

CIA Announces New Mission in Venezuela and Cuba

By [Eva Golinger](#)

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Caracas, August 19, 2006—John Negroponte, Director of National Intelligence for the United States, announced on Friday, August 18, 2006, the creation of a new special CIA mission to oversee intelligence activities in Venezuela and Cuba. Negroponte, who coordinates the entire intelligence community in the United States and reports directly to President George W. Bush, named CIA veteran J. Patrick Maher as Acting Mission Manager of this new important division.

According to a Press Release from the Directorate of National Intelligence, “Maher will be responsible for integrating collection and analysis on Cuba and Venezuela across the Intelligence Community, identifying and filling gaps in intelligence, and ensuring the implementation of strategies, among other duties.” According to Negroponte, “such efforts are critical today, as policymakers have increasingly focused on the challenges that Cuba and Venezuela pose to American foreign policy.”

Since early 2005, the CIA has named Venezuela as one of the “Top 5 Unstable Countries” in Latin America and has increased its intelligence personnel within the country by fifty percent.

The new CIA Mission Manager for Cuba and Venezuela will “be responsible for ensuring that policymakers have a full range of timely and accurate intelligence on which to base their decisions.” This implies a further increase in actual ground agents and field officers in both nations.

During the past two years, the Venezuelan Government has discovered and expelled four U.S. officials engaged in espionage activities. Two of these individuals were military attachés, Capitan John Correa and Lieutenant Humberto Rodriguez, and had been actively recruiting members of the Venezuelan armed forces to provide strategic and secret information about internal Venezuelan affairs to the U.S. government.

The other two accused spies are not publicly known, though President Hugo Chávez recently made reference to a “beautiful woman caught taking photographs in the city of Valencia”, indicating she was a CIA operative who had been detained and turned over to the U.S. Embassy.

J. Patrick Maher has been the National Intelligence Officer for the Western Hemisphere since August 2005. He will remain in that capacity as well as assume the role of Acting Mission Manager until a more permanent replacement is named. Maher was the Deputy Director of the CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence’s Office of Policy Support from 2003 to August 2005, and previously oversaw different CIA divisions in Latin America, including the Colombia Working Group, the Mexico Working Group and he served as Chief of the Latin America

Branch's Middle-Caribbean Division. He joined the CIA in 1974 after a two-year stint as a volunteer in the Peace Corp, where he was stationed in Colombia. The Peace Corp has often been viewed as a first step trial period for young perspective CIA officers.

The Mission Manager for Cuba and Venezuela is a position recommended by the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission of the Directorate of National Intelligence and has been endorsed by President George W. Bush. The Cuba and Venezuela Mission becomes the sixth of its kind, though the only other nations with such specific missions are Iran and North Korea. The other missions include one for counterterrorism, one for counter-proliferation and one for counterintelligence. The Missions are aimed at leading the intelligence community on a strategic and analytical level.

This latest development in the growing hostilities between Venezuela and the United States Government indicates the importance the Bush Administration is now placing on monitoring activities within Venezuela and developing new strategies of intervention. Despite excellent commercial relations between the two nations, the verbal rhetoric and behind the scenes preparations for a direct conflict are increasing. Top Secret CIA documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act in 2004 revealed the in-depth role the Agency played in the coup d'état against President Hugo Chávez in April 2002. Subsequently, direct U.S. intervention in Venezuela has grown through multi-million dollar funding to opposition groups via the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

It was long known that the CIA and other intelligence bodies were active in Venezuela, yet this latest confirmation from the Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, affirms that Venezuela has taken a top priority role in the Bush administration's intelligence and strategic defense planning.

Venezuela has presidential elections coming up on December 3, 2006, and is concerned that this new special CIA Mission will attempt to interfere with the electoral process.

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