

Exemplary of how the MBR-200 operates, was its support in February 1995 for a civic strike in Apure, the Venezuelan state bordering Colombia's Arauca department, and Chávez's stronghold. This is an area which the Caldera government has selected for a 4 billion bolivar economic and infrastructure development package, including the building of a new city, Ciudad Sucre. The strike, which took place in the municipality of Guasualito, specifically opposed the building of Ciudad Sucre.

Guasualito is a region into which the ELN had previously made numerous incursions, and two of its members successfully infiltrated the strike organizing committee, although they were later arrested by local authorities on Feb. 26. In a provocative move, Chávez announced that he would personally travel to Guasualito to support the strike, "despite death threats I have received."

Perhaps as a reprisal for the arrests of the two Colombian guerrillas in Guasualito, between 150 and 200 members of an ELN force attacked the Venezuelan Naval outpost of Cararabo, on the Meta River, and murdered eight Venezuelan sailors, decapitating some of them, and mutilating their corpses. Four others were wounded and several reported missing. Although Chávez formally condemned the massacre, his reported meetings with guerrilla leaders, and his presence in the region agitating against the government, immediately raised questions as to his role.

Chávez's MBR-200 also stands out for its open ties to London. In a March 29, 1995 press conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Chávez bitterly complained that he had been planning to travel to London for a series of meetings, at the invitation of London's ambassador in Caracas, John Flynn, but that the Caldera government had intervened with the British government to sabotage his trip. The Caracas daily *El Nacional* also reported that Paul Webster Hare, the British embassy's counselor, had been seen dining with the "commander" at one of Caracas's ritzier restaurants.

Chávez is totally open about his plans to overthrow Caldera. On March 30, he warned that "anything could happen at any time. We are prepared to govern now, or whenever necessary. We're not planning a conspiracy, or anything like it, but faced with rebellion, we're prepared. I don't think Caldera will make it to the end of his term." For this reason, he is courted by leading members of Carlos Andrés Pérez's political machine, who want to see Caldera ousted and CAP's image restored, if not the man himself back in power.

Last May, Chávez traveled to Spain and France, sponsored by Gustavo Lamoine and Ignacio Quintana, the latter a financier friend of CAP who handled special accounts of government officials in Banco Latino, before it went bankrupt and was taken over by the State. According to journalist Rafael Poleo, Quintana had offered several bankers to help organize a broad-based coalition to overthrow Caldera, which would include Chávez and the MBR-200.

MBR-200 takes aim at the armed forces

Name of group: Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200 (MBR-200); MBR-civil.

Headquarters and important centers: Caracas; El Amparo, Apure, Venezuela.

Founded: July 24, 1983, on the 200th anniversary of the birth of Simón Bolívar, "The Liberator" of Venezuela and other South American countries.

Locations of operations, areas active: Nationally, the main base of operations is in the border states with Colombia, where the Colombian narco-guerrillas operate: Apure, Amazonas, and Táchira. The primary base of operations is in the border town of El Amparo, Apure state. Apure is considered the "Chiapas" of MBR-200.

Active primarily in neighborhoods, the barracks, and universities. They tend to attract extremist students who are not members of another legal party. Their primary bases of support are at the Venezuelan Central University; the Caballero Mejía Pedagogical University in Caracas; Carabobo University in Valencia; University of the Andes in Mérida; the Lisandro Alvarado Central University in Barquisimeto, in the state of Lara.

They have recently organized among poor peasants, in the border states of Apure and Táchira, and in Barinas, Lara, Guárico, and Aragua.

They reject any participation in the electoral process.

In the international arena, MBR-200 leader Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez Frías (ret.) has conducted several tours abroad since his release from jail in early 1994, under the excuse of organizing the "Second Amphictyonic Congress of Panama," with the participation of leftist retired military personnel from throughout the continent. He has visited Cuba, Colombia, Panama, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, Spain, and France.

Major terrorist actions: Its first public action took place on Feb. 4, 1992, at the head of the failed military rebellion against then-President Carlos Andrés Pérez. Chávez was captured and jailed, together with other leaders of the uprising.

March 1, 1992: Lt. Raúl Alvarez Bracamontes stole a cache of weapons from a military installation, to deliver to clandestine members of MBR-200. According to Bracamontes, Chávez gave the weapons to Pablo Medina, leader of the Radical Cause (Causa R) party, to distribute among civilians.

Nov. 27, 1992: A group of active military members of MBR-200 participated in a second military uprising against Pérez, but with the intention of sabotaging it and simultaneously releasing Chávez from the Yare prison.

Feb. 26, 1995: The Colombian ELN narco-guerrillas at-

tacked the naval post at Cararabo, in Apure state, killing eight sailors. One week earlier, Chávez had been in El Amparo, backing a hunger strike by four members of his group. According to press reports, Chávez used his visit to meet with Colombian guerrilla leaders. Some media stated that Chávez had actually participated in the Cararabo attack, but this has not been confirmed.

Modus operandi: The movement operates as a “resistance movement,” drawing on an informal organization of cells, which identify only with the name of the group and with Chávez, without the cells having anything to do with each other. Some of these “cells” are really armed bands of impoverished adolescents. Others are more politicized, and it is suspected that military weapons stolen during the uprisings of 1992 are distributed among them.

The leadership of the organization is structured on the model of secret lodges, with both public and secret members. Leaders are initiated through a Masonic-style ritual, held at some historic site, such as Saman de Guere or the military camp at Carabobo, where they pledge their lives to the movement.

They also organize for convoking a Constituent Assembly, at the same time that they threaten to carry out another armed uprising.

Leaders’ names and aliases: Lt. Col. Hugo Chávez Frías (ret.); Manuel Quijada; Luis Miquelena; Comisario Freddy Bernal, former commander of the Special Tactical Support Force (CETA) of the Metropolitan Police; Col. Luis Dávila García (ret.); Army Capt. Jesús Aguilarte Gómez (ret.); Capt. Carlos Luis Duarte (ret.); Capt. Ismael Pérez Sira (ret.); Capt. Miguel Madriz Bustamante; Leticia Barrios; Prof. Adina Bastidas (Venezuelan Central University, or UCV); Prof. Maigualida Barrera, of the MBR-civil (of UCV); Prof. Nelson Morentes; lawyer Guillermo Gavidia.

Groups allied nationally or internationally:

Nationally: National Bolivarian Front (retired military personnel who participated in the February and November 1992 rebellions, together with civilians who promote the Constituent Assembly); Red Flag (BR), the last terrorist group of the 1970s, currently operating in the universities; Union of Revolutionary Youth (UJR), which works with BR; Popular Democratic Movement (MDP), which also works with BR, but with greater involvement in the poor neighborhoods, which played an important role in the “Caracazo” riots of 1989; Third Path, formed by ex-guerrilla Douglas Bravo; Causa R, also a member of the São Paulo Forum, which participated in the elections together with former members of MBR-200 who have personal differences with Chávez, such as Lt. Col. Francisco Arias Cárdenas (ret.).

Internationally: member of the São Paulo Forum; the ELN’s Domingo Lainz Brigade (Colombia); FARC (Colombia); Argentine World Studies Center, linked to former Argentine commander Raúl de Sagastizábal and former Montonero guerrilla Norberto Ceresole.

Religious/ideological/ethnic motivating ideology: The MBR-200 has a synthetic ideology, based on a British-Masonic interpretation of the history of Venezuela’s civil wars of the past century, with a superficial varnish of Marxism. Their interpretation of “Bolivarianism” is based on the views of Marxist historian Federico Brito Figueroa: Bolívar represents the “chief general”; Ezequiel Zamora represents the “warrior”; and the Rousseauvian pedagogue of the last century Simón “Robinson” Rodríguez is “the teacher,” the one who initiated Simón Bolívar into Masonry. These three individuals form “the roots of the MBR-200 tree.”

MBR-200 shares the belief in indigenism with the EZLN. In the words of Chávez: “Both movements constitute an ideological resurgence drawing inspiration from the rescue of our historic identity, especially now when there is talk of the end of ideologies. To say Emiliano Zapata in Mexico is to say Ezequiel Zamora in Venezuela, both leaders rooted in agrarian and peasant revolution. This is how an ideology stops being a simple system of ideas and is transformed into the motor that stirs popular action against servitude.”

Known controllers/mentors/theoreticians: Chávez credits Federico Brito Figueroa as his inspirer, after having discovered his book *The Times of Ezequiel Zamora*, after graduating from the military academy. Brito Figueroa derived his view of Zamora, according to his own account, from Soviet historian Anatoli Shulgovsky of the Latin American Institute of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Shulgovsky promoted the figure of Emiliano Zapata, and pushed the line that indigenous autonomy must be at the center of any Ibero-American “liberation struggle.” Brito’s book was the ideological manual of the Venezuelan Marxist guerrillas of the 1960s, who gave their brigades the name of Zamora. Brito proudly states that several of these guerrillas were his students.

In the past century, Zamora’s image was used by the Masons to give a populist and jacobin tinge to the various governments they controlled. In this century, Zamora disappeared from official history, until he was rescued in 1975 by Carlos Andrés Pérez, who was inspired by Brito Figueroa’s book: He introduced it to the military academy, and endowed schools with Zamora’s name.

Chávez also credits Mao Zedong, José Carlos Mariátegui, and Antonio Gramsci as ideological influences on his movement. In fact, Chávez states that Marxism “is a science beyond any political thought, as a method of analyzing reality, as a method of facing reality and the perspective of the future; it continues to have perfect relevance, as do all the political currents that exist or have existed.”

Today, Chávez listens to two main advisers: Luis Miquelena and Manuel Quijada. Miquelena edited a newspaper with José Vicente Rangel called *El Clarín*, during the 1970s, which was the mouthpiece of the Marxist guerrillas of that period, although it was officially opposed to armed struggle. Miquelena was a channel for funneling funds to the guerrillas from the U.S.S.R., Algeria, Cuba, and China.

Manuel Quijada was the central civilian figure of the most important Marxist military rebellion against the government of Rómulo Betancourt, which took place in Puerto Cabello and was known as *el portenazo*. After serving time in prison, he left to study in England with a scholarship in economics.

Current number of cadre: No precise figures available. Judging from the number of soldiers who were imprisoned during the Feb. 4, 1992 and Nov. 27, 1992 uprisings, their military cadre could be conservatively estimated between 200 and 300. Some of these, including those who have been initiated into MBR-200 ranks, have abandoned public activism upon being reincorporated into the ranks of the military.

The number of civilian cadre could be much larger, given that they are drawn from ultra-left student groups.

Training: According to intelligence sources from State security agencies, members of MBR-200 have been in contact with the Cuban DGI (intelligence service) for the purpose of coordinating basic training. According to these sources, members of the group have received training in Colombia by members of the Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinating Group. In recent months, it appears that the group has received training in the Barinas Mountains, in Chávez's home state.

Known drug connections/involvement: Their base of operations in Apure is a binational drug-trafficking region, but there is no direct evidence regarding the involvement of the MBR-200 in such activity. Indirectly, it is linked to the Colombian narco-terrorists, and to Cuba.

Known arms suppliers/routes: Since the military uprisings of 1992, according to media reports, small quantities of weapons have been continually disappearing from the arsenals of the national Armed Forces.

Known political supporters/advocates: Fidel Castro; Commander Raúl de Sagastizábal (ret.) and Norberto Ceresole (Argentina); Pablo Medina and Andrés Velásquez of Causa R; former President Carlos Andrés Pérez (who defended Chávez when he was accused of involvement in the Cararabo massacre); sectors of the Catholic Church identified with theology of liberation, such as Arturo Sosa, S.J.; communications media tied to the Cisneros group (Televen and Venevisión).

Financing: Its best-known financier is Gustavo Lamoine, of a wealthy family, who was linked to the DISIP (Venezuelan political police) during the Pérez and Jaime Lusinchi governments. More recently, it has been learned that financier Ignacio Quintana, linked to the failed Banco Latino and to Carlos Andrés Pérez, has been funding various of Chávez's trips, specifically his last tour of Europe, Argentina, and Panama.

Thumbnail historical profile: When the study of the "social sciences" was first introduced into the Armed Forces in the late 1970s and early '80s, a group of leftist officials, described as a "Bolivarian lodge" by their leaders, explicitly prepared itself to take power. The MBR-200 comes out of

that current.

For a decade, they organized a military lodge inside the Armed Forces, on the basis of Masonic structures and practices, with a Marxist orientation, but cloaked in nationalism. Organizing was oriented particularly at the rank of lieutenant colonel (commander) on down—major, captain, lieutenant—and these were known as the "Comacates," for the two initial letters (in Spanish) of each rank.

Of the original founders who participated in the February 1992 uprising—Chávez, José Acosta Chirinos, Francisco Arias Cárdenas, Jesús Urdaneta, and Jesús Ortiz Contreras—only Chávez remains in the group. Urdaneta is a consul in Vigo, Spain. Arias Cárdenas worked for a time for a government agency, and then became a Causa R gubernatorial candidate; Ortiz Contreras died in a car accident in Paris, while working for the agency run by Arias Cárdenas; and Acosta Chirinos withdrew from public life.

Chávez was released from jail in early 1994, and proceeded to travel around the country and abroad. Most important was his trip to Cuba on Dec. 13, 1994, where he was personally received by Fidel Castro at Havana Airport with all honors due a head of State, and given extensive publicity. In Havana, Chávez gave a press conference at the Simón Bolívar House, attended by Castro along with Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega.

On Dec. 16, 1994, he traveled to Santa Marta, Colombia where, according to intelligence sources, he met with leaders of the Colombian FARC. He also traveled several times to Panama, where he met with leaders of the Panamanian Communist Party. On the last visit in mid-June 1995, the Panamanian government announced that it would deny his re-entry in the future, nor would it permit any international event to be held there of the sort Chávez was trying to organize.

Since his imprisonment, Chávez has established links to a faction of Argentina military leftists represented by retired commander Raúl de Sagastizábal and his adviser, former Montonero guerrilla Norberto Ceresole. On Nov. 26, 1994, Chávez was invited for the first time to tour Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, organized by the Argentines. In Buenos Aires, he announced that he would soon be going to Mexico to meet with "Sub-commander Marcos" of the EZLN, a meeting which has apparently not yet come about.

Ceresole and Chávez frequently accompany each other on tour. In June 1995, Ceresole was in Caracas, and was expelled from the country for intervening in internal politics. On May 6, 1995, Chávez traveled to Spain, presumably to promote his movement and to revive the Association of Latin American Military Studies, run by Ceresole. One week later, Chávez travelled to France. The trip was sponsored by financier Ignacio Quintana, who was acting in the name of several bankers who are fugitives from Venezuelan justice, mainly linked to Banco Latino, which was owned by the Gustavo and Ricardo Cisneros group, until the bank was closed by the Venezuelan government.