



BOLIVARIAN THREAT NETWORK

November & December 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 November & December 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.



- Venezuelan opposition parties extended the mandate of Juan Guaidó as the person they recognize as the nation’s legitimate leader, but curbed his powers amid criticism of his

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management of overseas assets and his failure to make headway in his campaign to oust the government. The opposition's assembly voted to extend its own term for another year and leave Guaidó in place as its president. - [Bloomberg on 04-JAN](#)

- The group that attempted to bomb Colombian air force planes at the Cúcuta airport on December 14, killing three people, were members of a criminal gang hired by the dissident elements of the FARC guerrilla group operating out of Venezuela, Colombian Defense Minister Diego Molano says. Three men and two women were arrested this week in connection to the attack, in which one of the perpetrators was killed, while evidence so far suggests that the alleged terrorist operation was financed by the FARC dissident group known as the 33rd Front. - [Miami Herald on 29-DEC](#)
- Venezuela says it's pumping the most oil since harsh U.S. sanctions strangled state-owned oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA more than two years ago. Not everyone believes it. PDVSA, as the Caracas-based explorer is known, reported more than 1 million barrels of daily output in a December 24 Twitter post. The figure appeared to represent a specific 24-hour period rather than the typical metric of a monthly average -- an important distinction given that industry observers are focused on sustained levels of higher output rather than temporary spikes. - [Rig Zone on 28-DEC](#)
- Venezuela has developed a spiritual successor to the U.S. Cold War-era M50 Ontos tank destroyer. The new fighting vehicle has been designated as the Maisanta YZR, but it's also referred to simply as Ontos Venezuela, in a direct nod to the M50. Appropriately enough, Ontos means 'the Thing' in Greek. The first images of this new vehicle began to appear in the summer, with very few details available initially, but more information has trickled out gradually since then. - [The Drive on 27-DEC](#)
- The Venezuelan state of Barinas, the birthplace of Hugo Chávez, officially began the electoral campaign for the repetition of the regional elections on January 9, although, in practice, the candidates have been holding rallies and promises for more than two weeks to the voters, bypassing the regulations. The elections will be held after the Supreme Court of Justice (TSJ) annulled the results of the regional elections of November 21, considering that the opposition candidate and winner by a narrow margin, Freddy Superlano, appeared despite being disqualified. - [Infobae on 23-DEC](#)
- Marathon legal efforts by Venezuela's Juan Guaidó to gain control over €1.6bn (£1.3bn) of gold reserves held by the Bank of England have come closer to success after the UK supreme court ruled that Britain unequivocally recognises him as head of state. Although the supreme court referred the case back to the commercial court to study the issue further, it added that it did not believe the UK court could recognise rulings by Venezuela's highest court, the supreme tribunal of justice (STJ), which has already declared Guaidó's efforts to gain control of the assets unlawful. - [The Guardian on 20-DEC](#)
- Venezuela is drafting renewable energy legislation that would enable the private sector to break free from the Opec country's accident-prone power grid. The government-controlled National Assembly is currently fine-tuning an initial draft of the

“alternative energy” bill that is circulating in the business community. Deputy Oscar Ronderos, second vice president of the energy and oil commission, says a more complete version will be presented to the legislature in January and approved in the first half of 2022. - [Argus Media on 15-DEC](#)

- The Colombian Aeronáutica Civil reported an explosion near the Camilo Daza airport in Cúcuta, the capital of the department of Norte de Santander. According to official information, criminals entered the airport and, minutes later, an artifact detonated. One person was killed in this explosion. Later, while several police officers surveyed the area, a found briefcase detonated, killing the members of the Metropolitan Police of Cúcuta. - [CNN Español on 14-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The Secretary-General of ALBA-TCP, Sasha Llorenti, indicated that one of the proposals at the ALBA-TCP summit would be the creation of the monitoring observatory. - [Zyri on 13-DEC](#)
- The United Nations (UN) warned that by the end of 2022 there will be 8.9 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees living in 17 countries in Latin America, surpassing the current 6 million. The alert was made by Eduardo Stein, joint special representative of the UN agency for refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), at the launch of the Regional Response Plan for Refugees and Migrants (RMRP). The plan predicts that \$1.79 million will be needed to support Venezuelans who have escaped the political, economic and social crisis in their country. - [Agencia Brazil on 10-DEC](#)
- The leader of the dissident group of the FARC, Iván Márquez, fled to Cuba to protect his life after two of his lieutenants in the movement that abandoned the peace process were assassinated in Venezuela, reported the former Colombian ambassador to the United States, Francisco Santos. The statement by Santos, who spoke in Miami in a forum on relations between the United States and Latin America, coincides with press reports published in Colombia, pointing out that Márquez was cornered in Venezuela, being persecuted by the same forces that killed his lieutenants earlier this week. - [El Nuevo Herald on 10-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- U.S. Diplomat Roger Carstens went to Venezuela and met with six Citgo executives to try to secure their release. Four people who knew of the visit said Carstens was able to visit the six executives, Tomeu Vadell, Jose Luis Zambrano, Alirio Zambrano, Jorge Toledo, Gustavo Cardenas, and José Pereira, who are held at El Helicoide prison, an infamous Caracas prison that was once a shopping mall. - [Newsweek on 10-DEC](#)
- Maduro plans to replace Oil Minister Tareck El Aissami because of health issues, eight sources close to the decision said. In recent weeks, El Aissami's health has deteriorated, which could render him unable to fulfill his ministerial duties at least temporarily, according to the sources, all of whom asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the matter. Four of the sources said that Maduro may appoint his ally Asdrubal Chavez, a cousin of the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez who is state-run

Petroleos de Venezuela's (PDVSA) current president, as oil minister, at least temporarily.
- [U.S. News on 09-DEC](#)

- Amid the rusted remnants of Venezuela's once-mighty oil industry, a motley crew of obscure drillers has achieved a feat few thought possible: It's more than doubled the country's crude production in the space of a year. To reach that milestone, PDVSA has resorted to desperate measures. According to people with direct knowledge of the matter, it's handing out contracts to little-known local companies with the promise of payments in scrap metal, or in some cases, backpacks stuffed with U.S. dollars as sanctions limit Venezuela's access to banks. - [BNN Bloomberg on 08-DEC](#)
- Hernan Dario Velasquez, known as El Paisa, and Henry Castellanos Garzon, known as Romana, were killed during a fight with rival gangs in the Venezuelan state of Apure, Colombian media reported, citing intelligence circles. "It is good news that these agents of terror, evil, drug trafficking, recruitment of minors and anti-personnel mines are no longer wreaking havoc," Colombian President Ivan Duque said. The two rebels commanded splinter groups of the paramilitary group FARC, which operates in the border region between Colombia and Venezuela. - [Ghana News Agency on 07-DEC](#)
- Colombia's police confirmed the death of a top commander belonging to a group of former rebels who rearmed following a 2016 peace deal, saying he was killed during a drug trafficking dispute in Venezuela. Hernan Dario Velasquez, known as El Paisa, is a former member of the now-demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas. He and several other well-known commanders said in 2019 they were rearming and forming a faction called Segunda Marquetalia. - [U.S. News on 07-DEC](#)
- Julio Borges, who serves as foreign minister for Venezuela's U.S.-backed interim government, said he would leave his post, further weakening the opposition just weeks after it was routed in regional elections. - [NBC News on 06-DEC](#)
- Venezuela's Maduro named a former foreign minister as his party's candidate for a special gubernatorial election in the home state of his mentor, Hugo Chávez, that was scheduled after the opposition contender in November's regular contest was retroactively disqualified. Maduro declared Jorge Arreaza as the ruling party's candidate via a livestream connected to a gymnasium in the rural state of Barinas. - [Associated Press on 06-DEC](#)
- About 500 supporters of a Venezuelan gubernatorial opposition candidate who was retroactively disqualified as the vote count showed him ahead in the home state of the late President Hugo Chávez protested Saturday against a decision that has become emblematic of what opponents say are unfair election conditions. - [Voice of America on 04-DEC](#)
- Venezuela's recent elections were marked by unfairness and political repression, but in a positive change from recent years, they did allow greater participation for the opposition, Jimmy Carter's Carter Center wrote in a report. While the opposition got more votes, the ruling party won most of the available positions amid low turnout and voter apathy

following years of economic decline under President Nicolas Maduro and his ruling PSUV party. Concessions to the opposition allowed it greater representation at this vote, but the background of political repression and restrictions on freedom of expression and participation created an uneven playing field, the Carter Center wrote in its preliminary report. - [BNN Bloomberg on 04-DEC](#)

- Venezuela has denied visa extensions for electoral observers from the European Union, requiring them to leave the South American country this weekend, a source with knowledge of the matter said. - [Reuters on 03-DEC](#)
- After the opposition wins the governorship in Zulia state, President Maduro's government decides to take control of the state's airports and toll roads. - [Katy Watson via Twitter on 02-DEC](#)
- More than three years after prosecutors in the tiny European nation of Andorra charged dozens of people with receiving over \$2 billion that had been plundered from Venezuela's state oil company, where exactly the money ended up remains a mystery. Now journalists may have found some of it. Documents from the OpenLux project show that three of the alleged conspirators, including a former deputy minister and his longtime romantic partner, invested millions of dollars in luxury Caribbean properties at the time of the apparent scam. - [OCCRP on 01-DEC](#)
- The older brother of late Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez renounced the governorship of western Barinas state, a stronghold of the family, after losing reelection to an opposition candidate who was subsequently disqualified. Later, Venezuela's highest court annulled the victory of Superlano, an ally of opposition leader Juan Guaido who is recognized by the United States and some 50 other governments as Venezuela's true president over incumbent Nicolas Maduro, whose 2018 re-election is disputed. - [Digital Journal on 30-NOV](#)
- Venezuela's opposition needs to rebuild and reflect on its strategy after suffering a heavy defeat in regional elections at the weekend, its leader Juan Guaido said, calling for unity among the fragmented movement's leadership. - [Reuters on 22-NOV](#)
- Venezuela's ruling socialist party appeared to win all but three races for governor in regional elections Sunday marked by low turnout amid splits within the U.S.-backed opposition and voter apathy following seven years of economic recession. Government candidates led 20 of 23 states, according to results announced by the National Electoral Council with more than 90% of votes in, though the margin in three of those states was still close. The widely expected victory for authoritarian President Nicolas Maduro's party, the PSUV, strengthens his control as he tries to rebuild the country's standing internationally. - [Bloomberg on 22-NOV](#)
- Venezuelan petrochemicals produced by joint ventures between state-run chemical firm Pequiven and foreign partners have arrived in the United States, despite Washington's efforts to limit trade with the OPEC oil and gas producer. - [Reuters on 18-NOV](#)

- The Nicolás Maduro regime in Venezuela has turned to casino gambling and U.S. dollars in hopes of an economic boost, The Wall Street Journal is reporting. Thirty casinos are now licensed to operate in the country where the socialist government had once banned gambling, and 12 more are set to open. - [Newsmax on 18-NOV](#)
- A delegation of three Venezuelan parliamentarians is in Managua to participate as international companions in the Nicaraguan elections, according to a political institute in Venezuela. The political collective signaled that the legislators are international companions in these votes, being witnesses of this democratic process. - [News Front on 07-NOV \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The International Criminal Court (ICC) will investigate whether crimes against humanity were committed during Venezuela's crackdown on anti-government protests in 2017. Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro said the state respects the decision to investigate, but does not share it. - [BBC on 04-NOV](#)
- Venezuela is cranking up oil production in a reflection of the Opec country's moderate success in adapting to operational constraints imposed by prolonged US sanctions. Output has surpassed 600,000 b/d as PdV incorporates Iranian condensate to help dilute extra-heavy crude from the Orinoco oil belt, which is now pumping out around 400,000 b/d. - [Argus Media on 03-NOV](#)
- Two major Venezuelan opposition parties today voted against a decree issued by US-backed shadow parliamentary leader Juan Guaidó, an unprecedented rupture that foreshadows the expiry of his constitutional claim to an interim presidency in January 2022. In an online session of the "legitimate" opposition-run National Assembly that serves as part of a virtual skeleton government in waiting, Primero Justicia (PJ) and Acción Democrática (AD) voted against Guaidó's decree, the first time a majority of the body has abandoned him. - [Argus Media on 02-NOV](#)
- The Foreign Minister of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Félix Plasencia, participated in an exclusive interview with HispanTV. - [HispanTV on 19-OCT](#)

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- Mexico's government said it had invited Chilean President-elect Gabriel Boric to visit, as the two countries vowed to forge a “strategic alliance” once the new leader takes office. The partnership will seek to work with other progressive countries in the region to promote “a common voice to face challenges in the international arena,” the ministry said. - [Reuters on 06-JAN](#)
- Some of the money from El Salvador’s state-issued Chivo wallets is reportedly missing, according to many Salvadorans posting on social media. In a December 16 Twitter thread started by user “the commissioner,” at least 50 Salvadorans have reported December losses totaling more than \$96,000, following the setup of the Bitcoin (BTC) wallets by the government. Some of these transactions were for as little as \$61, but others said they were missing thousands or more. - [Coin Telegraph on 27-DEC](#)

- Chile's President-elect Gabriel Boric has said that his new government will focus its foreign policy on improving ties with members of the Pacific Alliance trade bloc. Boric, who was elected earlier this month in a run-off vote, said relations with member states Colombia, Mexico and Peru would be prioritised. - [Buenos Aires Times on 27-DEC](#)
- The Peruvian inspectorate will initiate an investigation against provincial inspector Norah Córdoba for alleged irregularities in the framework of a construction of the seat of the Government of Pedro Castillo. The research was opened internally by the Deconcentrated Office of Internal Control of the Fiscalía of the Andean country, after Eduardo Pachas, the attorney of the representative of Peru, presented a dispute against the fiscal and its order. - [Minuto NON on 26-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- State media reports Brazilian Deputy Eduardo Bolsonaro, son of President Jair Bolsonaro, has heralded that once President-elect Gabriel Boric takes office, "Chile will now follow a similar path to that of Venezuela. Let me not give an opinion but rather tell [you] some facts about Gabriel Boric, so that we can get to know the president-elect of Chile better. . . Since high school, in 1999, he has been a militant student leader. He dropped out of law school to dedicate himself to politics. [He later] collaborated in the 2019 uprisings in Chile, which had a lot of violence, destruction, and fires," he said. The Brazilian President's son then quoted many Twitter postings by Boric praising Maduro, in addition to the warm congratulations he received from the Venezuelan president. - [MercoPress on 23-DEC](#)
- Nestor Reverol blames the massive power outage across Venezuela on an attack on the Guri hydroelectric dam, the same excuse that was given in 2019 during the nationwide blackout. - [Conflict News Worldwide via Twitter on 17-DEC](#)
- Mexico will impose visa requirements on Venezuelan visitors, the interior ministry said, as the country attempts to stem a steep rise in the number of people from the South American nation trying to enter the United States illegally. The ministry said in a document published online that it had detected a "substantial increase" in Venezuelans entering Mexico to reach a third country, as well giving false declarations on their motives for arrival. - [U.S. News on 17-DEC](#)
- On December 12, the president of El Salvador accused the U.S. government of funding the "communist" opposition against him in order to destabilize his government. "US taxpayers should know that their government is using their money to fund communist movements against a democratic elected (and with a 90% approval rating) government in El Salvador," President Nayib Bukele wrote on Twitter. "It's not working though," Bukele added, posting four pictures below his comment, including one aerial picture to purportedly show the protest against him on December 12 wasn't widely attended. - [Reuters on 15-DEC](#)
- State media reports the 20th ALBA-TCP Summit opened in Havana, after Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel welcomed the leaders who are attending the forum. At the Palace of the Revolution, the venue of the meeting, the Cuban head of State inaugurated the summit, which takes place on the 17th anniversary of this solidarity and integration

mechanism, founded by Cuban and Venezuelan leaders Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, respectively. - [Prensa Latina on 14-DEC](#)

- State media reports the organization of alleged native South Americans Runasur, headed by former Bolivian President Evo Morales (2006-2019), Monday announced the suspension of its forum scheduled for Dec. 20 and 21 at the Peruvian city of Cusco, citing concerns over the spread of the coronavirus Omicron variant. “After a health assessment, the Runasur Technical Commission has just suspended the event scheduled for December 20 and 21 in the city of Cusco, Peru,” announced Vladimir Cerrón, secretary-general and founder of Peru's ruling party Peru Libre. - [MercoPress on 14-DEC](#)
- Smoke from gunpowder and tear gas lingered in the air as rival members of a local farmer’s union in Peru engaged in a brutal conflict over the Movement for Socialism (MAS) Party’s distribution of free land to party supporters on December 13. - [Epoch Times on 14-DEC](#)
- The head of the Peruvian Council of Ministers, Mirtha Vásquez, rejected charges that the administration of Pedro Castillo is coordinating granting an exit to the sea to landlocked Bolivia. She also asserted that Bolivia's former President Evo Morales could not continue his missionary activities in Peru. “They have thought up a series of absolutely inaccurate proposals. They say that Bolivia's sovereignty is in danger and that Peru wants to cede a sovereign exit to Bolivia. None of this is true,” she explained in an interview with Canal N. - [The Rio Times on 13-DEC](#)
- Ex-officials and former vice ministers of foreign affairs of Peru issued a statement against the meeting in Cusco announced by the former president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, who considered it a “clear threat” to “sovereignty, independence and national security. The sole call to the meeting in Cusco constitutes an unacceptable interference and interference that violates the fundamental norms of the charters of the United Nations and the OAS (Organization of American States),” supports the statement entitled “In Defense of Sovereignty.” - [Latin US on 11-DEC \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- U.S. authorities are preparing criminal charges against El Salvador's deputy justice minister Osiris Luna and another senior official, accusing them of negotiating a secret truce with gangs, two sources said, amid rising tensions between Washington and President Nayib Bukele's government. - [Reuters on 10-DEC](#)
- President Nayib Bukele announced El Salvador plans to construct a Bitcoin City in 2022, near the Conchagua volcano. The city will have no taxes except a 10% value-added tax to fund city construction and services. The Central American country also plans to sell \$1 billion US dollar-denominated 10-year bonds with a coupon of 6.5% in partnership with Blockstream, a digital assets infrastructure company. Half of the funds will be used to buy bitcoin, while the other half will fund infrastructure and Bitcoin mining powered by geothermal energy. - [LatAm List on 10-DEC](#)
- Peru’s Congress voted against a motion to impeach Peruvian President Pedro Castillo. The motion was filed due to an alleged “permanent moral incapacity.” The presidential

impeachment motion required approval by 52 legislators before it could be admitted for congressional debate. However, Peru's Congress voted 76 to 46 against the motion. Subsequently, President of Congress Maricarmen Alva Prieto suspended the session late in the evening. - [Jurist on 08-DEC](#)

- Peruvian prosecutors said they will question socialist President Pedro Castillo as part of an investigation into the promotion of certain military officers, adding to pressure on the leader as lawmakers weigh an impeachment process. Prosecutors are set to question Castillo on December 14 after two ex-military heads said they were relieved of their duties after refusing to promote certain officials allegedly recommended by Castillo. - [NBC News on 03-DEC](#)
- State media reports Argentina's Ambassador to Bolivia Adrián Basteiro came under criticism once again for participating in a demonstration of Bolivia's ruling party Movement Towards Socialism headed by former President Evo Morales. - [MercoPress on 26-NOV](#)
- On November 22, the Ortega regime established entry into Nicaragua “visa free” for citizens of Cuba as a “humanitarian” measure to benefit Cubans with relatives in the country and others. The resolution of the Ministry of the Interior (Migob) has the main objective of facilitating commercial trips and family tourism. - [Confidencial on 24-NOV](#)
- Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega claimed victory in their presidential elections on Monday, November 8th, with over 97% of votes counted, according to the country's Supreme Electoral Council, a win that resulted after a months-long government crackdown on his potential political rivals. - [CNN on 08-NOV](#)
- According to analysts, one of the main interested parties to keep President Daniel Ortega in power, is his Venezuelan counterpart. Above all, because this would represent mutual support to extend the Bolivarian block in the region. - [Voice of America on 04-NOV \(content in Spanish\)](#)