional government moved quickly to appoint an electoral tribunal and begin the long road to elections that have been announced for May 3, 2020. Unlike interim-President Guaidó in Venezuela, Russia has recognized Bolivian

President Jeanine Añez, leading some to speculate that Putin has abandoned his longtime ally Evo Morales. Russia, however, is known to often play both sides of a conflict in an effort to confuse and obfuscate its opponents. Moreover, Putin still supports various efforts at destabilizing many Morales and Maduro opponents throughout the region, namely in Chile and Colombia.

For instance, in Bogota, the Colombian Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez suggested that Russia had a hand in cyber activities that fueled the protests in Colombia late last year. Similar accusations have been made in Chile. But recent reports of Russian military personnel repositioning along the Venezuelan border with Colombia, and in the mineral dense region of Bolivar state, could point to a transition by Moscow from cyber influence to a more direct military role in Venezuela's border conflicts.

- A mystery grows on the border of Venezuela and Colombia: Russian soldiers moved to Táchira in unknown missions. There, they dress in Venezuelan army uniforms, move freely throughout the territory and use Venezuelan barracks, helicopters and drones. - [Infobae on 14-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The United States will take action in response to growing Russian support for Maduro, a senior U.S. official warned. "We are looking at additional sanctions, personal sanctions, economic sanctions that we think will bring more pressure," Elliot Abrams, the State Department's Venezuela envoy, told reporters. - [Tico Times on 07-JAN](#)
- State media reports that Russia has sent 200,000 packages of insulin medications to Venezuela, with more than 5 million packages in the pipeline to be supplied throughout 2019-2020, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said. - [Sputnik News on 18-DEC](#)
- Forty armed Russian soldiers, dressed in uniforms of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB), arrived in Venezuela to support Maduro's regime and "terrorized" the inhabitants of Canaima, according to the journalist Mariana Reyes. They were sent from Moscow and arrived in a Shaanxi Y-8 plan, an aircraft built by the Chinese company Shaanxi Aircraft. The Russian military transported microwave equipment, satellite antennas, and signal inhibitors, among other things. - [PD America on 13-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The Trump administration pushed to undermine what it calls the "corrupt" government of Nicaragua at a moment when Russia is accused of pumping weaponry and security expertise into the Central American nation in a bid to reassert Moscow's once-powerful Cold War-era influence there. - [Washington Times on 13-DEC](#)
- Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega received an official delegation from the Russian regime to mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between both countries. The delegation was led by the vice president of the lower chamber of parliament, Olga Epifánova. - [La Prensa on 12-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- In the middle of the 21st anniversary of the Customs Police, Colombian Vice President Marta Lucía Ramírez blamed Russian platforms for the unrest in Colombia: "We know that there is an international project, we know that there is a web of platforms from Venezuela and Russia that have been influencing messages on social networks." - [El Tiempo on 12-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Pompeo and Lavrov told reporters at a news conference that they had discussed issues including arms control, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, unrest in Venezuela, the Syrian civil war, and the denuclearization of North Korea. - [Wall Street Journal on 10-DEC](#)
- The new government of Uruguay is set to expand cooperation with Russia, senator-elect from the conservative National Party, Jorge Gandini, told Sputnik. - [Urdu Point on 06-DEC](#)
- Maduro rearms with Russian fighters in a 209 million dollar contract and two patrols from Vietnam that the regime commissioned from a company in the Netherlands. - [KonZapata on 03-DEC](#)
- Within the framework of the operational New Alliance XXI, authorities of the Russian Federation visited Paraguay and pledged to join forces for the fight against drug trafficking in the country. National special agents will be trained in Russia and an

open information channel will be established in terms of intelligence tasks. - [ABC Color on 02-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)



I R A N



The impact of Gen. Qasim Suleimani's death has reverberated worldwide, affecting Iran's proxies from the Middle East to Latin America. Many Iranian embassies in the region put their flags at half mast and several of the Shi'a Islamic cultural centers in Latin America held three days of mourning in honor of Suleimani, expressing sentiments of sympathy with the terrorist leader. Joining these Iranian proxies in showing solidarity with the Islamic Republic are certain governments in Latin America.

Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez took to Twitter to quickly call Suleimani's death a "targeted assassination" and the Maduro regime of Venezuela published an official communication condemning the U.S. for the killing of Gen. Suleimani. Cuba and Venezuela's proxies, such as the FARC, also made public statements in favor of Iran and the late Qods Force leader. What grabbed most public attention, however, was an official ceremony in the Iranian embassy in Caracas where Diosdado Cabello, who is considered the number two strongman in Venezuela, signed a book of condolences, while PSUV Congressman Pedro Carreño, stated "your death will be avenged" in reaction to the killing of Gen. Suleimani.

Despite Iran's internal instability fueled by months of intensifying protests by various sectors of the Iranian population, the Islamic Republic continues to court Latin America, highlighted by recent meetings with the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Denis Moncada and Cuba's Ambassador to Iran Alexis Bandrich Vega.

Meanwhile, the new Argentine President Alberto Fernández recently commented on the Nisman case, alleging that there is not enough evidence to declare Nisman murdered, signaling a reversal from the Macri government's previous position declaring Nisman's death a homicide. Mohsen Rabbani, an Iranian accused in the 1994 attack on the AMIA, has broken his silence on the Nisman case. In a recent interview with Radio 10, he stated that Nisman was likely killed due to his lack of evidence proving Iran's involvement in the AMIA attack. Alberto Nisman had accused Rabbani of being the mastermind of the attack, and his mysterious death, the day before testifying before congress, holds a key to Cristina Kirchner's murky ties to Iran, Hezbollah, and the supposed cover-up of the 1994 AMIA Jewish Center bombing in Buenos Aires.

- Almost a week before the 5th anniversary of Argentine Fiscal Alberto Nisman's death, Moshen Rabbani, an Iranian accused in the attack on the AMIA, speaks out during an interview with Radio 10. - [La Nacion on 11-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Following the death of Iranian Qasem Soleimani, the FARC is convening for a ceremony to honor the general. - [El Tiempo on 07-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- State media reports Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla condemned recent U.S. attack resulted in assassination of Iranian Commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani. "This action is a serious escalation in the Middle East where a conflict might break out with unforeseeable consequences for international peace and security," he wrote on his Twitter account. - **Islamic Republic News Agency on 04-JAN**
- The Maduro regime, who maintains close relations with Tehran, "condemned" the death of Iranian General Qasim Suleimani, stating its an action that "raises the tension" in the Middle East. - **Infobae on 03-JAN (content in Spanish)**
- Qasim Suleimani, the head of Iran's external terrorism forces eliminated by a U.S. drone strike, oversaw every military decision taken by Iran in Latin America, according to a report by the Argentine news network Infobae last year. - **Breitbart on 03-JAN**
- Argentine President Alberto Fernández stated that evidence collected in the death of Prosecutor Alberto Nisman, thus far, cannot prove that he was murdered. He furthered, stating the position of the Gendarmerie lacks scientific rigor. - **La Voz on 02-JAN (content in Spanish)**
- State media reports that during the meeting in the Qatari capital on the sidelines of Doha Forum, Zarif and Moncada, foreign ministers from Iran and Nicaragua, respectively, underlined the need for broadening of mutual cooperation in different fields. The two also discussed the political developments in the Central and Latin American countries. - **Fars News Agency on 16-DEC**
- Speaking to Tasnim News Agency, Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, Iran's deputy army chief for coordination, said that the Islamic Republic's warships would defy a "12,000-mile line" drawn by "hegemonic powers" by entering the Atlantic Ocean. - **Newsweek on 11-DEC**
- State media reports that Deputy Foreign Minister for Euro-American Affairs Ali-Asghar Khaji and Speaker of the House of Representatives of Uruguay Jorge Orrico underlined the need for further expansion of Tehran-Montevideo relations at bilateral, regional and international levels. - **IRNA on 08-DEC**
- State media reports that Iran's Minister of Science, Research and Technology Mansour Gholami met and held talks with Cuban Ambassador to Iran Alexis Bandrich Vega on the expansion of scientific and technological cooperation. - **Mehr News on 24-NOV**

TURKEY

- Carlos Ghosen's dramatic exfiltration is drawing attention to MNG Holding Co and the private world of charter flights. Maduro has used aircraft from MNG to ship gold to Istanbul and Reza Zarrab, a gold trader who violated sanctions against Iran, tapped the company to manage his private plane. - **MSN on 03-JAN**
- Desperate for cash, Venezuela is looking for discarded car parts and odds and ends from construction sites to sell. In the latest lifeline that country has extended to Venezuela- after buying some of the \$40 million worth of gold Maduro sold in July - Turkey has purchased 27,800 tons of metals scrap from state-run Corpoez. - **Yahoo News on 18-NOV**

HEZBOLLAH TERROR DESIGNATIONS

- Honduras will join Guatemala and other allied nations in declaring Hezbollah an international terrorist organization, the office of the president announced. - **Times of Israel on 07-JAN**
- Attentive to the escalation in the conflict between the United States and Iran, President Alberto Fernandez raised the alert level and strengthened security measures throughout the country. - **La Nacion on 04-JAN (content in Spanish)**
- Guatemalan President-elect Alejandro Giammattei, who is currently on a visit to Israel, met with Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz in Jerusalem and announced that the first thing he will do when he takes office next month will be to approve the declaration of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. - **The Jewish Voice on 11-DEC**

- Argentina's President Alberto Fernández is considering making changes to his country's statement regarding Hezbollah as a terrorist organization. The change includes distinguishing between its military and political wings, according to the statement received by the Israeli embassy in Argentina. - [Jerusalem Post on 21-NOV](#)



As Russia, Iran, and Venezuela have dominated the news-cycle in Latin America, holding the public's attention, China quietly continues to court U.S. allies in the region, demonstrating the PRC's sway in Latin America. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who ran on an anti-China platform, recently signed a multitude of trade agreements with China and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele announced a massive set of critical infrastructure deals with the PRC.

President Bukele had been diplomatically courting the Trump administration, but his trip to China in early December and recent local reporting revealing possible campaign contributions from Venezuela's Alba Petroleós hint to Bukele's possible alignment with the VRIC. On the other hand, President Bolsonaro of Brazil, a steadfast U.S. ally, is facing increasing economic and political pressure to sign multiple agreements with China and express favorability towards Huawei's 5G bid in the country. Lastly, Argentina's new Fernández administration announced that it will join China's Belt and Road Initiative. While China's moves in the region are not flashy, they are dangerous; China's economic influence is entrapping and their infrastructure deals are schemes for regional surveillance.

- Brazil will not accept any pressure from the U.S. over whether to allow the Chinese company Huawei to bid for its 5G network, Marcos Pontes, the minister for science, technology, innovation and communications, said. "A good partner always understands the needs of the other," Pontes said in an interview in his office in Brasília. "Just as Brazil makes no claim over what business the U.S. does with China and whether this affects or not our agribusiness." - [BNN Bloomberg on 09-JAN](#)
- China is picking up soybean cargoes in Brazil, dashing hopes for big American sales immediately after a partial trade deal was signed with the U.S., according to people familiar with the matter. - [BNN Bloomberg on 08-JAN](#)
- China launches environmental satellite built in cooperation with Brazil. The sixth in a series of environmental monitoring satellites jointly developed by China and Brazil, successfully launched December 20 on top of a Long March 4B rocket. - [Space Flight Now on 21-DEC](#)
- Media organizations from 12 countries, including Pakistan and China, agreed on a joint initiative on Media Cooperation to promote in-depth communication and mutual cooperation at the 2019 Beijing International Media Forum and Tour held in the Chinese capital from December 9-13. The forum was host to over 150 journalists, including 14 senior executives representing media organizations from 12 countries,

including Brazil, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran, Japan, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, and Vietnam. - [**Pakistan Today on 17-DEC**](#)

- Argentina will join China's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), newspaper Perfil reported, citing the Argentine foreign office. BRI is a massive infrastructure scheme designed to improve connectivity and cooperation on a transcontinental scale, consolidate China's geopolitical influence, and develop markets for Chinese exports. - [**Business News Americas on 16-DEC**](#)
- Chinese companies have exported artificial intelligence surveillance technology to more than 60 countries including Iran, Myanmar, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and others with dismal human rights records, according to a report by a U.S. think tank. "Technology linked to Chinese companies -- particularly Huawei, Hikvision, Dahua and ZTE -- supply AI surveillance technology in 63 countries, 36 of which have signed onto China's Belt and Road Initiative," a Carnegie Endowment report said. - [**The Mainichi on 16-DEC**](#)
- State media reports the 13th Latin America and the Caribbean (China-LAC) Business Summit, which concluded in Panama, showed the high cooperation potential between the Asian nation and the countries of the region. - [**Prensa Latina on 12-DEC**](#)
- China and Latin America launched the 13th Caribbean Business Summit as part of the efforts to boost business ties between the two regions. According to Xinhua, over 1,000 firms are expected to join the summit. Jorge Juan de la Guardia, chief of Panama's Chamber of Commerce, said China is one of the top trading partners of the Panama Canal shipping route and the Summit can forge ties for the development of both sides. - [**Business Times on 11-DEC**](#)
- State media reports that China and El Salvador broadened the scope of their cooperation by signing nine agreements in sectors such as tourism, economy, agriculture, trade, investment, sports, technical assistance, and the environment. - [**Prensa Latina on 03-DEC**](#)
- China will help build several major infrastructure projects in El Salvador including a stadium and water treatment plant, the two countries said. Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele said the investment represented a "gigantic, non-refundable cooperation." - [**Reuters on 03-DEC**](#)
- Bolsonaro, who once accused China of trying to "buy up Brazil," visited with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing earlier this month. Brazil would like China to import more of Brazil's value-added products and to court more Chinese investment in Brazil. - [**Real Clear World on 22-NOV**](#)

Thanks for reading our monthly VRIC Monitor. If you enjoy this report, please take 5 minutes to give us some feedback! Your input is important to SFS and we are always striving to improve the Monitor.

[**Take the Survey!**](#)



1440 G Street, NW, #8198
Washington, D.C. 20005
Call: +1 (202) 909-1107
E-mail: info@securefreesociety.org



Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).