

# US-Cuban Rapprochement: Remedy to the Growing Isolation of the US in Latin America?

By [Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#)

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*It is important to pay attention to the events in Latin America. Not only are the events there indicative of regional changes, but they are also indicative to events in Eurasia. The US decline in the Middle East and Washington's increasing tensions with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China are playing out in the [Caribbean](#), Central America, and South America.*

## US Rapprochement with Cuba

Havana and Washington announced that they were going to respectively reopen their embassies in one another's capitals on December 17, 2014. After secret negotiations that were facilitated by the Canadian government and Vatican City, the last three of the Cuban Five — Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, and Ramón Labañino — were freed in exchange for the US agent Alan Gross. Not long after, the Cuban government also released several Cuban prisoners at the request of Washington as part of the agreement struck between Havana and Washington for rapprochement.

There are multiple factors behind the US move to normalize relations with Cuba, but one of the most important factors is that the political establishment in the Washington Beltway realized in 2013 that the US was increasingly losing influence in the Western Hemisphere. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which by design excludes the US and Canada, has increasingly sidestepped the Organization of American States (OAS). Even attempts to reinvigorate the OAS, which Washington uses as a panel of influence in the Western Hemisphere, have failed. In this regard, the Cubans flatly refused in 2009 to normalize their participation in the OAS after they were invited back into the pan-American organization.

South of Cuba, Argentine and Brazilian cooperation with China, India, Iran, Russia, and other independent powers has intensified. Inversely, Argentine and Brazilian relations with the US have declined. The two South American giants openly sided with the Chinese, Iranians, and Russians against US plans to bomb Syria in 2013 and joined ranks with Russia, India, China, Indonesia, and South Africa against the US, Britain, France, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and their allies at the September 2013 G-20 Summit held in the Russian city of St. Petersburg [1].

## Tensions between the US and Brazil and Argentina

Not only was Washington challenged on its war plans against Syria by most of Latin America

and the independent strata of the international community in 2013, but the US began to be challenged even more openly by the South American giants Argentina and Brazil. Brasilia has not hidden its anger over the fact that the US has used its surveillance agency the National Security Agency for industrial espionage against Brazil and to monitor Brazilian political leaders. [2] While there has been an attempt to whitewash this by the US government and mainstream media outlets, US espionage against the Brazilians has widened the chasm of differences between Washington and the Portuguese-speaking South American giant.

In 2013, at about the same time that the US government was challenged about Syria at the G-20 Summit, Brazilian President Dilma Vana Rousseff would denounce Washington and its intelligence agencies. President Rousseff would condemn the US for violating international law in front of the entire United Nations. [3] Not only were Washington's claims of using surveillance and spying practices only for security reasons and against enemies proven to be false, but the revelations of US spying further exposed the criminal and degenerating nature of US foreign policy. In a visible gesture to US elites demonstrating Brazilian resentment, Brasilia rejected giving the US company Boeing a lucrative contract to replace its fighter jets. [4] Instead the Swedish company Saab was given the \$4.5 billion (US) contract. [5]

Washington opted to keep silent when confronted by Brazil. This was also the case in 2014 when the US government was openly challenged by Argentina. Speaking during a televised broadcast from the Casa de Gobierno, Argentine President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner accused the US of wanting to assassinate her or topple her government via regime change in Buenos Aires on September 30, 2014. [6] Hours after the US Embassy in Buenos Aires issued a security warning to US citizens either already inside or traveling to her country, she told the people of Argentina that that «if something happens to me, don't look to the Mideast, look north» to the US government. [7]

Madame Kirchner's statements were a visible signal of the deterioration of relations between Argentina and the US as a result of US machinations to manipulate Argentinean policy by exploiting Argentina's debt through a group of bond holders known as the vulture funds. Early in the same month as her television address accusing the US of having nefarious plans against Argentina, President Fernández de Kirchner and Argentina opted to address «economic terrorism» at the UN as the most malignant force in the world instead of the mythical terrorists that are constantly reinvented and rebranded by the US and its allies to wage their war of conquest.

Madame Kirchner even diplomatically challenged the US at a high-level meeting of the UN Security Council that was held on September 24, 2014. After UN Security Council Resolution 2178 was unanimously passed, Kirchner reminded President Obama and his delegation that the terrorist the gathered world leaders were addressing were called «freedom fighters» by Washington just a year earlier in 2013 and Washington's «War on Terror» has actually helped increase terrorism instead of reducing it. She finished by saying that Argentina was under siege by the vulture funds while her country was working to develop its energy resources and become an energy exporter.

Not only was Cristina Fernández de Kirchner diplomatically alluding to the US delegation that she knew that the US was using the vulture funds as leverage against Argentina, she also said she knew it was linked to petro-politics. To the anger of NATO member Spain, Argentina had taken back control of Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales (YPF), its national

energy company, from the Spanish oil conglomerate Repsol on March 3, 2012. One of the reasons for this was that Argentina planned on developing its shale oil and natural gas reserves with hydraulic fracking. Argentina, however, upset the US by decided to do this with the help of the Russians. It is in this context that Russian President Vladimir Putin had visit Argentina two months earlier and announced that Moscow and Buenos Aires were strategic partners after signing an entire package of agreements, including information, energy, and military cooperation deals, with the Argentines on July 12, 2014. [8] It was no coincidence that Putin and Kirchner jointly inaugurate the maiden broadcast of Russian news channel RT en Español in Argentina on October 9, 2014. [9] A few days after Madame Kirchner challenged the US at the UN, Moscow and Buenos Aires signed «an important bilateral energy contract for Gazprom to cooperate with YPF to explore and develop Argentina’s natural gas reserves.» [10] According to Reuters, the «Gazprom deal would be the second major investment for Argentina after Chevron Corp agreed last year to invest \$1.24 billion into the promising Vaca Muerta [despoits]» in South America’s southernmost region of Patagonia. [11] This is why President Fernández de Kirchner has commented the vulture funds «look a lot like the eagles of empires.» [12]

### 2014 Saw a Failed Coup in Venezuela

It should be noted that the renewal of Cuban-US relations by Washington took place almost one full year after the US-supported anti-government riots failed to bring about regime change Venezuela again.

After the Coalition for Democratic Unity (MUD) candidate Governor Henrique Capriles Radonski—a wealthy lawyer that became the governor of Miranda in 2008 and who has openly called for the reversal of Chavista policies and the cancellation of Venezuelan ties with Cuba, China, Iran, and Russia—lost the April 2013 presidential elections to Nicolás Maduro Moros, the MUD refused to admit defeat and unceremoniously alleged fraud. The unraveling of events went thus: «With the initial support of the US government, Governor Capriles refused to accept the results even after an audit of more than half the votes was conducted through his insistence. Capriles then demanded that all the votes be recounted, which was accepted by the National Electoral Council. Capriles, however, made additional demands including a call for the full audit of the voter registry and essentially a retracing of all the votes cast (not merely a vote count). Even when the National Electoral Council with great hardship tried to meet his increasing demands and did verify that Maduro won the election fairly, Governor Capriles refused to admit defeat and said that the election was a hoax. Even the US government was forced to back down from supporting him.» [13]

Instead Capriles and the MUD incited street violence in Caracas and other Venezuelan cities. Using the opposition’s ownership of most the Venezuelan media, a distorted image of the protests was presented and the MUD misled some Venezuelan citizens with legitimate grievances about crime and inflation into supporting its attempts to remove President Maduro. Trying to win international opinion, at the same time doctored images were circulated by the anti-government forces. The anti-government forces and their supporters also used Argentine, Brazilian, Bulgarian, Chilean, Egyptian, Greek, and Singaporean protest pictures where security forces were confronting protesters. Using these pictures, they dishonestly claimed that the photographs were evidence that government in Caracas was using brute force against peaceful protesters.

A good and bad cop strategy was used by the opposition. Capriles started a dialogue with Maduro to get concessions, while pressure was exerted from the street riots by the

convicted embezzler Leopoldo Lopez Mendoza and the US-funded Maria Corina Machado, two opportunists that were involved with the US-supported military coup in 2002 and signed the Carmona Decree that suspended democracy and democratic institutions in Venezuela. Not only did Lopez support a suspension of democracy, «he was also a key figure in instigating the anti-government protests and violence in front of the Miraflores Palace that was used as a pretext to declare Chavez illegitimate.» [14] Their tactics were the same in 2014 as in 2002: pushing for bloodshed and a loss of life by planting gunmen that would start firing at the security forces among protesters. This is an approach that is best described as follows: «[The aims are] to instigate violence and a loss of human life as a tactic to delegitimize the Venezuelan government and to justify the mainstream opposition's strategy to work outside of any democratic framework. It cannot be emphasized enough that their aims are to increase political chaos and to disrupt Venezuela's political stability with the goal of creating a vacuum to justify acting outside of the democratic framework of elections.» [15]

This is exactly what happened in 2002. After nineteen people died, the opposition-controlled media constructed a false narrative to present the coup to the people and the international community as a noble reaction against a brutal government that had lost all legitimacy by killing its own people. The above events in Venezuela—from the good cop and bad cop strategy to the instigation of violence and media deceptions—are almost a cut-and-paste model of EuroMaidan in Ukraine.

#### Washington is Refocusing on Latin America

Washington is worried that the Kremlin could reciprocate the US and NATO military buildup in Eastern Europe by initiating its own military movements in the Western Hemisphere. The Pentagon has been concerned that the Kremlin could establish a permanent military presence in the Gulf of Mexico from places like Maiquetia in Venezuela with Russian strategic nuclear assets as an answer to Pentagon moves on the borders of Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Although it was denied shortly after by the Kremlin, during the same 2014 tour in which he visited Argentina, it was reported that Putin had made a deal with Havana to reuse the Russian signals facility in Lourdes that it abandoned in 2001 so that Russia could monitor the US. [16]

The US has anxiously been watching as the Chinese lead the construction of the Grand Canal of Nicaragua and while the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador carefully reaches out to Beijing and Moscow; El Salvador is already a quasi-member of the Bolivarian Bloc or ALBA through joint projects between Cuba, Venezuela, and FMLN-controlled structures such as the Intermunicipal Energy Association for El Salvador (ENEPASA) which owns ALBA Petróleos with Caracas. Although incomplete, the title of an article published by Forbes says a lot about what is happening: «As The US Sleeps, China Conquers Latin America.» In this regard, there should be no mistake about it: the US is trying to reassert itself in Latin America and the Caribbean. Not only is Washington trying to push out competitors like Russia and China, it is also trying to abate the rise of the Argentineans and Brazilians as world powers. Furthermore it wants to dissolve or control the Bolivarian Bloc and undo its work through ALBA.

#### Targets for Regime Change: Venezuela and Argentina

Both Havana and Washington think that they can manage and capitalize from Cuban-US rapprochement and not be manipulated by the other side. In regards to Cuba, a wing of the

US foreign policy establishment — as well as opponents of the Cuban government working in US think-tanks — believes that the United States can co-opt Cuba and entrenching it into Washington's orbit through trade and economic reforms that will change Cuba's normative system. [17]

Elite opinion in Washington, however, still believes that the US can re-conquer Latin America and the Caribbean. This is why Venezuela and Argentina are US targets. Regime change in both Buenos Aires and Caracas is part of a global strategy. Even the energy war that includes price drops target Argentina and Venezuela simultaneously with Washington's rivals in Eurasia. With the manipulated price drop in energy prices—which hurts US rivals like Iran, Russia, and Ecuador—the Venezuelan government has had to make cuts in its budget while Argentina's ambitions to become an energy exporter with Russian help are now in question.

In Venezuela, the drop in energy prices is hurting the economy and the Venezuelan government's ability to sustain its social programs. The economic problems being caused by the energy price drops is being used by the US-supported opposition to stoke the flames of sedition in Venezuela again with the hopes of renewing anti-government protests in 2015. Regime change is still on the drawing board in Caracas.

South of Venezuela, pressure has been renewed on the Argentine government using the death of Alberto Nisman on January 18, 2015. Nisman, who had been investigating the bombing of a building belonging to the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina; AMIA) for ten years as a special prosecutor, was found dead with a gunshot wound to the side of his head in the bathroom of his locked apartment on January 18, 2015. [18] Before he died, it was revealed that he has been working with elements of Argentina's Secretariate of Intelligence to build a case against President Kirchner that would have probably been used to remove the government. [19] Like the vulture funds, his death and the politicization of the AMIA case are being used as a pretext for US interference in Argentina's affairs.

## NOTES

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#### About the author:

An award-winning author and geopolitical analyst, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya is the author of *The Globalization of NATO* (Clarity Press) and a forthcoming book *The War on Libya and the Re-Colonization of Africa*. He has also contributed to several other books ranging from cultural critique to international relations. He is a Sociologist and Research Associate at the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), a contributor at the Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF), Moscow, and a member of the Scientific Committee of *Geopolitica*, Italy.

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