

An Iron Army after Venezuela's “El Dorado”

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The report focuses on explaining the details—so far unpublished—of a geological agreement between the governments of China and Venezuela, signed in September 2012. Experts consulted noted that the initiative involved a transfer of a legal obligation of the State—the survey of minerals in its territory—to a trading partner, with disturbing consequences for the nation, such as the transfer of vital information and sovereignty over its resources. Neither party disclosed the amount of the agreement, nor did they answer to requests for interview to discuss this.

The so-called “Work Plan for the Framework Agreement on National Geological Survey of Venezuela” was signed by China and Venezuela along with the cession of rights for the exploitation of the mines at Las Cristinas, one of the world's largest deposits of gold. The event was held at Miraflores, with President Hugo Chavez and the president of Citic, Chang Zhenming, in attendance, which showed the importance given by both governments to this agreement.

Specifically, the document provided for Chinese institutions to overfly and tour the country to conduct geophysical and geochemical studies in order to identify exploitable minerals. In particular, the Chinese were granted rights for exploration and calculation of reserves of iron, gold and bauxite (Bolívar); phosphate (Táchira, Mérida and Falcón) and copper (Táchira).

The project would involve the presence of 352 Chinese experts for five years, deployed in 27 camps in 12 states to undertake expeditions, analyze findings, train technical staff and set up laboratories. The agreement was signed between the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining (Rafael Ramirez), specifically the Institute of Geology and Mining (with Avilio Lavarca as president), and China's Citic (CEO: Hong Bo). Also included in the plan is China's National Bureau of Geological Survey. The work generated controversy in the scientific community of the country, including the National Academy of Sciences, and politicians. The work was never denied by Minister Rafael Ramirez, and since it was published, neither the Venezuelan nor the Chinese government has reported on progress and economic assessment of the agreement. Also, there has been no follow-up on implementation of the plan.