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MACK: THERE'S A BEAR IN LATIN AMERICA

WASHINGTON – Congressman Connie Mack (FL-14) condemned the deepening relationship between Russia and Venezuela and urged the Bush Administration to develop a comprehensive policy to deal with this troublesome alliance.

Mack, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said:

“As we have known for some time now, the Russian government is working diligently to re-establish strategic military and economic footholds in Latin America.

“This week, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez traveled to Russia to seal yet another arms deal with the country. Since 2005, Venezuela has signed 12 arms deals with Russia totaling \$4.4 billion. Just this month, Russian bombers were stationed in Latin America for joint military training exercises with Venezuela, and Venezuela has invited several Russian ships and 1,000 soldiers to take part in joint naval maneuvers in the Caribbean Sea later this year.

“What’s more, Russia, which is already complicit in Iran’s development of nuclear technologies, indicated this week that it is considering helping Venezuela develop a nuclear energy program of its own.

“There’s no doubt that Russia is using Chavez as a pawn in its quest to manipulate Latin American affairs just as the Soviet Union used Cuba and the Sandinistas.

“It’s extraordinarily alarming that Russia has found in Hugo Chavez a partner that not only loathes the United States and the ideals of freedom and democracy, but more importantly, a willing co-conspirator who has the resources and a zealous determination to destabilize the Western Hemisphere.

“It’s imperative for the United States to quickly develop a comprehensive solution to diminish and eliminate Russia’s growing foothold in the Western Hemisphere.”

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