
Relations Between Iran, Cuba And Venezuela

It is no secret that Iran, Venezuela and Cuba have close relations to one another especially considering they are all basically dictatorships. Iran is under control of a Supreme Leader that is supposed to be a democracy and Venezuela and Cuba are actually dictatorships. But their relationship is mostly anti-American. They help each other in relation to funding, weapons, intelligence and many other things like protection of criminals that are sought out by the United States.

Cuba has been known to fund terrorist groups outside of the country like Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Ghazi Nasr Al di and Fawzi Kanaan, two Arab Shiites, have been sent to post out in Caracas, Venezuela to then be under the protection of the Venezuelan government. From there they work with Cuban government in order to promote Hezbollah and Iranian targets in South America and against the US. They also fundraise for Hezbollah and help Hezbollah activists travelling around Venezuela and neighboring countries. For example, there are reports that they have smuggled narcotics and terrorists to the US through Mexico and arms and explosives under the Iranian diplomatic cover. This would also not be the first time that Cuba has funded groups that aren't seen acceptable by the rest of the world or even by sanctions that have been placed. In 2013, the UN caught them in violation of their sanctions. Cuba successfully smuggled weapons from Cuba to North Korea under the government of Castro. The UN report revealed that Cuba had "a comprehensive, planned strategy to conceal the existence and nature of the cargo". In addition, "some, if not all, of the consignment was not expected to be returned to Cuba." In 2014, the Castro government also admitted to have been facilitating financing of terrorism and they said they would begin to freeze bank assets related to Al-Qaeda.

The first evidence of relationships between Iran and Venezuela go back to 2001 when Hugo Chavez, former President of Venezuela, reached out to then President of Iran Mohamed Khatami to develop strong ties with the government of Iran. He wanted to focus specifically in energy production, the economy and the industrial cooperation. He declared that his reason for going to Iran is to "prepare the road for peace, justice, stability and progress for the 21st century". Since then Chavez has supported Iran's nuclear program.

After Khatami came President Ahmadinejad that, along with Chavez, said they are in opposition of the "US imperialism". At one point Venezuela had interests in selling F-16 Fighting Falcons to Iran but, with heavy controversy, they backed out and even though he has clearly expressed that he supports Iran's nuclear program he denies having plans to make an atomic weapon with Iran. When Chavez passed away, President Ahmadinejad, in 2013, expressed online in a

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personal tribute that “Chavez would return on resurrection day along with religious figures such as Jesus”.

The economy of one's country is very important and when oil prices started to decrease in 2015 Venezuela and Iran joined forces to stabilize the oil prices. In January 2015, Maduro visited Iran, as a stop on his tour of other OPEC countries. Both Maduro and Rouhani agreed that falling oil prices resulted from increased fracking in the United States, as well as their common enemies using oil prices as a “political ploy.” Rouhani affirmed that Iran and Venezuela would join forces to thwart world powers strategies and to stabilize prices at a reasonable level in 2015. “At the time, Venezuelan oil accounted for over 95 percent of the country's export earnings, with the price of a barrel dropping by half since 2014. In June 2015, Iran and Venezuela signed a series of agreements to fund joint investments and improve the supply of goods, with Maduro announcing, “These are six agreements of major importance for the economy of our countries.” The countries agreed to jointly fund a research program in nanotechnology, and Maduro stated that he secured goods necessary for the Venezuelan people such as drugs and surgical equipment. Iran's Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade reportedly stated the agreement was preliminary subject to review by Iran's finance ministry.

On November 23, 2015, Maduro and Rouhani met in Tehran in Maduro's second visit to the country that year, and the fifth from Venezuelan senior officials. During the meetings, the presidents announced they were re-affirming their country's mutual alliance. In January 2016, Maduro and Rouhani reportedly held telephone talks where Maduro called on Rouhani to promote the adoption of measures to restore oil prices on the world market, with Maduro calling for a meeting of OPEC members to address the issue, and congratulating Rouhani on recent cancelations of sanctions. As previously stated, all of these regimes have on common goal and that is to go against the US. The three regimes increasingly coordinate their policies and resources in a three way partnership aimed to counteracting and circumventing US policies in the Middle East and Latin America. So much so that when President Maduro won the election, Venezuela and Cuba felt that America was backing off from their interference with their governments because for the longest time the US has tried to isolate both countries so they cannot influence the countries around them. In addition to that, Cuba is proven technical savviness to interfere and intercept US telecommunications; Cuba has deployed around the world a highly effective human intelligence network.

The type of espionage carried out by Ana Belen Montes, the senior U. S. defense intelligence analyst who spied for Cuba during some 16 years until her arrest in 2001, has enabled the Castro regime to obtain a huge amount of intelligence on U. S. vulnerabilities as well as an appropriate understanding of the structure of the US security system. Such information and analysis was provided to Saddam Hussein before the US invasion of Iraq and is being provided to a strategic ally like Iran. While one may argue that factors such as Iran's limited military

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capabilities and its clear distance from the US diminish any conventional concerns, one should expect that Iran, in case of a US and Iran conflict would launch an asymmetrical offensive against the US and its European allies through neighboring terrorist states and paramilitary organizations. In such a scenario, Cuban intelligence would be extremely valuable to Iran and its proxies and terrorist groups could use Cuban territory to set up operations against the US. Alongside this, The FBI estimates that Cuba has been a shelter to tons of fugitives from US who live on the island under the protection of the Castro regime. Some of these fugitives are charged with or have been convicted of murder, kidnapping, and hijacking, and they include notorious killers of police officers in New Jersey and New Mexico, the most prominent among them is Joanne Chesimard, placed by the FBI in 2013 on the "Most Wanted Terrorist List." However, Cuba does not just do things behind curtains. In 1996, Cuba ordered a pair of Cuban Air Force pilots, Lorenzo Alberto Perez-Perez and General Ruben Martinez Puente, to shoot down two unarmed civilian American aircraft over international waters in the Florida Straits. The US set out indictments toward both of these pilots of which are obviously not acknowledged by Cuba. This act of terrorism, which was directly ordered by Fidel and Raul Castro, killed four men, which three of those were American citizens. Before the Barjam, Tehran's support for Cuba was prominent. Since 2005 Cuba has a receive a total of more than \$1. 2 billion in loans from Iran. With this money, Cuba has been able to make necessary investments in the restoration of Soviet-era infrastructure. In total, Iran is funding around 60 projects that include the acquisition of 750 Iranian-made rail cars and the construction of structures like power plants, dams and highways.

Recently, Saudi Arabia has tried to strengthen their ties with Cuba as well. In April Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Al-Jubeir visited Cuba for two days. Saudi and Cuban relations date back to 1956, with the Kingdom opening its Embassy in Havana in 2011. In May 2017, King Salman held talks in Jeddah with Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Ricardo Cabrisas and they agreed on economic cooperation between one another. Saudi Arabia has also granted Cuba loans through the Saudi Development Fund to finance projects worth over \$80 million. Now this is not a worry for the US. In reality Iran should be worried by these talks. Al-Jubeir's visit to Cuba shows how Riyadh needs Havana to be part of its anti-extremist program. Riyadh is seeking to bring Cuba into its fold, especially against Iran, in order to mitigate any support from Havana to Tehran as the confrontation between the US and Iran grows. Saudi Arabia is no longer standing by and watching how Iran conducts its foreign policy anywhere in the world. Riyadh took notice of how Cuban-Iranian relations have developed over time and given Tehran a hub in the Caribbean. Even though all of this is just skepticism, it shows that Saudi Arabia is not waiting to make any moves. Now there is the Nexus, which is the nickname for the relationship of Iran, Venezuela and Cuba but somehow Russia always seems to find a way into all relations against the US. Just like in the era of the Soviet Union, Cuba in 2015 asked for help from Moscow. The Cuban Economy is struggling and they need the cheap oil from Russia. The Cuban leader Raul Castro personally called on Russian President Vladimir Putin to regularly export oil to Russia. The

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request came after Venezuelan oil exports to Cuba suddenly fell. Venezuela, now facing a full-scale economic catastrophe, has for years been a key contributor to Cuba. In the golden age of the Caracas Havana relationship (when Hugo Chavez was still in power), Venezuela sent 105,000 barrels of oil a day to its Cuban counterparts. After Chávez's death, the figure fell to 90,000 barrels a day, and has recently reached 40,000 barrels a day. Oil exports from Venezuela have dropped by around 300,000 barrels this year, compared to the same time in 2015, according to researchers at Columbia University in New York. "The drop in exports could be a threat to the global oil market in 2017," the researchers said. But this geopolitical risk has now become a serious challenge for Cuba. With significant reductions in Venezuelan aid, these days for Cuba are a periodic reminder of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union broke its aid to Havana and refused to pay subsidies to the island.

According to the Cubans, in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union (1994-1991), the situation was such that it seemed to have returned to the Stone Age. The animals again replaced tractors on farms, bicycles replaced cars and millions died of starvation and famine. Of course, there is less one who believes that those days will be repeated again. "In the era of the Soviet Union, Cuba's dependence on that country was about 70 to 75 percent," said Carmelo Mozelago, an American Cuban economist. But Cuba's current dependence on Venezuela is only about 44 percent. "The current conditions for Havana are not only complicated by the Cuban dependence on Venezuela's oil; the issue is not getting money from Cuban doctors working in Venezuela. Cuban doctors' incomes in Brazil have declined dramatically as a result of the economic crisis. Over the past year, Cuba has spent more than \$ 6 billion on its physicians abroad. That amount is almost twice the income earned by Cuba in the tourism industry for some time. The reality is that Cuba is in very difficult circumstances. But does Russia need to help the country without any hesitation, when it faces serious economic challenges? The direct transfer of oil from Russia to Cuba will be very costly, because there is no direct and easy route to oil delivery to Cuba. Russia also does not currently have any additional oil to export to Cuba. Russian energy development fund director Sergei Pekin said that sending oil to Cuba means reducing oil revenues for Russia. At the same time, the Ministry of Economic Development has queried about the ability of Cuba to pay for oil money, saying oil exports in such a high-risk environment are high. The skeptics of the Russians are understandable. Cuba has never paid its debt to the Russians, either at the time of the Soviet Union or afterwards. Last October, Russia again provided a loan to Cuba for the purpose of building a thermal power plant and completing a half-power plant in eastern Havana. Since Cuba had taken a lot of oil rebates from Venezuela, it was set to return the loan at 4. 5% and one year to Russia. But now, with the cut off of Venezuelan help, the fate of the repayment of this loan to Russia is also in a hurry.

Russian experts believe it is wiser to buy Cuba from nearer countries, which, of course, would also impose additional costs on Russia. "Relations between Cuba and the United States are warming up recently, and it seems that Havana could be thinking of buying oil from the United

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States, which is much cheaper," says Sergei Pekin. On the other hand, sending oil to Cuba could be a kind of financial aid to the island. This is a political decision that Moscow should seriously think about. "Cuba has implicitly stated that Russia could expect Cuba's support from Moscow to international assemblies in exchange for sending oil to the country. "Russia still looks at Cuba as a strategic partner," said Victor Semenov, an expert on Latin American studies in Moscow. That's why Castro's appeal to Putin, not Obama, is so strange. Obviously, Washington did not have such an order because it did not look at Cuba. "Economic analysts believe that Cuba can go away with a comprehensive and economical reform, moving away from a centralized and planned inefficient economy, and accepting foreign aid from the crisis it is struggling today. Perhaps Russia's help is invaluable in these circumstances, but the fact is that along with Russia, the support of other countries interested in investing in Cuba and normalizing political relations with this country can remove Havana from this situation.

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