

PARDO-MAURER SPEAKS AT THE HUDSON INSTITUTE'S CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Introduction

What I'd like to do today is just talk for a few minutes about some strategic ideas that are coursing through the administration now. I'll give you a sense of how we're looking at things now after being in office four years. Then, I'd like to hit the center mass of the target, talk about what's going on with Cuba...

With regard to Cuba, I want to leave three main messages for you. One, they're back. They're back with a huge foreign policy and we need to be aware of that. Two, as we all know, this foreign policy has to do with their association with Venezuela. I want to give some ideas and actually raise some questions about what the nature of this association is and give a sense of the scale of it because in talking with even very informed people, I find they're surprised at just how truly massive, how expeditionary this relationship is. I'd like to raise some questions about what this relationship means for our thoughts on the succession in Cuba, another aspect of this relationship that I find has not been thought through. And finally, the third point I'd like to make about Cuba is I'd like to draw your attention to the place where I think the set – if you'd like – the set battle piece in what is truly going on right now, which is the battle for the future of Latin America, where I think this is happening – Bolivia – and what Cuba and Venezuela are doing there.

Bush Administration Strategy

So let me just briefly give you some ideas of, if you like, the big strategic thoughts that will give you a sense of how at least we in the administration look at Latin America... I have been at this job, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Western Hemisphere, since the beginning of the administration. I'm the senior advisor to the Secretary of Defense. I'm the senior political civilian appointee at the department responsible for hemispheric affairs. That is Latin America, Cuba, and Canada. So my job is to inform the secretary, my job is to represent the department in the interagency.

I'd like to say that right now I'm giving you my perspectives from the Department of Defense... You're not going to hear some authoritative account of the administration's view of Cuba or of Latin America. But the main point I'm trying to make here is this is not some new tack of the administration on Cuba. Those who came expecting that, you may have to wait a little while on that. The administration has plenty of authoritative documents and statements explaining what our Cuba policy is, and I will refer you to some of those.

So with regard to overall strategy in the administration, in 2001, when I and the rest of the Latin America team came on board, our security problem set for Latin America could be described as basically two big issues, and they were very connected. The first one was Colombia... The United States had 300 troops in Colombia who were advising the government of Colombia on what was essentially a very, narrowly focused security effort to help the government of Colombia deal with the problem of drugs, and specifically the eradication of coca in Colombia... And then, of course, there was the drug problem overall in Latin America. I would say that was our problem set. When I was brought on board, that was what I was hired on to deal with.

Where are we now? The problem set is much larger. First of all, Colombia, I think, remains the center of gravity of our effort. We have to get Colombia right. Congress has bought into or become a partner in the policy of the administration in a bipartisan way. There is a strong bipartisan consensus to support Colombia in what is now a unified campaign against drugs and terrorism. We realized that we could not separate the issue of drugs from the issue of terrorism. And in a bipartisan way, Congress agreed to a policy of expanded authorities, and in fact, to an expanded U.S. presence, authorizing up to 800 troops in Colombia. So that in itself is a much larger challenge there. That was in response to what was perceived rightly as the success of Plan Colombia, which was the original plan, also a bipartisan plan to deal with the problem of drugs in Colombia. That alone is a much larger problem set.

Haiti – the United States, France, and Canada, under a United Nations mandate, intervened in Haiti last year... So Haiti is back.

You have a revolution going on in Bolivia, a revolution that potentially could have consequences as far reaching as the Cuban revolution of 1959. I'll save the detailed remarks on that for when I talk about Bolivia, but this is something that could have an impact on the way you deal with foreign policy for the rest of your lives. I mean, we are still dealing with the Cuban Revolution of 1959. That was 50 years ago. I wish all of you a long and happy career in whatever you're doing including policy, but the things going on in Bolivia could have repercussions in Latin America and elsewhere that you could be dealing with for the rest of your lives.

We have the emergence of China as an important and influential economic force in the region. We have a burgeoning security relationship with Mexico, which did not exist before... Finally, I would say we have the most important thing of all, which is, of course, this is the post-9/11 world. In June of 2001, that was not on the horizon, and that in itself raises all kinds of challenges. So what I'm saying is, we're dealing with a much more complicated problem set than we were dealing with in 2001.

How are we approaching these? Let me lay out for you what I would say are the two big thoughts that guided us in crafting administration policy...

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The first thought is what informs our Colombia strategy specifically. I described to you the original problem set, which was how to help Colombia fight drug trafficking. That was the original intent of Plan Colombia. As I say, we realized that you couldn't separate the problem of terrorism from the problem of drugs...

Second concept was one that was already entrained before 9/11... What we realized is that homeland, hemispheric, and global security need to be seen as a continuum, and that is a very, very different approach from what we have traditionally had.

So those are two big thoughts that guided us at the beginning of the administration, this effective sovereignty idea and the continuum of homeland, hemispheric, and global security. That was then; this is now. We are revising the concept. We are looking at the region again. We're always looking at it, but we're looking at our assumptions that have guided us over the last four years and we're asking are these assumptions still valid? I think those two that I laid out for you still are. I would add two more to the mix.

The first one is that there are alternatives to the model that we champion, the model for which we are the champion, which is the model of the democratic, market based liberal society, liberal in the old-fashioned sense of the word...

There are less benign [alternatives]. There are even malicious and I would not be afraid to say, downright evil alternatives. One of them, as we know, is the Bolivarian Alternative, of which I'll talk in a little bit, and this is the model championed by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and supported or even directed by Fidel Castro in Cuba. That is an alternative...

The second one is global uncertainty...

So to that big strategic thought that there are alternatives out there, the idea that the world is an increasingly uncertain place, but we do know that in that kind of world, we want to know where the Western Hemisphere is, that that is important, that is another big, strategic thought... I want you to understand why the Western Hemisphere is important and why it is essential that we understand what is going on there, and especially when we see avowed actors who are hostile to us who in the past have done everything they can to destroy us, and I'm referring to the Cuban Missile Crisis specifically there, we need to know what is happening, and we need to realize that this is important, and we need to know that this will affect the way we're able to approach the world and sustain our way of life for the next 50 years.

Cuban Adventurism: Support for Terrorism Pre-dates 9/11

So let me now move on to the main subject here, Cuba, because I think this is, as I said, this is one of the key alternatives that we have to deal with, that we have to understand, and that we have to develop policies that we continually need to refresh in order to deal with. Let me first, just as a refresher for those who are too young to remember, go through some of the places where Cuba has engaged in adventures over the last 50 years. This is by no means an exhaustive list and I don't really have a very scientific criterion for selecting here, but I just tried to find places where Cuba had tried to foster revolution or had supported revolution or had engaged in subversion with more than a handful of people over the last 50 years.

Now, let me just first of all say that by his own admission in a 1998 speech, Fidel Castro said: "the only place in Latin America where we did not try to promote revolution was Mexico"... Well, in April of 1959, the first Cuban intervention took place. It was in Panama... In May, the same happened in Nicaragua of 1959; in June, in the Dominican Republic, the first of three active efforts by Castro to subvert the Dominican Republic; and then, in August, in Haiti. So they hadn't been in power for four months, but they already were trying to spread the revolution throughout Latin America.

In the 1960s, Cuba - oh, I should add in 1959, Che Guevara visited Africa to start laying plans for Cuban subversion in Africa - in the 1960s, Cuba was involved in Algeria, in Bolivia, Congo-Brazzaville, what is now the other Congo - it is now called Zaire, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guinea-Conakry, Venezuela, Zanzibar, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, and Tanganyika. These were not small-scale operations. They were up to a thousand men in Zaire in 1966. Cuba sent a battalion to help Algeria in a war with Morocco in the '60s.

In the 1970s, Cuba was involved in Angola, Benin, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, in the Golan Heights, in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Iraq, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Somalia, South Yemen, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and again, the usual array of Latin American countries... In 1973, Cuba joined Syria and sent a tank brigade to join in the war against Israel...

Also, of great note, in 1974, Cuba established the Americas Department of its Intelligence Directorate. And this became the standard model for intervening in other countries. Typically, it was an intelligence operation that led the vanguard in establishing a Cuban presence.

In the 1980s, you have Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, did I mention Ethiopia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Iraq, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mozambique, still Nicaragua, Sao Tome and Principe, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Yemen, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda, Western Sahara, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. I'm talking about places where they had more than fifteen or 20 people, in some cases, as I told you, thousands, in many cases, hundreds of people... Cuba, I remind you, is a country of what, 11 million people, 10-11 million people? Imagine if Ohio had done all this and you begin to get a sense of the hubris, the incredible megalomania of a country that can barely provide for itself engaging in these kinds of adventures. So you had 25, then up to 40,000 troops in Angola; you had 12,000 troops in Ethiopia.

In Grenada – Grenada is very small, but only because it's an island, so they probably couldn't put too many in there, but there were about 635 civilians who were construction workers who ended up having quite an interesting firefight with the U.S. troops when we intervened in Grenada. This was the first time that I'm aware of and the last time that Cubans and Americans were actually engaged in direct combat against each other was in Grenada. Why Grenada? What's the point of all this? Well, given the type of aircraft that Cuba had, given the type of connections that Cuba was facilitating between terrorist groups in the Middle East and terrorist groups in Latin America, Grenada was a very important way-stop from Africa to Central America and to Latin America and the other way around. It was a way that Cuba was hoping to be able to send folks unobserved, if you like, to different parts of the world. The whole strategic effort... was for the airfield in Grenada at Port Salinas.

In Nicaragua, I mentioned there were 7,000 civilians and up to 3,000 troops. At the same time, Cuba was also supporting and training and financing and paying for the FARC, the PLN, PLO, the FSLN, the FMLN, ETA, the IRA, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, every acronym guerilla group that you ever heard of was somehow in Cuba.

Then, the '90s came. Nineteen-ninety was a particularly bad year for Cuba. They had just lost one of their key allies, Manuel Noriega in Panama, the Sandinistas lost the elections in Nicaragua, and then in 1991, the Soviet Union disbanded its subsidies to Cuba, up to \$6 billion a year. And Cuba went into something called the special period. I'm not going to go into the details of that, but it was – the economy may have collapsed by 40, 50 percent... It was a severe contraction. It made all these adventures, which had largely been paid for by others, impossible. And Cuba just kind of disappeared off the radar screen.

Cuba is Back

The title that I chose for this presentation: "The Return of an Aggressive Cuban Foreign Policy," is a little mischievous in the sense that Cuba has always had an aggressive foreign policy. The only thing that has changed has been Cuba's ability to implement that foreign policy. I ask you, as you look at this list of all these places where Cuba has been over the last 50 years, under the leadership of the same man, under the guidance of the same military, led by and strategized by the same intelligence department with the same ideology, with the same system of cronies, I ask you, why should things be different now? That's my first question. Why should things be different now?

Well, they're not. Cuba is back. Cuba is back with more experience, but the same vision. And it is the vision of a Marxist, socialist, totalitarian state.

In 2002, President Bush announced his Initiative for a New Cuba. For all those here who aren't familiar with this, if you ever hear someone say, why doesn't the United States just give Cuba a chance? Why don't we just lift the embargo? I mean, we're the ones strangling them. Why don't we just offer them something? The fact is, the president, President George W. Bush said, I want to offer a deal. If Cuba makes progress in terms of elections, opening its economy, freedom of speech, a few other things, I will be willing to work with Congress to find ways to lift the embargo. That was in 2002. Cuba's response within a few months was to launch one of the most ferocious and savage crackdowns that Fidel Castro has engaged in since he took power. There are still 75 high profile dissidents who are jailed in Cuba as a result of that crackdown. That was Cuba's answer to the opening.

As part of the special period, which was again, really just a euphemism for the complete collapse of the economy due to the loss of subsidies – the economy itself was never really a functioning economy after Che Guevara drove it into the ground – the response to this opening... some degree of economic activity to take place on the island. Permits were issued for families to have restaurants, for small businesses to open. The currency regime was liberalized. It was possible to have dollars and trade them. The military got into the hotel business – a huge moneymaker.

Well, I was very interested to read in I think October of last year suddenly [the Castro regime] canceled the permits for the restaurant owners. Convertibility of the peso has ended. Cuba says you cannot have dollars anymore, you must turn them in; and by the way, here are some pesos for you for your dollars. It's estimated that the regime took in \$1.5 to \$2 billion that way.

Why?... Why if all that it takes is a little opening to sort of show the goodwill to the world, why does [Castro] suddenly retrench on this? Why? Well, the answer is because he has an alternative, and whenever Castro has had an alternative that meant that he did not have to open the economy; that he did not have to allow freedom of the press; that he did not have to behave like a member of the civilized community of nations, he took that alternative. And the alternative is Venezuela. So what I've done now – first I wanted to give you a sense of the scale of Cuba's ambitions, the imperial Cuban plan. Now I want to talk to you a little bit about the relationship between Cuba and Venezuela...

Castro and Chavez

Chavez was discovered by Castro after he was released from prison [March 1994] for his participation in a coup attempt [February 1992] in Venezuela. And this relationship very, very quickly flourished into what we see today... Chavez benefits from the relationship and Castro benefits from the relationship. I'm not going to say that Cuba or Venezuela do, but it is definitely a symbiotic relationship, and it's very difficult to tell which is the tail and which is the dog in this. And I'm going to add another thing. It's very difficult for us here in the United States and us in the policymaking community who rely on intelligence to really understand what's going on here because of the lack of

transparency; because of the active counter-intelligence measures taken by the Cubans and the Venezuelans. And I will remind you that Cuba runs probably the best counterintelligence shop in the world today.

Right now Cuba has, we estimate, between 35,000 and 50,000 Cubans in Venezuela in an enormous range of occupations. A great majority of them are in what many people regard as benign things. They're serving as teachers, sports trainers, doctors and so on. But there is also a huge number of military personnel. Chavez's security entourage is basically a Cuban project. Cubans have moved into key administrative positions in virtually all of the states of Venezuela. Cubans have also latched onto the Venezuelan embassies abroad, and it's notorious now – if there's a Cuban and a Venezuelan diplomat in the room, the Venezuelan will go quiet and the Cuban will talk. This is a huge project. What is it about? Well, I can suggest some answers but one of the main things I want to say is that there's a lot that we don't know, simply because they're not telling us and because it's very, very hard to find out. But given the track record, it is not good. It is certainly not a democratic project. There are all kinds of evidence of direct Cuban advice in terms of: how to deal with demonstrations; how to deal with the opposition; the way to set up a counterintelligence network; the way to subvert democratic organizations; and the way to get rid of civil society.

One of the most interesting projects that I've been tracking in Venezuela has to do with the establishment of a militia. Chavez is establishing a militia that will report directly to him, not through any established traditional military structure. He has announced that he wants to recruit 2 million people for this militia. That was an interesting figure for me because Venezuela has a population of approximately 24 million, and so he wants to put about 10 percent of the population under arms. He's purchasing up to 300,000 Kalashnikovs from Russia, all kinds of other things to support this project.

It's very interesting – this is an exact replica of what the Cubans had tried to foist on Nicaragua in the '80s. Towards the end of the civil war there, when the Nicaraguan economy had been absolutely destroyed, the Cubans advised setting up a militia and the Sandinistas announced that they were going to have a militia of about 4 million people – 10 percent of the population. This is both a military project, the idea being one of –arming the people that you need for a prolonged popular war strategy, a people's war if you like. It's also a social-control device. You have the names and addresses of all these people and you know how to make them report to you and you have ways to control them. And finally, it's a way of getting subsidies out. If you've ruined the economy you need to find a way to feed people and get them clothes and things. And this is a social distribution network as well. In Nicaragua this project failed because ultimately the Sandinistas were forced to come to the negotiating table. In Venezuela this project is ongoing. That's a Cuban project.

Vast Scale of Cuban Project

We're running short on time... What I want to leave with you is a sense of the vast scale of this Cuban project. There are perhaps as many as 50,000 Cubans in Venezuela. There may be more. We just don't know. But the Cuban Aviacion flights are arriving every single day. The other side of this coin is that thousands upon thousands upon thousands of Venezuelans are being taken to Cuba. And perhaps one of the most sinister developments here is that there's been a sort of subversion of the idea of citizenship. Venezuela has been issuing citizenship cards to Cubans and others and something similar may be going on on the Cuban side. I'm not too certain of that. But they're blurring the lines there. This is truly a joint project and it is huge.

This ought to concern us with regard to Cuba. I would say one of the prevailing assumptions out there is that this Cuban regime is so rotten, it's something that is so repudiated, it's something that is bankrupt, it's something that is so economically incapable that when the old man dies, this rotten apple will just fall off the tree and roll our way. I would argue that succession scenarios based on that idea are obsolete and that all of us in the think tank community need to go back to our drawing boards and ask, what does this [Venezuelan] alliance mean for Cuba? Because I cannot believe that in all these trips that Chavez is making to Cuba that they're not talking about what will happen in Cuba when Castro dies, and I have reliable intelligence from the CIA, from the DIA, from the FBI, from everybody that Castro is going to die someday – someday. There is a consensus in the interagency on that.

Let me just give you one possible scenario: Castro knows that he's on his deathbed. He places the phone call, says, "Hugito, me muero." Hugo comes to Cuba. There is a touching deathbed scene. Raul and Chavez come out carrying the coffin. The revolution will live; the revolution will continue. What if this project of destroying civil society in Cuba is so successful that really there's no way to connect the voices that want change in Cuba. And suppose there are sporadic little uprisings on the island asking for change. In a situation of apathy, in a situation of complete atomization of civil society, the one that wins is the one that is most organized. The mere fact that Chavez is able to put gas in Cuba's tank, literally, may make all the difference between whether there's a transition to a democratic government or more of the same.

It's estimated that Chavez provides 90,000 barrels a day of oil to Cuba. It may be much, much more to that. Because of the mechanics of it, that's a subsidy of about 1–1.2, maybe more, \$1.2 billion for Cuba. Cuba resells Venezuelan oil on the market, literally putting gas in the tanks, which they did not have in the 1990s, so that the goon squads can go and beat into submission anyone who says: "I'd like a democratic vote on where Cuba is going after Castro." That may make all the difference. We need to ask ourselves, what does this mean? What does this mean for our scenarios?

Finally I would just simply like to draw your attention to what I regard as the objective of subversion that Cuba and Venezuela are working on as a joint project in which I think they are closest to achieving their objectives, and that is Bolivia. And I will remind you that Bolivia has always been a central project for Cuba. And it follows a strategic template. Castro sent Che Guevara to the Congo in 1965 and said, take this place, turn it into a Marxist state, help them become a Marxist state. And they explained the concept. The Congo, Zaire, is a huge, resource-rich, land-locked country that is the heartland of Africa. It's the key to everything around it. Che Guevara went there; it was a disaster. He nearly got killed. He ran away. His next project was another huge, landlocked, resource-rich state: Bolivia, in the center of South America. Che Guevara sought to ignite a war based on igniting a peasant revolution, and it failed and he was killed there. That's where Che Guevara died.

This project is back. It may be even one of those bits of unfinished business that Castro psychologically feels he has to accomplish. Now what is going on is Cuba and Venezuela are actively trying to exploit what is a revolution in Bolivia driven by fundamental structural causes. This would be happening anyhow, whether Cuba or Venezuela were there or not. What you have in Bolivia is a combination of urban rage, in drawing on the demographic of the young, frustrated populations of rapidly growing cities – the urban rage combined with ethnic resentment and grievances based on hundreds of years of history – very, very real, fundamental, autochthonous qualities in Bolivia. They've combined – that's the revolution – the combination of this urban rage and ethnic resentments have combined into a force that is seeking to change Bolivia. It has, in the last two years, swept away all the institutions of the country except the military and the police pretty much. It has swept away presidents; it has swept away the constitution; even the very borders of Bolivia are in some kind of question now as there's a secessionist movement in the south of the country.

Those may be impersonal, inexorable, inevitable forces. We too, the United States, are involved in Bolivia, and the aim of our policy is to work with the Inter-American system, to work with the OAS and with the democratic countries of the region to ensure that the revolution in Bolivia has a soft landing to help Bolivians lead this to a democratic outcome. We want to find the Nelson Mandela of Bolivia to help overcome all this history. That's what we're looking for.

What Cuba and Venezuela are doing is something quite different. They are trying to steer this revolution towards a Marxist, socialist, if you like, populist state in the new Bolivarian model. This is their big project. And what I would like to submit is many people are focused on the Venezuelan role in this and there is no question that Chavez is providing money and moral support and championing Evo Morales, but what I'd like to suggest is what you need to look for is the Cuban hand in this as well. From what I am able to see, this is a project that is directed and organized and orchestrated by Cuba, with Venezuelan support.

Here I'm venturing into the terrain of guessing, simply because there is so much that we do not know, but I would argue that the two main Cuban projects in the region are Venezuela and Bolivia. There are subversive efforts going on everywhere else – everywhere else, and those seem to be primarily funded, organized, orchestrated by Venezuela, but Bolivia is the set battle piece going on right now. It is not by any means inevitable that Bolivia should go to a Marxist, radical, anti-U.S., pro-Cuba, drug producing state. That is not inevitable. But the other side is working very hard to take it that way.

Che Guevara was just 30 years too late in Bolivia. Latin America is today the most urbanized region of the world. This is something that makes it different from the Latin America that you and I grew up in. Eighty percent of the population lives in cities. These cities are often catastrophes of urbanism. They are catalogues of everything that can go wrong when you do not plan for a city, or of misbegotten growth. In many cases, because of the policies that countries are following, these cities are not able to deliver the job opportunities that are needed to keep a rapidly growing young population, especially young male populations, in jobs that provide sustenance and dignity. That is the demographic that they are tapping into, and it may work this time – it may work this time. There's no Che Guevara out there but the plan is still there.

Conclusion

So what I hope I've done here is alerted you to what I see as the outlines of the plan. I warn you, there's a lot that we don't know, simply because there is no transparency, simply because these folks run the best counterintelligence in the world, simply because it's something that is new. This is something that has really just started to take off in the last few years. Until October of 2004 – was it October? No, August of 2004, Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro were concentrating on one thing: How do we get Chavez past this referendum in Venezuela? He succeeded in that, and what we have seen is an acceleration of this revolutionary project. This is something very, very new. It's something that's just happening. It's happening under your noses.

I'd say sometimes the easiest things to miss are those that are right in front of you, but I hope that after having gone on for so long, this crowd will feel a little better informed, or at least emboldened to present some tough questions, and I'll be happy to take those now. Thank you.

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