



## **BOLIVARIAN THREAT NETWORK**

**January & February 2022**

The following is a summary of open-source media reporting on the Bolivarian Threat Network's activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in January & February 2022. 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.



- On February 12, anti-government protests convened in Caracas by Venezuela's opposition leader Juan Guaidó failed to draw large crowds, and were overshadowed by a

thousands-strong counterprotest in support of President Nicolás Maduro. - [LatinNews Daily on 14-FEB](#)

- Venezuela's surprise jump in crude oil output has raised questions on the accuracy of the data provided. There are signs that PDVSA is struggling to boost oil output further, with industry experts speculating that Venezuela's national oil company has reached capacity. The uncertainty surrounding the accuracy of PDVSA's production data makes it difficult to know whether the company's production reached the volumes claimed by Caracas. - [Oil Price on 13-FEB](#)
- The Observatorio Venezolano de Finanzas (OVF), an independent economic think tank established by the Venezuelan opposition, has announced that economic activity increased by 6.8% in Venezuela in 2021. This marks a change of fortune following previous OVF estimates of a 25.3% fall in economic activity in 2020, and a drop of 26.0% in 2019. Despite this improvement, the OVF emphasized that Venezuela's economy remains in dire straits. - [LatinNews Daily on 09-FEB](#)
- A court in Venezuela has upheld long prison sentences for six American oil executives detained in the South American country on corruption charges for more than four years. Venezuela's supreme court announced the ruling late Friday, disappointing family members who had hoped the surprise decision last fall to hear the appeal, and a recent jailhouse visit by a top State Department official, signified President Nicolás Maduro's government was looking to release the men as part of a gesture to engage the Biden administration in talks over U.S. sanctions. - [Yahoo News on 04-FEB](#)
- Venezuela's opposition has suggested the U.S. ease economic sanctions on the country and some of its individuals, a potential policy shift aimed at bringing Maduro back to the negotiating table, according to Juan Guaido. The plan could be put in motion even before talks hopefully resume in Mexico, Guaido said, as the opposition pushes for "free and fair" elections as soon as possible as well as changes to Venezuela's judicial system. - [BNN Bloomberg on 28-JAN](#)
- Venezuelans got a chance to demand a recall of Maduro, but a government-friendly electoral board imposed limits that backers said were impossible to meet. That added to complaints about a system sharply tilted in favor of the governing socialist party. The National Electoral Council said that nearly 4.2 million people at a minimum would have to sign petitions for a recall within a 12-hour period at 1,200 electoral centers. - [NBC News on 27-JAN](#)
- On January 26, the Venezuelan civil society organization Movimiento Venezolano por el Revocatorio (MOVER) accused the authorities of voter intimidation during the signature collection process to trigger a referendum on Maduro's leadership, which the opposition effectively abandoned due to strict conditions on the gathering of signatures. - [LatinNews Daily on 26-JAN](#)

- Where there is a will, there's a way. And when oil is your main source of official income, and the U.S. is roadblocking you from selling it, you've got to find the work-arounds. Venezuela's ruling Socialists United Party (PSUV) seems to be doing just that with at least two willing partners – China and Indonesia. European oil traders are also happy to oblige. - [Forbes on 23-JAN](#)
- The U.S. Treasury Department banned transactions of a key bond issued by Venezuela's state-owned oil company for one year, the longest since it first stepped in to shield its U.S.-based refining arm from creditors, amid its economic downfall and political crisis. - [BNN Bloomberg on 20-JAN](#)
- Venezuela broke a four-year bout of hyperinflation, one of the longest in the world, as the socialist government slowed the pace of printing money and the U.S. dollar became the preferred currency in the country. Prices rose 7.6% in December from November, according to the central bank, marking a full year with monthly inflation below 50%, the threshold most economists commonly use to define hyperinflation. On an annual basis, Venezuela ended 2021 with inflation at 686.4%. - [Bloomberg on 14-JAN](#)
- State media reports Venezuela's state-run PDVSA will begin exporting diluted crude oil after a nine-month stoppage. The last time PDVSA shipped diluted crude to Asia was in April 2021. - [Merco Press on 12-JAN](#)
- State media reports Maduro underlined the strength of cooperation between Venezuela and Nicaragua, and reiterated the will to advance in the consolidation of bilateral relations. Maduro attended the inauguration ceremony of his counterpart Daniel Ortega and Vice President Rosario Murillo - [Prensa Latina on 11-JAN](#)

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- Truckers angry over the the alleged slaying of a driver at the hands of undocumented migrants blocked major highways in northern Chile on Friday, prompting the cancellation of flights to closed-off airports. Interior Minister Rodrigo Delgado said protesters had blocked highways in five places and he demanded they open them. The protests erupted after reports that a trucker was killed during an altercation with several migrants in the town of Mejillones, some 1400 kilometers (870 miles) north of the capital, Santiago. - [Associated Press on 11-FEB](#)
- Justice Minister Iván Lima said Thursday that two former military chiefs, General Jorge Terceros and Admiral Palmiro Jarjary, requested an abbreviated procedure, acknowledging their responsibility in the "coup d'état II" case. - [Los Tiempos on 10-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The First Criminal Court of La Paz ruled that the order for the commencement of the trial against Jeanine Añez and others involved in the "Coup d'état II" case was waived, thus postponing the commencement of the trial. It is expected to take place this month on Wednesday the 16th. - [Opinión on 10-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- Former Bolivian President Jeanine Áñez goes on hunger strike on the eve of her trial. The former senator, who denounces political motivations, is accused of having acted against the Constitution when she declared herself president in 2019 after the resignation of Evo Morales. - [El Pais on 09-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Nicaragua and El Salvador are accusing each other of violating their maritime territory in the Gulf of Fonseca. El Salvador's Foreign Relations Ministry replied late Monday to Nicaragua's initial allegation by saying that Nicaraguan naval vessels were actually the ones in the wrong in Friday's events. - [Daily Mail on 08-FEB](#)
- Six months in office, four prime ministers, three foreign ministers, two finance ministers and one unanswered question: how long can Peru's leftwing president Pedro Castillo remain in power? Ever since he was sworn in last July as the most unlikely leader in the country's history, Castillo has led an administration in constant flux. - [Financial Times on 06-FEB](#)
- The U.S. indictment of Bolivia's former anti-narcotics chief on drug and weapons charges means he could possibly be extradited to the United States, a move that Bolivia will decide following his arrest on charges of illicit enrichment. Maximiliano Dávila Pérez, who served atop Bolivia's anti-drug agency (Fuerza Especial de Lucha Contra el Narcotráfico - FELCN) in 2019 under former President Evo Morales, faces charges of conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and a related weapons offense, according to a U.S. Justice Department news release on February 2. - [InSight Crime on 04-FEB](#)
- At the insistence of reporter Fernando Del Rincón, who reminded him of some statements of support for Bolivia before he was president, the Peruvian head of state said that the people had to be consulted on the possibility of granting Bolivia an outlet to the sea. "I am not telling you that I am going to give you the sea for Bolivia (...) Now we will agree, we will consult the people. For that, the people need to manifest themselves," he said, visibly uncomfortable. - [Página Siete on 05-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Peru's new Prime Minister Hector Valer said that he supports amending the country's market-friendly constitution, a campaign promise from President Pedro Castillo, but that the process would take about four years. - [Reuters on 01-FEB](#)
- Several thousand protesters in Buenos Aires demanded a reform of the judicial system and changes in the Supreme Court, amid crossed accusations between the government and the opposition of wanting to instrumentalize justice. The march, supported by the government of Alberto Fernández, human rights organizations and unions, denounced the alleged bias of the Judiciary, for the benefit of the conservative opposition and against, mainly, Vice President Cristina Kirchner in open cases of corruption while she served as the president (2007-2015). - [Infobae on 01-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- International human rights groups called for authorities in El Salvador to open an investigation into allegations that journalists and activists had their phones hacked and implanted with the sophisticated spyware Pegasus. - [Reuters on 31-JAN](#)
- Venezuela and Honduras have reestablished diplomatic ties, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia said. Castro, the first female president of Honduras, was officially sworn in. She won the presidential election in November 2021, marking the end of a 130-year rotation of power between the Libre and National Party. Venezuela's Maduro was among the first leaders to congratulate Castro on the inauguration. After the ceremony, Castro and Plasencia held a meeting. - [Sputnik International on 28-JAN](#)
- Colombian President Iván Duque confirmed that Euclides España Caicedo, alias "Jhonier" and leader of the FARC dissidents in the southwest of the country, died in an operation carried out by the authorities in the municipality of Toribío, which is part of the convulsive department of Cauca. - [EFE on 25-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- On January 23, legislators from the leftist Partido Libertad y Refundación (Libre), the party of Honduras's president-elect Xiomara Castro, elected Luis Redondo as the new president of congress while in a separate session Libre rebels elected another congressional directorate headed up by Jorge Cáliz. - [LatinNews Daily on 24-JAN](#)
- About 2,000 people protested in the streets of the capital of El Salvador, on the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords that ended the civil war (1980-1992), and expressed their discontent against the government of Nayib Bukele. Guerrilla war veterans, Army veterans, victims of human rights violations, members of social and feminist organizations protested. - [EFE on 16-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The Citizen Lab and Access Now have conducted a joint investigation into Pegasus hacking in El Salvador in collaboration with Frontline Defenders, SocialTIC, and Fundación Acceso. They confirmed 35 cases of journalists and members of civil society whose phones were successfully infected with NSO's Pegasus spyware between July 2020 and November 2021 and shared a sample of forensic data with Amnesty International's Security Lab which independently confirmed the findings. - [Citizen Lab on 12-JAN](#)
- Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega was sworn in for a fourth consecutive term following elections considered rigged and on a day marked by sanctions from the United States and European Union against members of his government. - [NBC News on 11-JAN](#)
- State media reports Argentine President Alberto Fernández said that the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) "was not born to oppose or confront other institutions" as he took over the body's leadership from Mexico. Fernández also thanked CELAC's support to his country for the ongoing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). "I really appreciate it because you feel much stronger knowing that your Latin American and Caribbean brothers are accompanying you." - [Merco Press on 08-JAN](#)

- El Salvador's government, led by President Nayib Bukele, has moved ahead with plans to issue Bitcoin bonds by preparing 20 bills designed to provide a legal framework for them. Alejandro Zelaya, head of the treasury, told Salvadoran media El Mundo that the bills will cover regulations about issuing securities as cryptocurrency to ensure the viability of the Bitcoin bonds that were proposed in November 2021. - [Coin Telegraph on 05-JAN](#)

## **COLOMBIA, FARC, AND BORDER CRISIS**

- The Prosecutor's Office assured that there are 67 dead in the midst of clashes between criminal groups in the department of Arauca. The cases of violence not only increase in number, but also in degree of cruelty. The Minister of Defense, Diego Molano, warned that the criminality and damage to the tranquility of Arauca has its origin in Venezuela. - [La Semana on 12-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Military operations on the border with Colombia have killed at least nine people belonging to illegal armed groups, while eight civilians died after explosive devices left by the same groups detonated, Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino said. - [Reuters on 11-FEB](#)
- The Vice President and Foreign Minister, Marta Lucía Ramírez, and the Minister of Defense, Diego Molano, held a meeting at the Foreign Ministry with the Russian Ambassador to Colombia, Nikolay Tavidumadze, after the diplomatic tensions that arose after the military assistance agreement signed between that country and Venezuela. - [La Semana on 07-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- El Tiempo spoke with Joseph Humire, executive director of the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS), who stated that the Russian military were present on the border with Arauca and that they deployed equipment such as radars to intercept communications. The operation of foreign armies in Venezuelan territory is information that has been circulating for several years. Cubans and Iranians would also make up the group of soldiers with a presence in the country. A source within the Fanb told this newspaper that at least in the case of the Cubans, there would be some 22,000 within the Venezuelan military organizations. - [El Tiempo on 06-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Fighting between rival guerrilla groups along Colombia's border with Venezuela has ushered in a bloody start to the new year, leaving dozens dead and sending residents fleeing from some of the worst violence since the country's historic peace accords five years ago. At least 23 people were killed in clashes between leftist armed groups in the northeastern department of Arauca during the first weekend of January. Later in the month, car bomb exploded in front of a building where more than 40 social leaders were gathered in a self-protection workshop, injuring dozens and killing a security guard. - [Washington Post on 04-FEB](#)
- Venezuela is moving troops to the border with Colombia with technical assistance from Russia and Iran, Colombia's Defense Minister Diego Molano said, calling the possible deployment "foreign interference." Molano, citing intelligence sources, said troop

movements were registered in Venezuela opposite Colombia's Arauca province, the scene of fierce fighting between guerrillas of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and FARC dissidents for control of the drugs trade. - [Jerusalem Post on 03-FEB](#)

- On January 27, at least one person was killed and 24 injured in a wave of attacks targeting the Colombian security forces and United Nations (UN) officials, with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN) guerrilla group claiming responsibility for much of the violence. - [LatinNews Daily on 28-JAN](#)
- The Venezuelan National Armed Forces is reinforcing the municipality of Páez in the state of Apure, located in the region of Los Llanos, in the southwest of the country, and on the border with Colombia, among other reasons, due to the presence of irregular armed groups in the area and the other side of the border. The deployment is being carried out within the framework of Operation Bolivarian Shield 2022, which is conducted by the Strategic Operational Command of the National Armed Forces (Ceofanb). - [Info Defensa on 20-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- State media reports the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) deployed its members and equipment to Apure state, on the border with Colombia, with the aim of fighting Colombian terrorist groups known as TANCOL. In compliance with the order previously issued by Nicolas Maduro, the head of the FANB Strategic Operational Command (CEOANB), General Domingo Hernandez, ratified that the Bolivarian soldiers will rid Venezuelan territory of foreign irregular groups. - [TeleSUR on 17-JAN](#)
- The dissident 10th Front of the ex-FARC has been busy. After taking on multiple enemies on Venezuelan soil, the group now appears to be taking on a far larger criminal obstacle: the ELN. On January 7, Colombia's Attorney General's Office issued a warning that the fight between dissident forces of the now-defunct Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC) and the National Liberation Army (Ejército de Liberación Nacional - ELN) was expanding. In a statement, authorities warned that ex-FARC forces were moving from their stronghold in Norte de Santander to attack the ELN in Arauca, a Colombian department on the border with Venezuela. - [InSight Crime on 11-JAN](#)
- Colombia sent 600 soldiers to protect the population from the open conflict between the ELN and the FARC dissidents in Arauca, on the border with Venezuela. The two battalions arrived in less than 72 hours, according to the order that was generated on Monday, January 3, 2022. - [MilenioMX on 06-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)

## COLOMBIA ELECTIONS

- It has been shown that the strategy of some of the presidential candidates in Colombia is to disqualify their direct opponents. The insults have been across the board, but those focused on their actions in public matters prevail, such as: “corrupt,” “extremist,” “lukewarm,” and “bad administrator.” However, the worst possible adjective is “populist.” - [La Semana on 07-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)

- These are the results of the most recent survey by the National Consulting Center for SEMANA for Colombia's 2022 presidential election: Gustavo Petro, Rodolfo Hernández, Ingrid Betancourt and Sergio Fajardo appear in the first four places of the vote. - [La Semana on 05-FEB \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Colombian politician Ingrid Betancourt, who was held as a hostage for six years by the country's largest guerrilla group, said that she will be running for her country's presidency. She enters a crowded field of candidates in which Gustavo Petro a leftist former mayor of Bogota is currently leading polls, but where moderates like Betancourt stand a chance to do well, if they can unite their efforts and tap into voters' frustration with corruption and growing inequality. - [ABC News on 16-JAN](#)

## BRAZIL ELECTIONS

- Former leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is pulling ahead of his likely rival, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, and could win outright in the first-round of Brazil's October election, a new poll shows. Voter support for Lula is now almost the same as the total support for all other candidates, which is at 45%, indicating that he could win the election in the first round by getting more than 50% of the valid votes cast. - [Reuters on 21-JAN](#)
- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro accused two Supreme Court Justices, Luis Roberto Barroso and Alexandre de Moraes, of being biased against him. "Barroso and Alexandre de Moraes want Lula to be president," Bolsonaro said in a TV interview, referring to former left-wing President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. "Ok, they might not want to vote for me, but do they want to return the office to the man who robbed the nation for eight years?" he added. - [DW on 12-JAN](#)

## ALEX SAAB

- Revelations around the case of Alex Saab, the alleged figurehead of Maduro who is being investigated by the U.S. justice system, are still appearing in different Latin American countries. The report prepared by the Oversight Commission of the Ecuadorian Congress gives an account of Saab's links with politicians in the region. The document, which is also known as "the Ecuadorian dossier," is even related to the track that the FBI followed about the alleged money laundering of which Saab is accused. - [Infobae on 17-JAN \(content in Spanish\)](#)