

Attacking Democracy: Chavez, the US, and the Destabilization of Venezuela

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Venezuela goes to the polls this Sunday in an election many are calling a referendum on President Chavez and his policies. Although there is surely such a dimension, the significance of the elections goes far beyond political opinion and partisan bickering, striking at the heart of the Venezuelan state. This is because these elections will be used as a front for an attempt to overthrow, by brute force if necessary, the democratically elected government and put in its place a government more amenable to US interests.

If this sounds familiar, it should. This is precisely the same tactic tried in 2002 in a US-instigated coup that, though it briefly deposed Chavez, ultimately failed. Now, ten years later, the US imperialist ruling class is prepared to try their hand at regime change in Venezuela once more.

The Destabilization Strategy

Sunday's election presents the ideal opportunity for US intelligence to instigate some kind of coup or "color" revolution in Venezuela. However, in order to achieve this insidious goal, there are very specific strategies, tactics, and contingencies which must be understood. In his paper, published by the Council on Foreign Relations, former US Ambassador to Venezuela Patrick Duddy presents a number of scenarios in which the election becomes the centerpiece of a destabilization campaign. Perhaps the most important of these scenarios, one which would be in keeping with the tradition of "color" revolutions all over the world, is the outbreak of violence in the hours after the winner is announced. Duddy writes, "most plausible scenarios for instability and conflict in Venezuela derive from the premise that the Chavistas will not willingly surrender power and would be willing to provoke violence, orchestrate civil unrest, or engage in various forms of armed resistance to avoid doing so." Naturally, Duddy fails to explain for whom such a scenario would be deemed "plausible". Because of the nature of the paper and the author, it is fair to assume that he is referring to the US intelligence community for whom this is "plausible". Of course, this assertion is made with no precedent of historical evidence of Chavistas engaging in such behavior. Rather, this is precisely the type of unrest fomented by the United States in the service of regime change.

Any violence would have to be predicated on the notion that the election were unfair and that Chavez has "stolen" a victory. In fact, the US propaganda on this premise is unmistakable. In an article written for the right-wing Heritage Foundation and propagandistically titled "The Chavez Plan to Steal Venezuela's Election", Dr. Ray Walser writes that the "stealing" of the elections will be made possible because of deception, electoral inequality, propaganda, and violence among other factors. However, in examining the way in which Dr. Walser presents each of these factors, one begins to see that, in fact,

what is being described is not a list of possible tactics and scenarios, but rather, an incredibly detailed blueprint of the pretexts that will be used to legitimize a manufactured and likely violent response to a Chavez victory.

One of the most obvious forms of deception that the US intelligence community is engaging in is the manipulation of polling data. A study conducted by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign UK shows that, no more than two months ago, Chavez's lead was anywhere from 15 to 27 points, depending on the polling agency. However, despite the overwhelming amount of statistical evidence to the contrary, the Western media and intelligence establishment continue to propagate the outright lie that Chavez is actually behind in the polls. Nowhere is this deception more obvious than in the fact that *Democracy Digest*, a mouthpiece for the National Endowment for Democracy, claims that Capriles Radonski holds a two point lead over the Venezuelan president. The article quotes Luis Christiansen, a representative of the dubious Consultores polling group, who states, "If we were to make a linear projection for the election, it would be that Capriles will maintain an advantage of 2.5 percent over Chávez." This would seem a rather innocuous assertion that might have some validity were it not for the incontrovertible fact that more than a dozen other independent polling agencies conclude just the opposite that, in fact, Chavez leads and that the margin is significant. Therefore, one can easily see that a poll such as Consultores will play a major role in manufacturing a crisis because the poll will then be held up as evidence of clear "election fraud".

Another aspect of this propaganda and deception has to do with the integrity of the elections themselves. One of the most common talking points established by the US imperialist ruling class has been that the decision by Chavez not to allow international elections observers can only be interpreted as an admission of government guilt in election fraud. As Walser states in his Heritage Foundation article, "Following the 2006 presidential election, Venezuela ended serious electoral observation missions by the OAS, the European Union, and other groups, such as the Carter Center in the U.S...The CNE [National Electoral Council] now allows only electoral 'companions'...which lack international credibility." This assertion completely ignores the obvious fact that such international NGOs and other organizations are part of a complex network of institutions funded and controlled by the Western imperialist ruling class. As was most clearly demonstrated in Russia following Putin's reelection, so-called "independent monitors" function as provocateurs who attempt to create controversy where there is none. Moreover, such organizations are entirely dependent on funding from the US State Department and other powerful institutions of the ruling class, and work in the service of US imperialism. In light of such attempted subversion as well as similar examples throughout the world in recent years, it makes perfect sense that Caracas would want to ensure the validity of elections outside the purview of US hegemonic power.

Beyond the elections themselves, the US also intends to try to use the military against Chavez. In a strategy reminiscent of Egypt and the use of Tantawi and others to do the dirty work of ousting Mubarak, so too does the intelligence establishment hope to bribe or otherwise influence senior officers to turn on Chavez. This is precisely the final, and perhaps most significant, recommendation made by former ambassador Duddy who writes that the US should, "Leverage defense department contacts in Latin American and Spanish armed forces to communicate to the Venezuelan military leadership that they are obliged to uphold their constitution, respect human rights, and protect their country's democratic tradition." Aside from being a gross violation of international law by meddling in the affairs

of a sovereign state, such a recommendation demonstrates the weakness of the political opposition which, despite being well-funded and enjoying the support of the wealthy elite, still does not have the support to achieve a legal, electoral victory.

The recommendations of Duddy, Walser, and others show that those forces (opposition, military, police, business elite, etc.) that instigated the attempted coup d'état against Chavez back in 2002, are very much active in this renewed destabilization effort. Nowhere is this fact more obvious than in the opposition candidate himself, Henrique Capriles Radonski. At the time of the attempted coup, Capriles was mayor of Baruta (a municipality in Caracas) and led what can only be described as an assault on the Cuban embassy. His culpability in the attack is demonstrated quite clearly in the statement issued by the Cuban embassy staff which read:

The immediate responsibility of Mr. Capriles Radonsky and other Venezuelan state authorities was demonstrated when they failed to act diligently in order to prevent an increase in the aggression to which our embassy was subjected, causing serious damage and endangering the lives of officials and their families in clear violation of national and international law. Some also speculate, with good reason, that Capriles was also involved in the assassination of Danilo Anderson, the prosecutor in charge of investigating the individuals involved in, and responsible for, the 2002 coup. Given such criminality as Capriles has demonstrated, coupled with an insatiable egomania, one would have to wonder whether this man could possibly be anything other than a US puppet.

Capriles does have a base among the wealthy and some of the bourgeois middle class, though it should be pointed out that the breadth of this base is often purposely mischaracterized by the media mouthpieces of the ruling class. However, regardless of the size, his core supporters will be put in harm's way due to the recent call by Capriles for them to "stay in the streets" to "minimize fraud" at the polls. These supporters will likely become the victims, instigators, and/or both, of post-election violence, just as has been seen in Kenya, Thailand, and countless other countries in recent years. This violence would then be blamed on the Chavez government and is designed to destabilize the entire country. However, the question remains: if not Chavistas, then who would perpetrate such violence?

One possibility is a covert, mercenary force that has penetrated into Venezuela by crossing the border into the country illegally. In early August, an American was captured trying to sneak into Venezuela. Although he has refused to divulge any information about himself or his mission, his passport showed trips to Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and other countries. This revelation alone would indicate at least some military involvement and, likely, Special Forces or some other covert detachment. Moreover, his capture coincided quite closely with the mysterious refinery explosion and fire that killed a number of innocent Venezuelans. Was this individual part of a group of saboteurs and mercenaries sent into Venezuela in preparation for a destabilization effort? Though concrete proof of this is impossible to obtain given the nature of covert operations, the possibility must be considered.

Why They Hate Chavez

The reasons why Chavez evokes such rage and antipathy from the US ruling class are many and interrelated. First and foremost, Chavez has demonstrated himself to be perhaps the leading international voice of anti-imperialism and resistance to US hegemony. He has led the transformation of much of Latin America from little more than US markets for exploitation to independent nations capable of managing their own affairs. This

development comes in the form of the establishment of regional cooperation organizations, the assertion of national sovereignty and control over resources, as well as the formation of viable and independent political blocs in the region. Additionally, Chavez leads a country that is one of the world's leading energy producers, giving him leverage over Western oil companies. Finally, and perhaps most critically, Chavez represents a model for other nations of Latin America and the rest of the world who wish to pursue an independent, socialist path of development. This is, of course, anathema to the goals of the financial elite of the Anglo-American establishment who wish to reassert dominance in what had been the US sphere of influence.

One of Hugo Chavez's great accomplishments has been the formation of regional cooperation organizations such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). These organizations serve as both economic communities and political blocs, providing a viable alternative to dependence on the United States. It is because of such regional organizations that countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia have been able to take the initiative against the various forms of domination, coercion, and subversion by the United States. Moreover, this has delegitimized the hegemony of the US by allowing Latin America to move away from US-dominated organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and Mercosur. In doing so, ALBA, CELAC, and other such alliances become organs of national agency and independence.

Another aspect of Chavez's influence that draws the ire of the US imperialists is his support for large-scale economic development in the region. Not only has Venezuela taken over from the US and its international finance arms, the IMF and the World Bank, but it has used the aforementioned alliances to promote independent economic development. The recently announced plans for an Inter-Oceanic Canal through Nicaragua that would link the Pacific and Atlantic oceans along with the proposed Colombia-Venezuela oil pipeline, are merely two examples of the Chavez government's commitment to mutually beneficial economic development. These projects, and many like them, have helped move Latin America in the direction of cooperation and progress and away from the division and subjugation of the 20th Century.

This form of domination at the hands of the US Empire was nowhere more apparent than in the oil sector. For decades, foreign oil companies had extracted untold wealth from beneath the feet of the people of Venezuela while rampant poverty only worsened. However, with the Hydrocarbons Law of 2001, the Chavez government effectively nationalized the energy industry and, for the first time, exercised national sovereignty over natural resources. This move, perhaps more than any other, earned him the hatred of the Anglo-American ruling class. The oil industry was not the only one to be nationalized – cement, telephone, and a number of others were also brought under state control.

Chavez has also built warm economic and political relations with China, Russia, Iran, Cuba, and countless other countries that the imperialists perceive to be "enemies". This is what is often referred to as Chavez's "anti-Americanism". However, it should here be pointed out that Chavez has stated repeatedly his positive view of Americans, saying at a speech in New York City, "...I fell in love with the soul of the people of the United States." Rather, it is the ruling class of the United States, the same ruling class that exploited and oppressed Venezuela and the rest of Latin America for decades, which he despises. This is an important distinction which is crucial to dispelling the distortions and lies told by the

mainstream media in the US.

Perhaps Chavez's most important accomplishments are socio-economic. The progress that his government has made in combating poverty, illiteracy, racism, oppression of indigenous peoples, infant mortality and countless other indicators of social progress, has made Venezuela into the shining example for the rest of Latin America and the world. This is, of course, an existential threat to the power of international finance capital, and capitalism more generally. By expounding this sort of "21st Century Socialism", Chavez makes himself into the target of subversion at the hands of the US - his social policies make him public enemy number one.

Hugo Chavez has come to symbolize everything that the US imperialist ruling class despises: independent economic development, independent foreign policy, and a deep commitment to social justice. He has openly challenged, not just the US Empire, but imperialism in all its forms. Moreover, Chavez represents a viable future for Latin America, one that is free of the chains of US bondage. For these reasons, the ruling class is set on trying for regime change once more. Anti-imperialists the world over must stand now and defend Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution, not because we agree or disagree with all of its tenets, but because it stands in opposition to empire, colonialism, and domination.

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