

The Latest Confrontation Between the US Empire and Evo Morales and Hugo Chavez

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I've said before it's easy to know what the empire is thinking (especially its powerful movers and shakers sitting in corporate boardrooms) by reading the Wall Street Journal daily as I do. Despite its heavy pro-empire bias, readers can also get some real news and information – something nearly impossible elsewhere in the corporate media especially from the venerable New York Times I've before labeled the closest thing we have in the US to an official ministry of information and propaganda.

I'll return to that subject another time, but for now I want to highlight the May 25 front page feature article in the Journal titled "New President Has Bolivia Marching to Chavez's Beat." The sub-title is even worse – "Venezuelan Populist Pushes Anti-US Latin Alliance; Has He Gone Too Far?" And below that and still headlined – "Cuban Doctors in the House."

I hope readers understand from that language what's quite clear to me: a virtual call to arms against Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales, two leaders who likely more than any others believe that since their people elected them, they have an obligation to serve them and not the interests of a belligerent and dominant Northern neighbor.

What Evo Morales and Hugo Chavez Are Doing Jointly That's Roused the US Ire

The WSJ attack begins by its implied condemnation that right after being elected Morales told foreign steel companies they would have to renegotiate a proposed deal to develop a huge iron ore deposit known as El Mutun. The Journal also complained that the Bolivian government invited Venezuelan experts to help them in the bargaining, which, of course, was logical and sensible if such help was available. The outcome of the negotiation was that Bolivia demanded a new agreement that was much fairer to the Bolivian people than the one-sided one the previous government accepted. The foreign steel producers weren't too pleased, and neither was the Journal.

The WSJ was just getting warmed up as it then complained both nations joined with Cuba in a Free Trade Agreement of the People (much like Venezuela's ALBA) which is much different from the one-sided ones the US demands with it getting all and developing nations giving everything, "take it or leave it." Under the agreement, Venezuela pledged to supply Bolivia with 200,000 barrels of crude and refined products a month at below-market prices and in return buy 200,000 tons of Bolivian soybeans a year as well as quantities of chestnuts and almonds. Chavez also will provide 5,000 scholarships and 100 advanced internships for Bolivians to study in Venezuela. And while other foreign energy companies are freezing their Bolivian investments, the Venezuelan state-owned energy company PdVSA is investing in a number of Bolivian projects including a new gas separation plant and jointly owned filling

stations with the Argentinian oil company YSFB. Venezuela is also taking a leading role in the development of Bolivia's El Mutun iron ore deposits further strengthening the ties between the two nations.

My point in listing the above arrangements is that all nations should be working cooperatively with each other doing these same sorts of things to maintain their independence and benefit their people. The Journal, however, is indignant about them - meaning, of course, that Bolivia is taking its lead from Venezuela and daring to go around the dominant US "our way or the highway" kind of agreements that steal from poor nations to make powerful US corporations richer and more powerful. But the Journal just kept pouring it on expressing its ire (by implication) that Venezuelan technocrats dare to help Bolivia set policies on a range of issues from health care to land reform to nationalizing the oil, natural gas and other industries. These plans are intended to help the Bolivian people benefit fairly from their own natural resources and for Cuban doctors and teachers to be used in poor areas to set up clinics and schools and give the people essential social services they never had before.

Hugo Chavez will also loan Bolivia \$100 million "to implement (its) potentially explosive promise to redistribute some 12.4 million acres of state-owned property to indigenous groups" - a first step in a broader program to put unproductive state and private lands that don't have clear title in the hands of the people who need it and will use it to benefit them and the nation. The Journal calls this land reform plan a "time bomb" that could lead to a "civil war," - incredibly hostile language. They're also upset that Morales is purging his military of some of its high-ranking officers, requiring every public official to take an almost 50% pay cut, and stipulating that no bureaucrat can earn more than his own salary of \$22,000 a year (compared to George Bush's \$400,000 while he spends half his time at his Texas "ranch" raking in the bucks and not the hay).

Evo Morales has accomplished all this in just four months since he was inaugurated as Bolivia's President on January 24th of this year. And while the US empire and WSJ are upset and angry, the Bolivian people love him and show it in the approval rating he's earned that now exceeds 80% or nearly threefold higher than how George Bush currently scores. No matter, the Journal pours it on further. It berates Chavez for using his oil wealth to lead a "bloc of anti-American countries in the region and beyond," has lent hundreds of millions of dollars to Argentina and Ecuador (imagine the arrogance of going around the IMF and World Bank that specialize in impoverishing developing nations to enrich giant corporations) and supports Iran's right to enrich uranium and develop its commercial nuclear industry as that country has every legal right to do without outside interference.

And now the clincher - I can barely contain myself. Because of this alliance and what's emerging from it, the Journal claims Chavez and Morales "threaten to undo years of political and economic 'liberation' (does it get more Orwellian than that) in South America and is the latest in a series of energy-security threats." I can only think of an expressive Yiddish term that best explains my reaction to that statement - what unmitigated "chutzpah." For those who don't know the term, it means an extreme level of arrogance and insolence.

It's quite unacceptable to the US empire that these two leaders would dare act as all leaders should. And the Wall Street Journal feels the same way and says it clearly or by none too subtle implication throughout its lengthy feature article today. The message from it indicates there's trouble ahead for Hugo Morales and Evo Morales, and it's coming from the

USA.

What It All Means

I've written a lot in recent months about how the US is stepping up its hostile rhetoric against Hugo Chavez in preparation to launching its fourth attempt to oust the Venezuelan leader after failing to do it three previous times. This morning's Journal article clearly indicates Evo Morales has been elevated to likely co-equal status with President Chavez after just four short months in office. Of course, Fidel Castro has been on the US's hit list for over 45 years and is probably more in jeopardy now than he's been for some time. The US simply won't allow any nation to function outside its orbit of influence, especially those rich in natural resources like Venezuela, Bolivia and Iran. Iran in particular has been the target of the most extreme US venom for no other reason than it's oil rich like Iraq and Venezuela and its leadership won't sell out its sovereignty to a hostile US demanding it.

The Wall Street Journal provides empire watchers a useful service - a window through which to view likely US intentions and to be able to do it on a daily basis. Today's article is one such view and an important one. It steps up the hostile rhetoric one more notch and provides one more clear sign that these two nations must brace for what seems certain US action against them to remove their leaders and replace them with ones again subservient to US wishes. Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales do anything but that and as such represent the greatest threat above all others to US continued dominance in the region - a good example that left unchecked may grow and spread and help erode the US's unchallengeable position it's held up to now.

Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales want no part of it, and the US won't tolerate that attitude. Clearly a confrontation is ahead on what timetable and by what means we won't know until it unfolds. But it surely will, and commentators on this web site and other progressive ones will be monitoring all the signs and events and reporting them as they unfold. Stay tuned.

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