

# Virtual Declaration of War: New U.S. fleet to threaten Latin American sovereignty

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The U.S. Navy on April 24 announced the return of the Fourth Fleet to the Caribbean, Central America and South America, covering 30 countries in the region. The fleet had operated in those waters beginning in 1943, monitoring German submarines during World War II, and was dismantled in 1950.

In a press release entitled “Navy Re-Establishes U.S. Fourth Fleet” ([defenselink.mil](#)), the Pentagon tried to soften the appearance of this aggressive move, saying that “these assets will conduct varying missions including a range of contingency operations, counter narcoterrorism, and theater security cooperation (TSC) activities. TSC includes military-to-military interaction and bilateral training opportunities as well as humanitarian assistance and in-country partnerships.”

The fleet will be the Navy component of the Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) and will be based in Florida. The new operations are scheduled to begin on July 1.

## Venezuela a key factor

It is interesting to note, at least briefly, the origins of the Fourth Fleet. In a detailed article in the May 27 issue of CounterPunch, entitled “U.S. Fourth Fleet in Venezuelan Waters,” Nikolas Kozloff describes how in the early part of WWII, Venezuela was the main oil exporter in the world. “During the conflict the oil-rich Maracaibo fields, located in the westernmost Venezuelan state of Zulia, were considered a crucial resource for both the Axis and Allied powers.”

The article describes the eventual cessation of Venezuela’s oil trade with the Germans and its alignment with the United States. The Germans responded by sinking over two dozen oil tankers in the Caribbean north of Venezuela and attacking an oil refinery on the island of Aruba. These incidents led to the formation of the Fourth Fleet—basically, to defend U.S. oil interests in Venezuela.

## A virtual declaration of war

Were it not such a serious matter, one could laugh at the stated mission of “humanitarian assistance.” Like the ones in Afghanistan and Iraq? A look at some of the components of this fleet makes the blood run cold.

It is a floating city. This armada is larger than the total military forces of many of the Latin American and Caribbean countries it will surround. It includes the biggest and most powerful nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, which can host 90 ultra-rapid,

state-of-the-art military aircraft, like the infamous F-16 and F-18 jet fighters. It also contains stealth bombers, helicopters, additional warships and submarines. There can be no illusions. Reconstituting this fleet is preparation for threatening the peoples of the region with war.

Increasingly, the United States is being isolated in Latin America. Except for its closest collaborators in the region—Colombia and Peru—most countries do not want any more U.S. bases or big military deployments in their territories, even if they maintain trade and diplomatic relations with the U.S. One example is the U.S. airbase in Ecuador called Manta. It will be closed by order of President Rafael Correa when the contract expires in 2009. It is not surprising, then, that the Pentagon seeks to adopt a more “flexible” scenario at sea.

This isolation reflects an overall development in Latin America and the Caribbean that is very upsetting for U.S. imperialism. The majority of these countries, forced in many cases by the uprising of the masses, are trying to move away from the U.S. sphere of dominance. And that also includes the most important area of financial domination.

### **Ideas of regional integration resonate**

The countries south of the Rio Grande have political differences among them.

Some are undergoing revolutionary processes, as in Cuba and Venezuela, where the ultimate objective is to do away with capitalism and change the class relationships in order to build up the country on a socialist basis.

Then there are ones, like Argentina, Brazil and Chile, among others, that only want reforms and are leaving the capitalist mode of production intact while trying to implement progressive programs to benefit the poor.

Others, like Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua, are beginning to look towards socialism as the only way to develop. The first two are trying to take back control of their natural resources through nationalizations.

But even many of those that only want reforms are moving away from the financial domination of U.S. imperialism, represented by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Both Brazil and Argentina, for example, paid their enormous debt to the IMF to end their dependent relationship with the financial vulture. Bolivia in 2006 also broke relations with the IMF.

Many countries in Latin America are widening their markets. While in the recent past they traded mostly with the U.S. and Europe, they are now increasingly trading with China and, very importantly, with each other. The ideas put forward by Cuba and Venezuela of regional integration and cooperation are more and more accepted.

Cuba and Venezuela, along with Bolivia, Nicaragua and Dominica, are members of the Bolivarian Alternative for Latin America (ALBA), which is a tremendous effort of trade and cooperation in all spheres—education, culture, sports, health, finance, energy, infrastructure development, and so on. It has the ultimate goal of uniting the whole region following Simon Bolivar’s ideas of “La Patria Grande” (The Great Homeland).

ALBA’s proposals include energy development programs like Petrocaribe and Petrosur and, very crucial, the Bank of the South. This bank is an attempt to replace the WB and the IMF

with a Latin American entity that will benefit all the peoples of the South and would operate not as a profit-driven organism but as a financial organization that will take into consideration each country's economic situation.

Many efforts are being conducted to stimulate cooperation and solidarity. One of those was the emergency summit in Nicaragua on May 7 under the theme "Sovereignty and Food Security: Food for Life," to deal with the food crisis in the area. Fifteen countries attended.

Besides ALBA, a new and larger regional organization was formally constituted on May 23 in Brasilia, the capital of Brazil. Twelve South American countries signed the final document that has as a goal the eradication of poverty, defense of biodiversity, integration and cooperation. Taking into consideration the differences of each country, they will adhere to the treaty as their condition permits.

These working summits and proposals are in direct competition with the U.S. aim of controlling the region. Washington's desperation can be seen in its increased aggression toward the South.

### **U.S. secession strategy: Bolivia**

The Fourth Fleet is only the latest action against the Latin American effort to pursue independence and sovereignty. Other tactics are stimulating the formation of secessionist movements, strengthening the opposition, working through allied governments and other military operations, like Plan Colombia.

Secession by itself is not a negative development, if it comes from the struggle of oppressed masses to liberate themselves from an oppressor. However, the secession tactic used by the U.S. is totally the opposite. It is promoting secession in several countries to strengthen the entrenched oligarchy and break away a wealthy area to the detriment of the poor majority of the nation, thus destabilizing what the U.S. perceives to be an "enemy country or regime." They are trying to use this strategy in Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia.

In Venezuela, the region targeted is the Zulia, the oil-rich area in the northwest that was the main reason for the creation of the Fourth Fleet during WWII. Now, once again, the same fleet can be a threat to help the secession of that wealthy part of Venezuela. However, this time, Venezuela's oil belongs to the people and they, with the leadership of President Hugo Chávez, have vowed to defend it.

Bolivia, however, is in great danger. The secessionist movement there, thoroughly fascist, has been very violent against the peasant and Indigenous majority. The Media Luna (Half Moon)—an area containing the wealthiest provinces of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija—has been threatening the progressive national government of Evo Morales with secession from the rest of the country. It is an attack on Morales's programs of nationalizing the gas and oil, establishing programs for the poor, and recognizing the rights of the Indigenous nations within Bolivia.

Even though these types of separatist referendums are illegal under the Constitution, which also prohibits the installation of foreign (U.S.) military bases in Bolivia, these provinces have moved to hold them anyway. Santa Cruz held its own on May 5. Although the abstentions, blank votes and "No" votes amounted to 50 percent, the oligarchy's media deceptively announced that 80 percent had voted "Yes."

On June 1, the provinces of Beni and Pando held theirs. Again, a significant abstention rate was reported in both, but the separatists claimed victory. Tarija will have its referendum on June 22.

The role of the U.S. government in all this is crucial. The Civic Union of Santa Cruz, headed by Croatian businessman Branko Marinkovic, is the leading organization behind the secessionist movement. It is allied with a viciously racist and violent group called the Youth Union of Santa Cruz. These groups go from province to province stimulating hatred against the Indigenous population and Morales in preparation for the referendums. Their propaganda gets financial support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, a long-time conduit for the CIA.

Interestingly enough, the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia is Philip Goldberg, who was instrumental in the secession of Kosovo from Yugoslavia. In February, according to Prensa Latina, Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca stated that the U.S. Embassy had to explain why it was funding the "Organization for Police Studies," previously known as "Special Operations Command"—an intelligence service committed to promoting destabilization campaigns. Other similar organizations attached to the U.S. Embassy were being investigated for espionage and conspiracy.

Many of these organizations have now been dissolved.

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