

“Nobel Peace Prize Winner Barack Obama, is Preparing for War in South America”; Interview with Eva Golinger

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Mike Whitney—The US media is very critical of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. He’s frequently denounced as “anti-American”, a “leftist strongman”, and a dictator. Can you briefly summarize some of the positive social, economic and judicial changes for which Chavez is mainly responsible?

Eva Golinger—The first and foremost important achievement during the Chávez administration is the 1999 Constitution, which, although not written nor decreed by Chávez himself, was created through his vision of change for Venezuela. The 1999 Constitution was, in fact, drafted - written - by the people of Venezuela in one of the most participatory examples of nation building, and then was ratified through popular national referendum by 75% of Venezuelans. The 1999 Constitution is one of the most advanced in the world in the area of human rights. It guarantees the rights to housing, education, healthcare, food, indigenous lands, languages, women’s rights, worker’s rights, living wages and a whole host of other rights that few other countries recognize on a national level. My favorite right in the Venezuelan Constitution is the right to a dignified life. That pretty much sums up all the others. Laws to implement these rights began to surface in 2001, with land reform, oil industry redistribution, tax laws and the creation of more than a dozen social programs - called missions - dedicated to addressing the basic needs of Venezuela’s poor majority. In 2003, the first missions were directed at education and healthcare. Within two years, illiteracy was eradicated in the country and Venezuela was certified by UNESCO as a nation free of illiteracy. This was done with the help of a successful Cuban literacy program called “Yo si puedo” (Yes I can). Further educational missions were created to provide free universal education from primary to doctoral levels throughout the country. Today, Venezuela’s population is much more educated than before, and adults who previously had no high school education now are encouraged to not only go through a secondary school program, but also university and graduate school.

The healthcare program, called “Barrio Adentro”, has not only provided preventive healthcare to all Venezuelans - many who never had access to a doctor before - but also has guaranteed universal, free access to medical attention at the most advanced levels. MRIs, heart surgery, lab work, cancer treatments, are all provided free of cost to anyone (including foreigners) in need. Some of the most modern clinics, diagnostic treatment centers and hospitals have been built in the past five years under this program, placing Venezuela at the forefront of medical technology.

Other programs providing subsidized food and consumer products (Mercal, Pdval), job

training (Mission Vuelvan Caras), subsidies to poor, single mothers (Madres del Barrio), attention to indigents and drug addicts (Mission Negra Hipolita) have reduced extreme poverty by 50% and raised Venezuelans standard of living and quality of life. While nothing is perfect, these changes are extraordinary and have transformed Venezuela into a nation far different from what it looked like 10 years ago. In fact, the most important achievement that Hugo Chávez himself is directly responsible for is the level of participation in the political process. Today, millions of Venezuelans previously invisible and excluded are visible and included. Those who were always marginalized and ignored in Venezuela by prior governments today have a voice, are seen and heard, and are actively participating in the building of a new economic, political and social model in their country.

MW—On Monday, President Chavez threw a Venezuelan judge in jail on charges of abuse of power for freeing a high-profile banker. Do you think he overstepped his authority as executive or violated the principle of separation of powers? What does this say about Chavez’s resolve to fight corruption?

Eva Golinger—President Chávez did not put anyone in jail. Venezuela has an Attorney General and an independent branch of government in charge of public prosecutions. Chávez did publicly accuse the judge of corruption and violating the law because that judge overstepped her authority by releasing an individual charged with corruption and other criminal acts from detention, despite the fact that a previous court had not granted conditional freedom or bail to the suspect. And, the judge released the suspect in a very irregular way, without the presence of the prosecutor, and through a back door. The suspect then fled the country.

This is part of Venezuela’s fight against corruption. Unfortunately - as in a lot of countries - corruption is deeply rooted in the culture. The struggle to eradicate corruption is probably the most difficult of all and will probably not be achieved until new generations have grown up with different values and education. In the meantime, the Chávez administration is trying hard to ensure that corrupt public officials pay the consequences. That judge, for example, engaged in an act of corruption and abuse of authority by illegally releasing a suspect and therefore was charged by the Public Prosecutor’s office and will be tried. It has nothing to do with what Chávez said or didn’t say, it has to do with enforcing the law.

MW—Why is the United States building military bases in Colombia? Do they pose a threat to Chavez or the Bolivarian Revolution?

Eva Golinger—On October 30th, the US formally entered into an agreement with the Colombian government to allow US access to seven military bases in Colombia and unlimited use of Colombian territory for military operations. The agreement itself is purported to be directed at counter-narcotics operations and counter-terrorism. But a US Air Force document released earlier this year discussing the need for a stronger US military presence in Colombia revealed the true intentions behind the military agreement. The document stated that the US military presence was necessary to combat the “constant threat from anti-US governments in the region”. Clearly, that is a reference to Venezuela, and probably Bolivia, maybe Ecuador. It’s no secret that Washington considers the Venezuelan government anti-US, though it’s not true. Venezuela is anti-imperialist, but not anti-US. The US Air Force document also stated that the Colombian bases would be used to engage in “full spectrum military operations” throughout South America, and even talked about surveillance, intelligence and reconnaissance missions, and improving the capacity of

US forces to execute “expeditionary warfare” in Latin America.

Clearly, this is a threat to the peoples of Latin America and particularly those nations targeted, such as Venezuela. Most people in the US don’t know about this military agreement, but if they did, they should question why their government, led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Barack Obama, is preparing for war in South America. And, in the midst of an economic crisis with millions of people in the US losing jobs and homes, why are millions of dollars being spent on military bases in Colombia? The US Congress already approved \$46 million for one of the bases in Colombia. And surely more funds will be supplied in the future.

MW—What is ALBA? Is it a viable alternative to the “free trade” blocs promoted by the US?

Eva Golinger—The Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas - Trade Agreement for the People, is a regional agreement created five years ago between Venezuela and Cuba, and now has 9 members: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Dominica. ALBA is a trade agreement based on integration, cooperation and solidarity, contrary to US trade agreements which are based on competition and exploitation. It promotes a way of trading between nations that assures mutual benefits. For example, Venezuela sells oil to Cuba and Cuba pays with services - doctors, educators and technological experts that help to improve Venezuela’s industries. Venezuela sells oil to Nicaragua and Nicaragua pays with food products, agricultural technology and aide to build Venezuela’s own agricultural industry, which long ago was abandoned by prior governments only interested in the rich oil industry. ALBA seeks to not just provide economic benefits to its member nations, but also social and cultural advances. The idea is to find ways to help members develop and progress in all aspects of society. ALBA recently created a new currency, the SUCRE, which will be used as a form of exchange between member nations, eliminating the US dollar as the standard for trade.

MW—Are US NGO’s and intelligence agents still trying to foment political instability in Venezuela or have those operations ceased since the failed coup?

Eva Golinger—In fact, the funding of political groups in Venezuela, and others throughout Latin America that promote US agenda, has increased since the April 2002 coup against President Chávez. Through two principal Department of State agencies, USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the US government has channeled more than \$50 million to opposition groups in Venezuela since 2002. The USAID/NED budget to fund groups in Venezuela in 2010 is nearly \$15 million, doubled from last year’s \$7 million. This is a state policy of Washington, which the Obama Administration plans to amp up. They call it “democracy promotion”, but it’s really democracy subversion and destabilization. Funding political groups favorable to Empire, equipping them with resources, strategizing to help formulate political platforms and campaigns - all geared towards regime change - is a new form of invasion, a silent invasion. Through USAID and NED, and their “partner NGOs” and contractors, such as Freedom House, International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Pan-American Development Foundation and Development Alternatives, Inc., hundreds of political groups, parties and programs are presently being funded in Venezuela to promote regime change against the Chávez government. US taxpayer dollars are being squandered on these efforts to overthrow a democratically elected government that simply isn’t convenient for Washington. Remember, Venezuela has 24% of world oil reserves. That’s a lot!

MW—How hard has Venezuela been hit by the economic crisis? Do the people understand Wall Street's role in the meltdown?

Eva Golinger—Actually, the Chávez government has taken important steps to shelter Venezuela from the financial crisis. People here in Venezuela absolutely understand Wall Street's role in the crisis and know that the US capitalist-consumerist system is principally responsible for causing the financial crisis, but also the climate crisis that the world is facing. The Venezuelan government took preventive steps against the financial crisis, such as withdrawing Venezuela's reserves from US banks two years ago, creating cushion funds to ensure social programs would not be cut and diversifying Venezuela's oil clientele so as not to be dependent solely on US clients. Recently, several banks have been nationalized by the Venezuelan government and others have been liquidated. But this was more due to the mismanagement and internal corruption within those banks. The Venezuelan government reacted quickly to take over the banks and guarantee customers' savings would not be lost. In fact, it's the first time in Venezuela's history that no customers have lost any of their money during a bank liquidation or takeover. This is part of the Chávez Administration's policy of prioritizing social needs over economic gain.

MW—Here's an excerpt from a special weekend report by Bloomberg News:

"Americans have grown gloomier about both the economy and the nation's direction over the past three months even as the U.S. shows signs of moving from recession to recovery. Almost half the people now feel less financially secure than when President Barack Obama took office in January...Fewer than 1 in 3 Americans think the economy will improve in the next six months....Only 32 percent of poll respondents believe the country is headed in the right direction, down from 40 percent who said so in September." (Bloomberg)

The frustration and disillusionment with the US political/economic system has never been greater in my lifetime. Do you think people in the United States are ready for their own Bolivarian Revolution and steps towards a more progressive, socialistic model of government?

Eva Golinger—The rise of Barack Obama neutralized a growing sentiment for profound change inside the US. Hopefully, the slowdown in US activism will only be temporary. South of the border, there is tremendous change taking place. New social, political and economic models are being built by popular grassroots movements in Venezuela, Bolivia and other Latin American nations that seek economic and social justice. I believe strongly that models in process, like the Bolivarian Revolution, provide inspiration and hope to those in the US and around the world that alternatives to US capitalism do exist and can be successful.

The US has a rich history of revolution. There are many groups inside the US dedicated to building a better, more humanist system. Unity and a collective vision are essential aspects of building a strong movement capable of moving forward. Every nation has its moment in history. This is the time of Latin America. But there is great hope that the people of the US will soon unite with their brothers and sisters south of the border to bring down Empire and help build a true world community based on social and economic justice for all.

Bio.— Eva Golinger, winner of the International Award for Journalism in Mexico (2009), named "La Novia de Venezuela" by President Hugo Chávez, is a Venezuelan-American attorney from New York, living in Caracas, Venezuela since 2005 and author of the best-selling books, "The Chávez Code: Cracking US Intervention in Venezuela" (2006 Olive

Branch Press), "Bush vs. Chávez: Washington's War on Venezuela" (2007, Monthly Review Press), "The Empire's Web: Encyclopedia of Interventionism and Subversion", "La Mirada del Imperio sobre el 4F: Los Documentos Desclasificados de Washington sobre la rebelión militar del 4 de febrero de 1992" and "La Agresión Permanente: USAID, NED y CIA". Since 2003, Eva, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College and CUNY Law School in New York, has been investigating, analyzing and writing about US intervention in Venezuela using the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to obtain information about the US Government's efforts to destabilize progressive movements in Latin America. Her first book, *The Chávez Code*, has been translated and published in six languages (English, Spanish, French, German, Italian & Russian) and is presently being made into a feature film.

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