



BOLIVARIAN THREAT NETWORK

March 2021

The following is a summary of open-source media reporting on the Bolivarian Threat Network's activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in March 2021. This is not a complete list of media reports on the Bolivarian Threat Network's activities in Latin America but are some of the most relevant articles and reports selected by SFS researchers and fellows. The monitor does source a limited amount of media reports from state-owned or -controlled media outlets, which are carefully selected and solely intended to report on news that is not reported on by other media and is relevant for understanding VRIC influence in the region. This report is produced as part of our VRIC Monitor published monthly by the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS), a non-profit, national security think tank based in Washington D.C.



- Maduro is pressing banks to implement digital payment systems as hyperinflation prompts chronic shortages of cash in the bolivar currency, three people familiar with the talks told Reuters. Maduro has targeted the public transit system - where roughly three-quarters of all circulating cash is spent - as the first stage of a plan he calls "the digital bolivar." - [Yahoo Finance on 15-MAR](#)
- The discovery of 41 gold bars worth about \$1.5 million at Bogota's El Dorado Airport exposed a powerful asset laundering network operating with complicity and participation of the Bolivarian National Guard. The complex criminal network has tentacles in China, Israel, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. - [La Semana on 14-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- Over the past six months, the regime of Nicolás Maduro has been quietly handing over dozens of run-down gasoline stations across the country to local entrepreneurs who turned them into these flashy retail complexes and rebranded them under a chain known as Via. It's the first phase of a desperate and complicated plan to rescue the country from U.S. sanctions that have dealt a final blow to Venezuela's oil business and choked the nation of fuel supplies so severely that filling stations have been forced to repeatedly shut. - [Bloomberg on 11-MAR](#)
- Venecápital in the quest to revive foreign investment in Venezuela: To have a prosperous ecosystem, it begins with having a stable political framework that provides legal security for companies with private capital A new alternative for the development of ideas, businesses and new ventures will have the support of legal consultants, specialists in banking and investment . This is how Venecápital presents itself in the search for financing opportunities with private capital in Venezuela. - [Analítica on 10-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- United Nations human rights experts said they were looking into allegations that Venezuelan police forces had killed 200 people this year and investigators raised concerns about possible summary executions. U.N. investigators said that authorities have failed to release death certificates, charged fees for autopsies, and delivered bodies in a closed casket "with the instruction that it not be opened." - [Reuters on 10-MAR](#)
- State media reports that the President of Cuba, Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez, met with the Executive Vice President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, companion Delcy Rodríguez Gómez, who heads the delegation of her country to the XXI Intergovernmental Commission Venezuela-Cuba. - [Canal Caribe on 09-MAR](#)
- U.S. Senator Jim Risch (R-Idaho), ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sent a letter to U.S. Comptroller General Eugene Dodaro requesting that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) provide an assessment of the scope of the transactional criminal network threat within and from Venezuela, as well as a review of the effectiveness of the United States Government's policies actions, and authorities to combat these criminal threats. - [La Patilla on 05-MAR](#)
- The National Armed Forces of Venezuela has begun the detachment of troops, aircraft, tanks and artillery towards the western border in the start-up phase of the Joint Action Exercise and Comprehensive Bolivarian Shield 'Supreme Commander Hugo Chávez Frías 2021.' In that order, they arrived at the 'Mayor Buenaventura Vivas Guerrero' air base, located in the town from Santo Domingo, in the Andean state of Táchira, bordering Colombia, a contingent of troops from the Army's 42nd Parachute Infantry Brigade, aboard a Shaanxi Y- 8F200W of the Air Transport Group No. 6 of the Military Aviation. - [Info Defensa on 03-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Guyana said that two Venezuelan fighter jets entered its airspace, circling a community on the countries' shared border before returning to their own territory, though Venezuela's government disputed the claim. The incident is the latest in a long-running

border conflict between the two South American nations. Caracas says much of eastern Guyana is its own territory, a claim rejected by Georgetown. The conflict has flared up in recent years as Guyana has started developing oil reserves near the disputed area. -

[Reuters on 03-MAR](#)

- USAF MC-12W Liberty reconnaissance aircraft spent 2 hours orbiting along the Colombia-Venezuela border over La Guajira on March 1st. - [CNW on 02-MAR](#)
- An increase in the number of reports of illegal invasions of homes and commercial establishments in Venezuela during the pandemic has revealed the ever-widening criminal portfolio managed by militant civilian groups known as “colectivos.” - [InSight Crime on 02-MAR](#)
- Venezuela has warned its neighbor Guyana that it will defend “at all levels” the rights it claims it has over the Essequibo, a rich territory over which these two nations have a historic dispute, while returning to put on the table its willingness to resolve the conflict within the framework of the Geneva Agreement. - [EFE on 28-FEB](#)
- State media reports Nicolás Maduro says his country will review its relations with Spain after the visit of Spanish Foreign Minister Arancha Gonzalez to Colombia's border regions. - [UrduPoint on 28-FEB](#)
- A Venezuelan police special forces unit has illegally detained former legislator Gilberto Sojo, an ally of opposition leader Juan Guaido, the opposition said. The unit, known as FAES, has been widely accused of human rights abuses, and international activists have called on President Nicolas Maduro to abolish it. - [Reuters on 26-FEB](#)
- The European Union did not rule out imposing new measures against the Nicolás Maduro regime after the expulsion of its ambassador to Venezuela. The bloc and its member states "reserve the right to consider it," said the spokesperson for the European External Action Service, Nabila Massrali. - [Infobae on 26-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Maduro said the country should propose supplying natural gas to Mexico, which experienced disruptions to its supplies from Texas, though energy experts dismissed the plan as unrealistic. Texas banned out-of-state exports this week during an unprecedented cold snap, prompting Mexico to import liquefied natural gas (LNG) under emergency conditions. - [Reuters on 19-FEB](#)
- State media reports the SIBO-100 and SIBO-200 aircraft, developed 100% with Venezuelan technology, are being marketed by the airline Conviasa. These air vehicles, a flagship project in the manufacture of the National Aeronautical Company (Wanda), may be used for tourist use, in the transport of parcels, aerial photographs and as a taxi. - [Correo del Alba on 18-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- State media reports Nicolás Maduro inaugurated the National Anti-Drug Superintendence on Thursday, February 18th, and announced the delivery of the Anti-Drug Law project.

Maduro blamed Colombia for all the drugs that try to enter Venezuela and declared that Venezuela is a territory free of drug production and export. - [TeleSUR on 18-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- Conviasa reported that its priority continues to be expanding to Russia, Iran and China once the restrictions due to COVID-19 are lifted, which will encourage tourism to Venezuela. The project for this year is to install a direct flight between Caracas and Moscow and by March to begin commercial operations to Tehran. - [Airline Geeks on 17-FEB](#)

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- Bolivia's former interim President Jeanine Añez landed behind bars in the capital of the country she led just six months ago after the new government arrested her on claims she participated in a 2019 coup to seize power. - [Reuters on 13-MAR](#)
- The Anti-Corruption Bureau (OA) filed a criminal complaint with the Criminal and Federal Correctional Court no. 5 against former President Mauricio Macri following the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). - [TN on 12-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Lula da Silva returned to the forefront of Brazilian politics following a surprise move by a supreme court justice to overturn graft convictions for which he was barred from running for office and served 580 days in prison, before being released in 2019. While the decision still has to be confirmed by the full supreme court, it has already set the scene for a contest between opposite sides of the political spectrum in next year's presidential race. - [Financial Times on 12-MAR](#)
- At noon on March 12th, police officers detained the former Minister of Energy of the temporary administration, Rodrigo Guzmán, for his alleged connection with the "coup d'état" case. The Prosecutor's Office now goes for former President Jeanine Añez and the people who made up her cabinet. - [Pagina Siete on 12-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The Venezuelan government turned to Ecuador's former Finance Minister Patricio Rivera as an advisor for relations with the country's foreign investors, according to two people familiar with the matter. - [Bloomberg on 10-MAR](#)
- An accountant witnessed meetings between Honduras President Juan Orlando Hernández and a drug trafficker in which they planned the trafficking of cocaine to the U.S., federal prosecutors in New York said. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jacob Gutwillig said during his opening statement at the trial of accused Honduran drug trafficker Geovanny Fuentes Ramírez that the accountant was present when Hernández allegedly said he wanted to "shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos." - [Associated Press on 09-MAR](#)
- Former Congressman Pelegrin Castillo warned that a civil war scenario is being set up in Haiti and with the final plan that the Dominican Republic opens its borders. He added

that the current set-up is one of confrontation between the Dubalierist sectors and other pro-government sectors. He revealed that the plan is called neocolonial rupture, to give way to popular sovereignty, with Haiti aligned with the ALBA group. - [Dominican Today on 08-MAR](#)

- On February 12th, Bolivia requested that its name be excluded from resolution S-29/1 that condemned the coup d'état perpetrated in Myanmar by its Armed Forces. The resolution adopted without a vote by the United Nations Human Rights Council, made up of 47 states, of which Bolivia is a party, called for "the immediate and unconditional release of all those arbitrarily detained" and "the restoration of the elected government." - [Brujula Digital on 08-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Lawmakers of Paraguay's largest opposition party said they will begin preparing impeachment charges against President Mario Abdo Benitez and Vice President Hugo Velazquez amid widespread protests over the administration's management of the pandemic. All 29 lower house lawmakers of the Authentic Radical Liberal Party backed the decision and an impeachment draft could be shared with other opposition parties as soon as the weekend, lawmaker Celso Kennedy said in a press conference broadcast by NPY. - [Bloomberg on 08-MAR](#)
- The Organization of American States (OAS) deployed an Electoral Observation Mission to the election that took place March 7th in Bolivia, in which governors and mayors will be elected, among other Bolivian authorities. The Mission will be headed by the former Electoral Counselor of the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico Rodrigo Alfonso Morales Manzanares, and will follow up on issues such as electoral organization, electoral technology, electoral justice, campaign financing, and the political participation of women and indigenous groups. - [Organization of American States Press Release on 01-MAR](#)
- President Nayib Bukele appeared to have won control of El Salvador's unicameral congress, ending a two-year standoff with legislators of the old parties that have dominated politics in the Central American country since the end of the 1980-1992 civil war. - [Associated Press on 01-MAR](#)
- State media reports the Bolivian government said Gonzalo Rodriguez, vice minister in charge of fighting smuggling, has died from the novel coronavirus. According to officials, Rodriguez was admitted to the hospital after contracting the disease. - [Xinhua on 28-FEB](#)
- The annual U.N. report on the human rights situation in Colombia found that violence is "intensifying" in some rural areas where state presence is weak and armed groups are fighting for territorial control following the 2016 demobilization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel group. - [Associated Press on 23-FEB](#)

- State media reports Bolivian lawmakers have nominated Argentina's President Alberto Fernandez for the Nobel Peace Prize for helping former Bolivian president, Evo Morales, when he left his country. - [Sputnik on 21-FEB](#)
- Bolivia's central bank has returned a loan of nearly \$350m plus interest to the International Monetary Fund, claiming it had been improperly negotiated by the previous government. - [Public Finance Focus on 19-FEB](#)
- On February 18th, thousands of people took to the streets in Guatemala's capital, Guatemala City, in protests organised by a leading indigenous organisation, Comité de Desarrollo Campesino (Codeca), calling for President Alejandro Giammattei to resign. - [LatinNews Daily on 19-FEB](#)
- Investigations are now under way into the Peruvian coronavirus vaccination scandal, in which hundreds of people, many well-connected, were given shots although they did not participate in trials for the Sinopharm vaccine to determine its efficacy. Health Minister Oscar Ugarte said 3,200 vaccines were given, including 1,200 that went to the Chinese Embassy. Investigators are looking into where the other 2,000 doses are, and who was vaccinated. - [Voice of America on 19-FEB](#)
- Nicaragua has created a new National Ministry for Extraterrestrial Space Affairs, The Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, prompting scorn from critics in a nation experiencing a steady erosion of human rights since a brutal crackdown on anti-government protests three years ago. The new space agency was approved by 76 legislators in the country's congress, which is dominated by the Sandinista party of Daniel Ortega, the president. Fifteen opposition legislators abstained. - [Guardian on 18-FEB](#)
- Amid bread shortages, Cuba gets one step closer to a scientific milestone: the mass production of a coronavirus vaccine invented on the island. - [New York Times on 17-FEB](#)
- The Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the national government, reported that it presented Nicaragua with a note of protest against the law recently approved by the National Assembly of Nicaragua, through which the so-called "Nicaraguan Caribbean Biosphere Reserve" was established. As stated by the Government of Colombia, this Nicaraguan measure does not comply with international requirements and procedures for the recognition of areas and places of special interest and environmental protection. - [Infobae on 16-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)

ALEX SAAB CASE

- A West African court ordered Cape Verde's government to free Alex Saab, a Colombian businessman close to Maduro, and halt plans to have him extradited to the U.S. The Economic Community of West African States Court of Justice found the authorities on the Atlantic Ocean island nation carried out Saab's arrest before a so-called Red Notice had been issued by Interpol. - [Bloomberg on 15-MAR](#)

- The Venezuelan government is using fake Twitter accounts to sway public opinion and stop authorities in the West African islands of Cape Verde from extraditing its chief dealmaker to the U.S., according to an intelligence analysis. - [Financial Times on 14-MAR](#)
- Colombian businessman Alex Saab, targeted for being a frontman for the dictator of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro, assured in an interview with the EFE news agency that he would "not collaborate with the U.S." in case of being extradited by Cape Verde, where he is being held, at the request of Washington. - [Infobae on 03-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The family of Alex Saab was transferred from Caracas to Moscow. The trip took place at the beginning of the year but was confirmed in the last hours, according to sources close to the businessman himself, and reported on by the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo. - [Infobae on 17-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)