

TERMS IN USE ON THE CUBA, MEXICO, VENEZUELA TOPIC

Dr. Rich Edwards
Professor of Communication Studies
Baylor University

ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America): Spanish for "dawn" and an abbreviation for the Bolivarian Alliance (formerly, "alternative") for the Americas and the Caribbean, promoted by Venezuela as an alternative regional integration scheme based on solidaristic economic principles rather than the market. ALBA, formed in 2004, has members including Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Nicaragua and three small Caribbean nations.

Banco del Sur (Bank of the South): Six presidents of South American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina – signed a 2007 agreement in Buenos Aires to create this bank. Venezuela's president, Hugo Chávez, proposed the bank so that member countries could avoid reliance on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, institutions dominated by the United States.

Black Spring: This term refers to the mass arrest of nonviolent Cuban protestors in March of 2003. Almost one-third of the political prisoners arrested were journalists, accused of the "crime" of "dangerousness." Most of the 75 Black Spring prisoners have been held in jail for the past decade. Some were released in 2010 and 2011 at the urging of the Spanish government and the Roman Catholic Church. Their release, however, was conditioned upon their willingness to leave their families behind and accept exile in Spain.

Bolivarianism: Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez calls for an ideological commitment to the rejection of imperialism, following the example of Simon Bolivar. Bolivar is revered as the Liberator of Venezuela; between 1810 and 1830, he successfully fought for the independence of Venezuela and four other neighboring countries from Spanish rule.

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC): This is a hemispheric organization, founded in 2011, that includes 33 countries in the Western Hemisphere, but excludes the U.S. and Canada. Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez founded the organization as an alternative to the Organization of American States and as a "weapon against imperialism." Cuban President, Raúl Castro was appointed as president of CELAC in January of 2013.

Convention against the Illicit Manufacture of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition, Explosives and Related Items (CIFTA): Twenty-two nations have ratified this convention, designed to limit the international transfer of assault weapons and other weapons of war; the United States has, so far, refused to ratify the agreement. U.S. refusal to participate in CIFTA is one of the points of contention between the U.S. and Mexico. The government of Mexico believes that about 90% of the assault weapons used by Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are purchased in the U.S. and transferred to Mexico. President Barack Obama has called on the U.S. Senate to ratify CIFTA.

Cuba Reconciliation Act: This is the name of one of the many recent congressional proposals for lifting the Cuban embargo. This particular bill has been introduced by New York Representative, Jose Serrano, in several recent sessions of Congress. In each case, the legislation has died in Committee, meaning that it has not even reached the floor of Congress for a vote. Another similar piece of legislation is the Free Trade With Cuba Act, proposed by New York Representative, Charles Rangel.

Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA): This 1966 law permits any Cuban touching ground in the United States to “naturalize” immediately, meaning they are virtually guaranteed permanent resident status and given an unusually simple path to full citizenship. Cuban immigrants, so long as they touch U.S. soil, do not have to go through the elaborate system of quotas facing immigrants from all other countries. The CAA is upsetting to Cuban government officials who believe that it encourages “illegal departures.”

Cuban Asset Control Regulations (CACR): These regulations were issued by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in 1963, just a few years after Fidel Castro’s rise to power in Cuba. The regulations prohibit virtually all trade and transactions between U.S. entities and Cuban nationals or the Cuban government. In addition, CACR placed a total freeze on all Cuban assets in the United States, whether those assets belonged to private Cuban citizens or the Cuban government. One of the most controversial aspects of the CACR regulations is that they apply to all non-U.S. subsidiaries of U.S. firms. This means that foreign branches of U.S. corporations are not allowed to do business with Cuba. The CACR does provide for the possibility of exceptions, but any such exceptions must be granted only on a case-by-case basis by the granting of an OFAC license.

Cuban Democracy Act (CDA): This 1992 Act is also sometimes called the Torricelli Act, after the name of its sponsor, U.S. Representative Robert Torricelli of New Jersey. The CDA tightened the terms of the Cuba embargo by prohibiting any vessel from loading or unloading freight or passengers within 180 days of such vessels leaving a Cuban port. This provision made it more difficult, though not impossible, for other countries to ignore the terms of the U.S. economic embargo. A vessel traveling from a Canadian port, for example, would not be allowed to travel to Cuba and then also stop in a U.S. port to refuel or deliver goods. The timing of the CDA was significant in that it came only a short time after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of significant amounts of Soviet aid to Cuba. Many U.S. politicians felt that the twin impacts of the Soviet collapse and a tougher U.S. economic embargo would bring down the government of Fidel Castro.

Cuban Five: This refers to five Cuban nationals who, in 1998 were detained and eventually imprisoned in the United States for gathering intelligence against the Boca Chica Air Naval Station in Key West, the McDill Air Force Base in Tampa and the headquarters of the U.S. Southern Command in Homestead, Florida. Cuba claims that these five individuals were in the United States to gather information, not on the U.S. military installations, but instead on Cuba exile groups based in Florida that have perpetrated terrorists acts in Cuba. Signs throughout Cuba demand the release and return of the “Five Heroes,” as they call them.

Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act: This 1996 act is also commonly called the Helms-Burton Act, after its sponsors, North Carolina Senator, Jesse Helms, and Indiana Representative, Dan Burton. This legislation further tightened the economic embargo of Cuba in a number of ways. This Act gave the force of law to the Cuban Asset Control Regulations of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). This meant that the OFAC regulations, were taken out of the hands of the executive branch to tighten or loosen at its discretion. In 1996, that meant that Congress eliminated the possibility that President Bill Clinton might decide to use an executive order to lift key parts of the Cuban embargo – though there was little indication that President Clinton had any intention of lifting the embargo. But the Libertad Act also has an impact on public policy in 2013; this means that it will require an act of Congress to lift the Cuban embargo – President Obama cannot simply do so on his own authority. The Libertad Act also strengthened the embargo by raising a legal threat to non-U.S. companies doing business with Cuba. Title III of the Act says that any person or company that “traffics in property” that was confiscated by the Cuban government on or after January 1, 1959 can be liable in U.S. courts to any U.S. national who claims to own the property. This provision refers to the fact that the government of Fidel Castro nationalized all businesses and personal property when his government came to power in 1959. Many of these Cuban nationals fled to the United States after losing their property and assets; they have filed claims in U.S. courts amounting to billions of dollars. Title III of the Libertad Act means that Spanish companies building tourist hotels in coastal resort areas may open themselves to legal claims filed by previous owners of those properties.

Fast and Furious: This is the name of a sting operation conducted from 2006-2011 by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) designed to trace the sales of assault weapons from the U.S. into Mexico. As part of the operation, the ATF actually facilitated the sale of thousands of firearms that did, in fact, end up with Mexican drug cartels. The ATF knows this because many of the weapons it tracked ended up being used in massacres near the U.S. border. In one especially tragic case, the weapons allowed into Mexico by the sting operation were used to kill U.S. Border Patrol Agent, Brian Terry. The Fast and Furious operation has become a major embarrassment for the ATF.

Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA): This was a proposed agreement to expand NAFTA to all of the nations of the Western Hemisphere, with the exception of Cuba. Representatives from 34 countries participated in negotiations culminating in a November 2003 meeting in Miami, Florida. Ultimately, the negotiations broke down over U.S. unwillingness to abolish its agricultural trade subsidies. The creation of the FTAA has also been actively opposed by Venezuela, Cuba and the other member nations of ALBA.

Free Trade with Cuba Act: This legislation has been introduced by New York Representative, Charles Rangel in each of the last few sessions of Congress. The legislation has, in each case, died in committee. This legislation, if passed, would repeal the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996. It would also remove Cuba from the list of state sponsors of terrorism and remove the current ban on normal tourist travel to Cuba.

Globalization: This is the term given to the free trade regime promoted by the United States and other leading world powers through such instruments as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Critics of globalization argue that it gives undue power to large corporations, undermines labor conditions for workers around the world, despoils the environment and exacerbates the disparities between rich and poor nations. Venezuela and Cuba, working through ALBA, are vocal opponents of globalization.

Gross, Alan: In 2009, Gross was a subcontractor working for the U.S. Agency of International Development (USAID) in Cuba when he was arrested by the Cuban government and eventually sentenced to a long prison term. The “crime” committed by Alan Gross was that he attempted to assist some members of the small Jewish community in Cuba with establishing a connection to the Internet. The Obama administration has viewed the arrest and imprisonment of Alan Gross as an indication that the Cuban government of Raúl Castro is not interested in developing warmer relations with the United States.

Guantanamo Bay Naval Base: Guantanamo Bay is the oldest U.S. military base on foreign soil and remains the only one located in a communist country. The base is located on a 45-square mile region of Cuba that has been continuously occupied by the United States since 1903 under the terms of a treaty stating that the U.S. presence can be terminated only by mutual agreement or in the case of abandonment by the United States. When the government of Fidel Castro took power in the 1959 Cuban revolution, it assured the U.S. government that it would abide by the terms of the treaty that gave the U.S. control of Guantanamo Bay. More recently, however, the government of Cuba has declared that the U.S. occupation of Guantanamo Bay is illegal. The treaty specifies that the U.S. will pay “\$2,000 in gold coins” a year for as long as it occupies the base, but Cuba has refused to cash the checks annually submitted by the U.S. government. Since the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. has maintained a prisoner camp at the Guantanamo Bay base. President Barack Obama pledged to close the base within a year of taking office, but legal complications have made it impossible for him to fulfill that pledge.

Guest Worker Program: Millions of Mexican laborers live and work in the United States, even though they have no legal right to do so. From 1946 to 1964, the U.S. operated the Bracero Program that allowed for the legal importation of Mexican laborers to work in agricultural fields, railroads and other industries. Immigration reform proposals, including one offered by President George W. Bush, have often included provisions that would offer a limited legal status to temporary immigrant workers.

Hegemony: Hegemony refers to a situation where one nation has predominant power over a region or even the entire world. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the United States has been viewed as the world's sole superpower. Political scientists disagree on whether U.S. hegemony is a desirable state of affairs. Defenders of U.S. hegemony argue that all nations benefit from the maintenance of world order, enforced by the worldwide string of U.S. military bases. Opponents argue that U.S. hegemony benefits neither the U.S. nor the rest of the world. The maintenance of hegemony is unduly expensive and periodically embroils the U.S. in wars that have little to do with its core national interests. Critics also argue that other nations have their national sovereignty diminished by continual U.S. meddling in their military and economic affairs. The key challenge to U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere is the emergence of ALBA, led by Venezuela and Cuba.

Helms-Burton Act: See the Cuban Liberty and Democracy and Solidarity (Libertad) Act.

Kuhn Directive: This refers to a directive issued by former Major League Baseball Commissioner, Bowie Kuhn, for the handling of the recruitment of Cuban baseball players into the major leagues. This directive prohibits any team representatives, including scouts, from any discussions or negotiations with baseball players in Cuba. For Cuban players traveling outside of Cuba, however, there are no restrictions. This has led to numerous situations where outstanding Cuban baseball players "defect" while engaged in international travel – meaning they sign with a U.S. team and never return to Cuba.

Ladies in White: This is a group of Cuban women who have regularly protested on behalf of the many political prisoners held in Cuban jails. These women, dressed in white hold silent marches to protest the unjust imprisonment of their husbands, brothers or friends. The Cuban government has treated these marches as if they represent a security threat to the state, in many cases harassing, detaining or imprisoning them for doing nothing more than engaging in a silent march. This repression has drawn the attention of the international community and has been regularly condemned by Amnesty International and twelve European-based human rights groups. The leader of Ladies in White, Laura Pollan Toledo, died in October of 2011 under mysterious circumstances shortly after being released from a Cuban prison.

Maduro, Nicolás: The current president of Venezuela; he was the hand-picked successor to Hugo Chávez. He won a surprisingly narrow (and disputed) electoral victory over challenger Henrique Capriles in March of 2013.

Maquiladoras: This refers to the manufacturing plants in the northern regions of Mexico that exist almost exclusively for the assembly of products to be sold in the U.S. The maquiladoras are controversial because, typically, wages are low and working conditions are poor. Defenders of maquiladoras argue that these manufacturing jobs provide an alternative for Mexican workers who would otherwise cross the border as illegal immigrants to seek work in the U.S.

Mercosur (Mercado Comum do Sul): This organization was founded in 1991 as a trade agreement grouping Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil into a common market. Venezuela was accepted as a Mercosur member in 2012.

Mérida Initiative: The Mérida Initiative refers to a joint U.S.-Mexican effort to combat Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) in Mexico. The outline for the Initiative was formed at an October 22, 2007 meeting between Mexican President Felipe Calderón and U.S. President George W. Bush held in Mérida, Mexico. The agreement was based on four pillars: (1) a comprehensive effort to weaken DTOs; (2) institutional development and capacity building; (3) building a 21st century border to secure communities while encouraging trade and growth and (4) building community resilience against participation in the drug trade and consumption. Congress authorized \$1.6 billion for the Mérida Initiative in 2008, but the appropriation was held up by a series of complaints in Congress about human rights abuses by the Mexican military. These concerns were eventually addressed and most of the funding has now been provided. The Obama administration has endorsed most of the objectives of the Mérida Initiative.

Microfinance Solutions to Poverty: Nobel Prize winning economist and humanitarian, Muhammad Yunus, has gathered a large international following for his microfinance solutions to poverty. This system was first demonstrated in Yunus' Grameen Bank, operating in his native Bangladesh. Microfinance is intended as "grass roots" alternative to "top down" approaches to development assistance. Loans to small scale entrepreneurs can enable market-based solutions to economic development. Raúl Castro has recently announced a system of economic reforms allowing Cuban citizens to start small business operations; microfinance loans could be the critical factor in turning Cuba's centrally-controlled economy into one based on free market solutions. Yet, at present, the U.S. economic embargo of Cuba prevents U.S. institutions or persons from providing the start-up capital to energize this opening to the free market. Some economists have also proposed an expansion of microfinance solutions to address poverty in Mexico.

Nieto, Enrique Peña: This is the new president of Mexico, assuming office on December 1, 2012. Nieto is a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The PRI had ruled Mexico for 70 years before losing a presidential election to the National Action Party in 2000, when Vicente Fox was elected president. Then, in 2006, the National Action Party won again – this time with the election of Felipe Calderón. President Nieto represents a return to power for the PRI.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA): NAFTA is a free trade agreement involving the governments of the United States, Mexico and Canada. The agreement took effect on January 1, 1994. Some economists argue that NAFTA has benefited all member nations by adding jobs while also protecting worker rights and the environment. But critics say that the agreement has simply provided the means for large corporations to swallow up small businesses. Special controversy centers on the maintenance of U.S. agricultural subsidies for its agricultural producers, creating an unfair trade advantage over Mexican farmers. U.S. labor unions claim that NAFTA is unfair to U.S. manufacturing workers because it allows big corporations to shift their operations to Mexico to take advantage of cheap labor.

Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC): This is a division of the U.S. Department of the Treasury, charged with enforcing the various provisions of the U.S. embargo of Cuba. Starting in 2000, Congress established an exception to the embargo allowing sales of agricultural products or medicines to Cuba with the passage of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSREEA). The enabling legislation did, however, specify that any such sales would be on a cash basis, meaning that U.S. companies would not be allowed to extend credit terms to the Cuban government. The original OFAC procedure for a cash sale was as follows: A U.S. ship could sail into a Cuban harbor with its products, receive the cash payment and then offload the agricultural products. Using this procedure, U.S. agricultural sales to Cuba expanded dramatically in the years 2000-2005. These agricultural exports helped address food shortages among the Cuban people and also provided a lucrative market for U.S. farmers. But in 2005, OFAC redefined the meaning of a “cash sale,” ruling that the payment from Cuba must be received before ships can leave U.S. ports bound for Cuba. This ruling created a significant problem, given that the U.S. embargo prevents U.S. banks from doing business with Cuban banks. In effect, it required that Cuba make an arrangement with a Mexican bank that would, in turn, provide payment in the United States. This was a cumbersome arrangement that resulted in a dramatic reduction in agricultural sales. Congress applied a short-term fix in a 2010 appropriation bill, but farming interests are hoping for a longer term solution.

Omnibus Appropriations Act of 2010: Section 619 of this legislation required that the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) change its definition of a “cash sale” of U.S. agricultural products to Cuba. The intent of the change was to make it easier for U.S. agricultural firms to sell products to Cuba. But since Section 619 was part of an appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010, OFAC has ruled that the easier terms will apply only to “sales of agricultural items delivered to Cuba between October 1, 2009, and September 30, 2010.” Accordingly, agriculture lobby groups such as the American Farm Bureau Federation have gone back to Congress to ask for a more permanent change in the OFAC procedure.

OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries): This organization was founded by Venezuela and Saudi Arabia in 1961 as an association of major Third World oil exporters. Member countries now include Algeria, Angola, Ecuador, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Venezuela. Venezuela has used its influence within OPEC to advocate restricting supply in an effort to increase oil prices.

Organization of American States (OAS): Though the current charter of the OAS was signed in 1948, this organization actually traces its history all the way back to the First International Conference of American States, held in Washington, D.C. in 1889. The OAS Charter announces a commitment to democracy as “an indispensable condition for the stability, peace and development of the region.” In 1964, following U.S. insistence, Cuba was expelled as an OAS member on the grounds that its government was no longer committed to democracy. In 2009, President Obama supported an OAS decision to re-invite Cuban membership, but the Cuban government rebuffed the invitation, indicating it was no longer interested in belonging to an organization dominated by U.S. influence.

Partido Socialista Unica Venezolano (PSUV): This is the political party formed by Hugo Chávez in 2007 with an announced commitment to socialist principles.

PEMEX: This is the state-owned petroleum company in Mexico, created in 1938 when the government nationalized all assets of foreign and domestic oil companies operating in Mexico at that time. Mexican law does not allow involvement of foreign oil companies in PEMEX projects, but pressure is growing for establishing exceptions to that policy. PEMEX lacks access to the deepwater drilling technology that would become available if the Mexican government would allow collaborative projects. New Mexican President, Enrique Peña Nieto, has called for changes in the law that prevents this collaboration.

Petroleos de Venezuela Sociedad Anonima (PDVSA): This is the name of the national oil company in Venezuela; it was created in 1976 when the government of Venezuela expropriated the property of all foreign oil companies then operating in that country.

Platt Amendment: This amendment to the Army Appropriations Act of 1901 is named for Connecticut Senator Orville Platt. As a condition for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Cuba following the Spanish-American War, the Platt Amendment required that Cuba include a provision in its constitution giving extraordinary power to the United States. This amendment provided that Cuba, an apparently sovereign country, would not be allowed to engage in treaties with foreign nations or contract debts over a certain amount without the oversight and assent of the U.S. government. Essentially, the Platt Amendment gave the U.S. government veto power over Cuban foreign policy. The Platt Amendment was formally abrogated on May 29, 1934 – meaning it ceased to exist.

Radio Martí: This refers to a station, modeled after Radio Free Europe, designed to reach Cuba with Spanish language broadcasts. The station, located in Miami, Florida, is funded by the U.S. government. The station also has a companion television station. Radio Martí was first created in 1983 by President Ronald Reagan. Ironically, the station is named after José Martí, a Cuban activist who fought for independence from Spain, but also opposed U.S. influence as well. The Cuban government quite effectively operates a jamming operation against the U.S.-based broadcast signal.

Soft Balancing: This refers to a technique that a nation or nations can use to undermine the power of a hegemon without resorting to war. The member nations of ALBA have specifically announced their intention to undermine U.S. influence in the Western Hemisphere by offering an alternative forum for regional security, development assistance and trading partnerships.

Special Period: This is the term that the Cuban government has given to the period starting in 1990 when Cuban imports dropped by about 75% because of the loss of support from the Soviet Union. This period became, for Cuba, a time of serious economic depression. By 1994, the deepest year of this depression, Cuban agricultural output fell to about half of its 1990 level, mainly because Cuban farmers lacked the equipment and supplies that had previously been supplied by the Soviet Union. The Cuban government also blamed the government of the United States for adding to the deprivation of the Special Period because of the passage of the Cuban Democracy Act, tightening the U.S. embargo.

Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act (TSRA) of 2000: This legislation eased some of the provisions of the economic embargo of Cuba to allow cash-in-advance sales of agricultural products or medicines to Cuba.

Trading With the Enemy Act (TWEA): This 1917 Act is designed to restrict trade with countries hostile to the United States. It gives the President of the United States the power to oversee or restrict any and all trade between the U.S. and its enemies in times of war. With respect to Cuba, the TWEA authority was first used by President John F. Kennedy in 1963 to order the creation of the Cuban Assets Control Regulations (CACR). Persons violating the terms of the Cuban embargo will face punishments ranging from a prison term of up to 10 years, \$1 million in corporate fines and \$250,000 in individual fines. In September of 2009, President Obama reissued an Executive Order applying the Trading With the Enemy Act to Cuba, effectively continuing the U.S. embargo of Cuba.

Washington Consensus: This is the name given to a commitment to free markets, free trade and liberal democracy – principles agreed upon at the Summit of the Americas in Miami in 1991. ALBA, an organization created by Cuba and Venezuela, is designed to create an alternative to U.S. hegemony and the Washington Consensus.

Wet Foot-Dry Foot Immigration Policy: In 1995, the Clinton administration engaged in an informal negotiation with the Cuban government in an effort to limit the flood of emigrants leaving Cuba during the “Special Period” of the early 1990s. The resulting immigration agreement was that Cubans intercepted at sea (“wet foot”) by the U.S. Coast Guard would be returned to Cuba. Any Cubans who successfully make it to U.S. soil (“dry foot”) will be allowed to establish permanent residence in the United States. This policy is controversial because it exempts Cubans from the quotas and other procedures imposed on immigrants from every other nation.