

Hugo Chávez's Legacy: Unity and Anti-imperialism

By [Nino Pagliccia](#)

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*This March many remember **Hugo Chávez**. He passed away eight years ago. It is a very short time when measured in terms of the fresh memories we have of him. He is remembered as the Comandante, Comandante Supremo, creator of the Bolivarian Revolution, founder of the Fifth Republic. He has been the architect of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, of which he was president from 1999 to 2013, and one of the most progressive constitutions in the world.*

Some, interpreting his own words on August 5, 1999, believe he was the reincarnation of Simón Bolívar, not in a metaphysical sense, but in an ideological sense. During the first session of the National Constituent Assembly that produced the 1999 Constitution, he said:

“When we ask in Venezuela today, where does this revolution come from? We inevitably have to fall back into the figure and time, and in the Bolivarian context when the first republics that arose in that Venezuelan land were born. ‘It is Bolívar,’ Neruda said, ‘who wakes up every 100 years’: but Neruda, who was a revolutionary, assimilated Bolívar’s awakening with the awakening of the people. He wakes up every 100 years, when the people wake up. This is where this revolution comes from.”

But many believe he is still among us in terms of his legacy. There is no aspect of human development, political leadership, ideological renovation and geopolitical impact that Chávez has not influenced in some noticeable way.

Venezuela today is the epicenter of a revolutionary movement that wants to establish a different political paradigm for Latin America; a paradigm with an autochthonous ideology with historical and cultural elements, not only repeating the past, but also adding new elements and experiences from the global context of our era. Chávez called this new paradigm Socialism of the 21st Century.

His generosity of thinking made it implicit that he was not offering a final worked out theory or ideology. Chávez only indicated the path towards a just society. His path had clear landmarks leading in the correct direction such as independence, sovereignty, justice, peace, UNITY, democracy, popular power, ANTI-IMPERIALISM. Some he marked in capital letters, in a figure of speech. But the work had to be done with the involvement of all Venezuelans as protagonists, as builders of their just society.

What Chávez unmistakably provided was a solid foundation on which to build that society. A foundation that would reunite Venezuelans and Latin-Americans to their historical roots, and with that it would be able to resist the US endless imperial hybrid warfare. He was well aware of Simón Bolívar's famous statement, "*The United States seems to have been created by Providence to plague [Latin] America with misery in the name of freedom*". Chávez offered "Bolivarianism" as the antidote to the plague.

Perhaps the two words of which we are often defensive, Bolivarian Revolution, capture Chávez's full legacy when we look at the core of their meaning.

The word "Bolivarian" revives the independence values of the 19th century based on the integrationist vision of Simón Bolívar, the idea of civic-military unity of Ezequiel Zamora, and the liberating popular education of Simón Rodríguez, who was the mentor of Simón Bolívar. Hugo Chávez took from them his own vision of building the Bolivarian *Patria Grande* (Great Homeland) based on the original principles of sovereignty and independence, with the people as protagonists. Recalling in an interview the founding of the Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement in 1982, the forerunner of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, Chávez said: "*That was what we were pursuing, a revolution, a political, social, economic and cultural transformation inspired in the proposition of Bolívar [Zamora and Rodriguez]. This is how we designed what we have called the 'tree with the three roots', which is our ideological source.*"

These historical roots are what make us identify the Venezuelan political phenomenon, with nationalistic and patriotic characteristics, as "Bolivarianism."

However, in the expression "Bolivarian Revolution", it is the word "Revolution" that identifies the "tree with three roots" or the "ideological source" of Bolivarianism. It is the word Revolution that is associated with *Chavismo*. But *Chavismo* is a projection of Bolivarianism into the future. It is a growing entity that is inevitably shaped by the political environment and the global context at every single point in time.

Chavismo with its Bolivarian roots is what is known as the Bolivarian Revolution. These two words cannot be separated without irremediably losing its original meaning. The tree cannot be separated from the roots without losing the harvest of its fruits.

In the span of eight years since the death of Hugo Chávez Venezuela has undergone one of the most severe economic warfare launched by the US with criminal coercive measures that are crippling the Venezuelan economic system. But Chávez's legacy as he originally offered it still stands today. His legacy included his trust in the Venezuelan people and his political successor, **Nicolás Maduro**. Venezuela owes it to the Maduro government and the Venezuelan people to hold on to his legacy at any cost because the Bolivarian project has not been completed, and it will not be completed unless all are on board.

Imperialism is seeking to create cracks in the Bolivarian Revolution at the slightest sign of weakness. This is the time to pay attention to Chávez's landmarks. Two in particular: UNITY and ANTI-IMPERIALISM, and follow the compas that points to socialism. If the road is blocked, a detour may be necessary that will rejoin the main path. This is not the time to enter the dangerous political maze of doubts and blames. And it is never the time to be divided. The Bolivarian Revolution cannot die. The price of losing the Bolivarian Revolution is too high.

As Fidel once said, “History tells us that a defeated revolution must pay the victors in blood.”

Perhaps Hugo Chávez meant to give us another message with his image of the tree with three roots. A tree resists the impacts of stormy winds by bending before returning to its straight position, otherwise it snaps and dies.

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