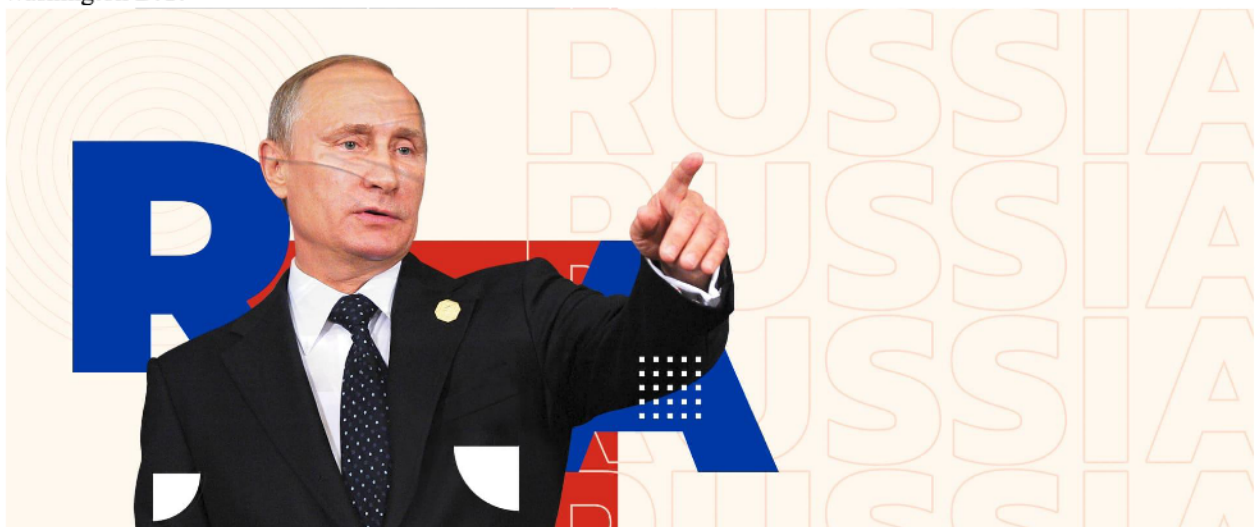




## **RUSSIA'S ACTIVITIES IN LATIN AMERICA**

**March & April 2022**

The following is a summary of open-source media reporting on Russia's presence and activities in Latin America and the Caribbean in March & April 2022. This is not a complete list of media reports on Russia'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.



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- In an interview with Fox News Digital, Amb. Juan Carlos Pinzón described how Russia – a country with a long and sordid history of negative involvement in Latin America – continues to use its influence through nefarious ways on the continent. He also extolled the U.S. relationship with his country and said it was important to further democratic values in the region. - [Fox News on 05-MAY](#)
- When the first Russian missiles struck Ukraine, the reverberations were felt 6,500 miles away, on the vast Brazilian farms that grow much of the world's soybeans. Russia supplies a quarter of Brazil's fertilizers, and sanctions meant to punish Moscow for its invasion threatened to trap the crucial commodity from being exported. That posed a danger not only to the Brazilian economy, but also to the world's ability to feed itself. - [New York Times on 08-MAY](#)
- Brazil's presidential front-runner Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskiy shares part of the blame for Russia's invasion of his country as he believes the leader failed to negotiate more with Moscow. - [Bloomberg on 04-MAY](#)
- Nearly a week into a ransomware attack that has crippled Costa Rican government computer systems, the country refused to pay a ransom as it struggled to implement workarounds and braced itself as hackers began publishing stolen information. The Russian-speaking Conti gang claimed responsibility for the attack, but the Costa Rican government had not confirmed its origin. - [Associated Press on 22-APR](#)
- Russia donated nearly 20,000 tonnes of wheat to political ally Cuba, a welcome gift to the Caribbean island nation beginning to feel the pain of soaring global prices for grains following the war in Ukraine. - [Reuters on 21-APR](#)
- Tijuana, a border city, has become an unexpected gateway for thousands of Ukrainians and Russians fleeing the war in hopes of crossing north to start a new life. - [Wall Street Journal on 21-APR](#)
- Cuba and Nicaragua voted against expelling Russia from the United Nations Human Rights Council over atrocities committed by its forces during the war in Ukraine, shifting from their previous, more cautious abstention votes to signal their open support for Moscow. Bolivia also voted against it. But more surprisingly, two of the region's heavyweights, Mexico and Brazil, abstained from voting, along with El Salvador, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, showing that Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be divided in their response to the war in Ukraine. - [Miami Herald on 19-APR](#)
- Brazil defends Russia's permanence in the G20, a group that brings together the 20 largest economies on the planet, Minister of Foreign Affairs Carlos França said on Monday, April 18. The same position is being adopted by Economy Minister Paulo Guedes at meetings with G20, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank. - [Agencia Brazil on 19-APR](#)

- State media reports Vladimir Putin signed Federal Law On Ratification of the Agreement on Social Security between the Russian Federation and the Oriental Republic of Uruguay. The Agreement is aimed at settling relations between Russia and Uruguay in the area of social security. To this effect, the provisions of the Agreement determine the list of pensions, allowances and other payments as well as establish a list of persons covered by respective provisions of the Agreement. - [The President of Russia Press Release on 16-APR](#)
- State media reports Russia's Foreign Ministry has released a statement from Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova urging for the resumption of negotiations between Argentina and the United Kingdom regarding sovereignty over the Falkland/Malvinas Islands. "We advocate the resumption of negotiations between Argentina and Great Britain in order to settle the dispute about sovereignty in accordance with UN resolutions," Russian authorities posted on social media. - [MercoPress on 14-APR](#)
- What does the Russian Embassy say about officer Dmitry Tarantsov? Russian officials assured that the officer is a career soldier with several missions abroad, denying allegations of cyber-spy actions. - [RCN Noticias on 08-APR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Exclusive: Russian military, linked to electoral scandals in the U.S., could now be in Colombia. Colonel Dmitry Tarantsov, an expert in cyber espionage, has been accredited by the Foreign Ministry as military attaché of the Russian Embassy in Colombia since 2019. - [RCN Noticias on 06-APR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The sanctions that the EU and the U.S. have imposed on Russia are said to be the toughest in history. But we have similar experiences with very extensive sanctions, albeit against countries of much less importance to the world economy. There are many differences between sanctions that try to stop a brutal invasion war, and sanctions that seek regime change. And Russia is not Venezuela. - [Confidencial on 01-APR](#)
- Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador brushed off comments by a senior U.S. military official who said there are more Russian spies in Mexico than anywhere else in the world. That was an apparent reference to Russia's huge embassy in Mexico City, which has a decades-old reputation for being an espionage hub. Responding to a question, López Obrador said Mexico was nobody's colony and didn't send spies abroad. But those were two things that Gen. Glen VanHerck, head of U.S. Northern Command, had not mentioned. - [Stars and Stripes on 25-MAR](#)
- Brazil is "clearly opposed" to barring Russia from the G20, its foreign minister said, as the United States led a push to exclude Moscow from the group over its invasion of Ukraine. "We've seen initiatives emerge in various international organizations... to expel or suspend Russia. Brazil is clearly opposed to those initiatives, in line with our traditional position in favor of multilateralism and international law," Foreign Minister Carlos Franca told a Senate session. - [Buenos Aires Times on 25-MAR](#)



- Mexico has condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but that didn't stop a group of lawmakers from creating a Mexico-Russia friendship group. Made up of deputies from the ruling Morena party, the Labor Party (PT) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the group was formally established in the lower house of Congress while Citizens Movement (MC) party lawmakers protested against the move. Russian Ambassador Viktor Koronelli acknowledged the committee's creation as an indication of Mexico's solidarity with Russia. - [Mexico News Daily on 24-MAR](#)
- According to the UN Refugee Agency, more than 3.5 million refugees have fled Ukraine since Russia launched its invasion late last month. Most of them have ended up in Poland or other neighboring countries. But some have come to the U.S. through its border with Mexico. At the same time, some Russians, generally those who oppose the war or their country's government, have also been trying to get into the U.S, but seemingly with less success. - [Fronteras Desk on 23-MAR](#)
- Cuba's reluctance to openly side with Russia at the United Nations recently speaks volumes about the difficult position in which the island finds itself, the future of its economy and the political alliances that depend much on what happens with the war in Ukraine and negotiations between the U.S. and the Maduro regime in Venezuela. - [Miami Herald on 22-MAR](#)
- One of the more bizarre aspects of Russia's war on Ukraine has been the behavior of both Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro and his Argentine counterpart, Alberto Fernandez. Both leaders paid visits to Russia where they met with Vladimir Putin shortly before Ukraine was invaded on February 24. The visits were not part of any effort to head off the invasion. - [National Interest on 20-MAR](#)
- At least five vessels are headed toward Russia with nearly 200,000 tons of Brazilian raw sugar sold by European traders, according to shipping data, about double the country's normal annual imports of the sweetener. Sanctions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have boosted demand for sugar and other food staples there, and store shelves have been emptying due to food hoarding. Yet sanctions may also make it harder for shippers to get paid for their cargoes. - [FX Empire on 17-MAR](#)
- According to a TIME analysis of CBP data, the number of encounters between U.S. border agents and Ukrainians and Russians at the U.S.-Mexico border increased 753% between FY2020 and 2021. In FY22 so far, the number of Ukrainians and Russians encountered at the border has already surpassed the previous two years, with the most significant uptick happening in the last six months, as Russia's threats against Ukraine increased. - [TIME Magazine on 15-MAR](#)
- Surging global oil prices and Russian sanctions are forcing Western governments to approach those countries they previously sanctioned in response to alleged human rights and nuclear proliferation. Russia exports nearly 7M b/d of crude and products both West and East, and even with sanctions relief on both, Venezuela and Iran cannot at present match such volumes. However, even if sanctions are increased against Russia, at least

some Russian exports to OECD countries are likely to find alternative markets in Asia. It looks like Venezuelan oil might soon come out of the shadows if diplomatic efforts succeed. - [Riviera Maritime Media on 14-MAR](#)

- As reported by Reuters, six South American nations are proposing the exclusion of fertilizer from sanctions on Russia, Brazil's Agriculture Minister Tereza Cristina Dias said. She said Brazil has secured the support of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay for a proposal excluding fertilizer products that will be submitted to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization. - [World Fertilizer on 11-MAR](#)
- Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez met Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Antalya, Turkey, according to Russia's ambassador to Caracas and Venezuelan state television. The meeting took place five days after U.S. officials met Nicolas Maduro amid the crisis surrounding Russia's invasion and suggested Caracas deliver some of its oil exports to the United States as part of an agreement to ease sanctions against the OPEC member country. - [Yahoo News on 10-MAR](#)
- Mexico will not impose unilateral sanctions to Russia or Belarus and will only implement sanctions if they are imposed by the Security Council. - [Baker McKenzie on 08-MAR](#)
- A high-powered delegation from the United States met with Nicolas Maduro and Vice President Delcy Rodriguez on March 5 to discuss the potential easing of sanctions and alternative oil resources. The group of emissaries from the United States—led by top White House Latin America adviser Juan Gonzalez and ambassador James Story—also included six Citgo executives and special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, Roger Carstens, who attended to address the release of American citizens and dual nationals being held in Venezuela. - [Epoch Times on 07-MAR](#)
- State media reports measures and sanctions targeting Russia's economy and banking system are having a great impact in world trade but the situation is anticipated to be particularly worse for some Latin American countries close to the Putin regime. White House security chief for the Western Hemisphere, Juan Gonzalez, anticipated that Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua will feel the impact of the sanctions due to their economic relations with Russia. - [MercoPress on 05-MAR](#)
- State media reports the Cuban consul general in Russia, Liana Hernández, stated that the embassy of the Caribbean nation is taking measures in this regard, starting with the cancellation of regular flights due to the closure of airspace to Russian aircraft by a considerable number of countries, among them the members of the European Union, Canada and the United States. - [On Cuba News on 04-MAR](#)
- Two of Russia's staunchest allies in Latin America declined to vote against a United Nations resolution condemning Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, dealing a diplomatic blow to Russia's increasingly isolated leader, Vladimir Putin. Both Cuba, with a decades-long relationship with Moscow, and Nicaragua, whose authoritarian leader has

expressed support for the invasion, abstained from the vote condemning Russia's actions. - [Miami Herald on 03-MAR](#)

- Russian President Vladimir Putin and Nicolás Maduro discussed increasing a strategic partnership between Russia and Venezuela in a phone call, the Interfax news agency reported, citing the Kremlin. They also discussed the situation in Ukraine, and Maduro expressed support for Russia. - [Reuters on 01-MAR](#)
- Guatemala President Alejandro Giammattei said that he has ordered the return of the Central American country's ambassador to Russia, Guisela Atalida Godinez Sazo, adding that his government rejected Russia's actions in Ukraine. - [Reuters on 25-FEB](#)
- During recent official visits to Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov spoke of deepening economic and military ties with the respective socialist and communist governments of its allies in the Americas. Russia's chairman of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, also visited Cuba on February 23—and Nicaragua on February 24—making it Russia's second official diplomatic meeting with anti-U.S. regimes in Latin America in a week. - [Epoch Times on 25-FEB](#)
- Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro unauthorized his Vice President Hamilton Mourao for saying that Brazil opposed the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Mourao earlier condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine. His comments went well beyond a statement by Brazil's Foreign Ministry expressing concern about Russia's military operations and urging a diplomatic solution. Bolsonaro, speaking on a webcast to his supporters, said only he, the president, could speak about the crisis between Russia and Ukraine, and it was not Mourao's business. - [Reuters on 24-FEB](#)
- The Russian Federation has agreed to postpone the payment of certain debts owed to it by the Republic of Cuba, allowing the small island country until 2027 to repay billions of dollars worth in foreign debt. These debts, worth a total of \$2.3 billion, are the result of numerous loans made by Russia on behalf of power generation, metals, and transportation infrastructure in Cuba. - [Epoch Times on 23-FEB](#)
- Russia and Cuba will deepen ties and explore collaboration in transportation, energy, industry and banking, Cuba's Foreign Ministry said following a visit from Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov. - [Reuters on 19-FEB](#)
- State media reports the President of Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega, welcomed a Russian delegation headed by Deputy Prime Minister Yury Borisov in a meeting conducive to strengthening the cooperative relationship between the two nations. The President said that it was possible to comply with the established schedule and highlighted Russia's work in the struggle for peace, an action they share. - [TeleSUR on 17-FEB](#)

## SERGEI VAGIN CASE



- On March 30, the Colombian Army and the Attorney General's Office captured in the town of Suba, Bogotá, Russian citizen Sergei Vagin and six Colombians, alleged members of a criminal network that moved millions of dollars to finance operations against the Public Force and organize protests in the country since 2019, Colombian magazine Semana reported. - [Diálogo on 27-APR](#)
- The arrest of a Colombian in Moscow is retaliation for the Russian captured in Bogotá, says his sister. If found guilty, the cucuteño could pay five to ten years in prison, as well as be forced to pay a fine of up to 5 million rubles (about 251 million Colombian pesos). - [Blu Radio on 13-APR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Exclusive: Audio of Sergei Vagin's chilling threats to members of the criminal network. The telephone recordings, held by the Prosecutor's Office, show the crudeness of the Russian when dealing with a problem with members of the organization. - [RCN Noticias on 04-APR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- The Prosecutor's Office recently revealed evidence that would implicate a Russian citizen and six Colombians in illegal activities. During the hearing, the judge referred to intelligence reports published by RCN Noticias in recent days. - [RCN Noticias on 01-APR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Sergei Vagin had a relationship with the ELN and recruited Venezuelans, according to the Prosecutor's Office. The revealing dossier of the accusing entity shows the alleged links of the Russian citizen with illegal activities in the country. - [RCN Noticias on 31-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)
- Last weekend RCN Noticias revealed two reports indicating the presence of Russian citizens in Colombia laundering money. According to investigations by intelligence agencies, a woman of Russian nationality was the head of a money laundering network that, under the façade of companies selling electric fryers, carried out transactions for more than 146 million dollars since 2018. - [RCN Noticias on 31-MAR \(content in Spanish\)](#)