

The Wall Street Journal Calls Hugo Chavez a Threat to World Peace

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Global Research, June 25, 2006

25 June 2006

You won't find commentary and language any more hostile to Hugo Chavez than on the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal. Their June 23 piece by Mary Anastasia O'Grady in the Americas column is a clear, jaw-dropping example. It's practically blood-curdling in its vitriol which calls Hugo Chavez a threat to world peace. The sad part of it is Journal readers believe this stuff and are likely to support any US government efforts to remove the "threat."

The O'Grady article is about the elections scheduled to take place in the fall for five non-permanent UN Security Council seats to be held in 2007. One of them will be for the Latin American seat now held by Argentina. The two countries vying to fill the opening are Guatemala and Venezuela, and the other countries in the region will vote on which one will get it. You won't have to think long to guess the one the US supports - its Guatemalan ally, of course. And why not. For over 50 years its succession of military and civilian governments have all followed the dictates of their dominant northern neighbor. In so doing, they all managed to achieve one of the world's worst human rights records that hasn't abated even after the 1996 Peace Accords were signed ending a brutal 36 year conflict. Although the country today is nominally a democratic republic, it continues to abuse its people according to documented reports by Amnesty International.

Amnesty is aware of sexual violence and extreme brutality against women including 665 murders in 2005 gotten from police records; 224 reported attacks on human rights activists and organizations in the same year with little or no progress made investigating them; forced evictions and destruction of homes of indigenous people in rural areas (echoes of Palestine); and no progress by the government and Constitutional Court in seeking justice for decades of genocidal crimes and crimes against humanity committed by paramilitary death squads and the Guatemalan military. The sum of these and other unending abuses led Amnesty to call Guatemala a "land of injustice."

That record of abuse hardly matters to the Bush administration nor did it bother any past ones either since the CIA fomented a coup in 1954 ousting the country's democratically elected leader Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. That coup began a half century reign of terror against the country's indigenous Mayan majority. It was fully supported by a succession of US presidents who were quite willing to overlook it as long as Guatemalan governments maintained a policy of compliance with the US agenda. They all did, and in return received the support and blessing of the US and its corporate giants that continue to suck the life out of that oppressed country.

Guatemala fills the bill nicely for the Bush administration and would be expected to be a

close ally in support of US positions that come up for votes in the UN Security Council. Venezuela, on the other hand, is a different story. Since he was first democratically elected in 1998, Hugo Chavez has done what few other leaders ever do. He's kept his promises to his people to serve their interests ahead of those of other nations, especially the US that's dominated and exploited Venezuela for decades. He's served them well, and in so doing engendered the wrath of his dominant northern neighbor that already has tried and failed three times to oust him and is now planning a fourth attempt to do it.

The idea of a Chavez-led government holding a seat on the Security Council does not go down well in Washington, and the Bush administration is leading a campaign to prevent it with aid and support of the kind of attack-dog journalism found in the Wall Street Journal. Honest observers know this newspaper of record for corporate America has a hard time dealing with facts it dislikes so it invents the ones it does to use in their place.

The June 23 editorial is a good example. It extolls the record of the Guatemalan government with its long-standing record of extreme abuse against its own people falsely claiming it's been "accumulating an impressive record of international cooperation on a variety of UN efforts." It claims one of its main qualifications is its "active role in international peacekeeping" and that the country is now home to a Central American regional peacekeeping school and training center. Oddly, it mentions that Guatemalan peacekeepers are now serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Haiti. What it fails to mention is that those so-called "peacekeepers," along with those from other countries serving with them, have in large part functioned as paramilitary enforcers, and in that capacity have committed gross human rights abuses against the local people rather than trying to protect them. The WSJ writer surely knows this but didn't choose to share that information with her readers. Instead she extolls the country's "democratic credentials." But readers with any knowledge of recent Guatemalan history surely know that country's true record is one of extreme violence and abuse against its own people and one no one would think of as a nation representing them democratically.

The WSJ's June 23 editorial is titled "A Vote for Venezuela Is a Vote for Iran." The commentary in it is one of the paper's most extreme diatribes against the Venezuelan leader which would seem to indicate the Bush administration and corporate America are stepping up their attack on Hugo Chavez in advance of when they plan to make their move to oust him. The Journal writer calls him a "strongman" in an "oil dictatorship" leading a government that values "tyranny and aggression" who'll use his seat and Council presidency when his nation assumes it to support "hostile states" like Iran, Cuba, Sudan and North Korea. Observers knowledgeable about Venezuela under Chavez would have a hard time containing themselves as the true Chavez record is totally opposite the one the Journal portrays. The Journal writer, of course, knows this, but would never report it in her column. Her employer and the interests it serves wouldn't be pleased if she did.

While claiming that a Guatemala seat on the Council is a "voice for the region, not its own national interests," it says Venezuela's "rests largely on oil 'diplomacy' and the capacity to push anti-American buttons around the UN." It goes on to state "It may seem strange Venezuela has any support in the region. Over the past seven years, its meddling in its neighbors' politics 'have' (even the grammar is wrong) earned it a reputation as a bully. Mr. Chavez is persona non grata in more than a few Latin nations. Many countries are worried about Venezuela's 'big spending' to acquire fighter jets and 100,000 kalishnikovs from Russia." Readers may need to pause to catch their breath.

What the Journal writer doesn't explain is far more important than what she does - but she's doing her job as a servant of the US empire. Chavez's so-called "oil diplomacy," in fact, is based on his Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas or ALBA. It's based on the principles of complementarity (not competition), solidarity (not domination), cooperation (not exploitation) and respect for other nations' sovereignty free from the control of dominant powers like the US and its large transnational corporations. It's the mirror opposite of US-style predatory capitalism and the one-sided trade agreements it uses to exploit other countries for its own gain.

The nations participating in ALBA-style agreements are able to operate outside the usual international banking and corporate trading system in their exchange of goods and services so that each country benefits and none loses - just the opposite of the one-sided way the US operates. Because Venezuela is rich in oil, it's been able to trade that vital commodity with its neighbors who need it, even sell it to them at below-market prices, and get back in return the products and services its trading partners can supply on an equally favorable basis. It's a true "win-win" arrangement for participating countries but one that angers the US because it cuts its corporations and big banks out of the process. The Chavez plan is to help his people, not serve the interests of the corporate giants or dominant US neighbor. The WSJ calls this "meddling" and Chavez a "bully." What glorious meddling it is, in the true spirit of the country's Bolivarian Revolution, and "bully" to Hugo Chavez for doing it.

As for Chavez's so-called "big spending" for weapons that has "many countries worried," one must wonder which countries the Journal writer means. She mentions none, which she surely would have and quoted their officials if, in fact, there were any. The truth, of course, is Hugo Chavez is acting no differently than most all other countries in the region or elsewhere, has expressed no hostility toward any of them, has never invaded a neighbor or threatened to, and is a model of a peace-promoting leader who's only taking sensible steps to upgrade his small military and protect his nation against a hostile US he has every reason to believe will attack him. But you'll never find that commentary on the pages of the Wall Street Journal.

The Journal editorial ends in grand style. It demeans the poor countries of the region benefitting from below-market priced Venezuelan oil as likely supporting that country for the Latin American Council seat. It also attacks Argentina for being a "Venezuelan pawn," calling it "once a haven for Nazis" (the US was and still is), and stating "the country has been so incompetent about managing its 'resources' that it too needs charity from Mr. Chavez." Indeed, Argentina had big financial trouble at the end of the 1990s, but the Journal writer doesn't explain why. It was because the country became the "poster child" model for US-style neoliberal free market capitalism in the 1990s. It wrecked the economy causing it to collapse into bankruptcy it's still struggling to recover from.

The Journal writer also attacks Bolivia and Cuba for supporting Chavez but is particularly hostile to the Lula government in Brazil for its siding with the Venezuelan leader. She calls that support "surprising" and accused the Brazilian government of being "Bolivia's unofficial energy advisor (that) orchestrated the confiscation of Brazilian assets (in Bolivia) recently." Bolivian president Evo Morales nationalized his nation's energy resources which Bolivian law clearly states the nation owns. He confiscated nothing, which the Journal writer surely knows but failed to tell her readers. She also mentioned a so-called "eternal Brazilian struggle to prove that it can challenge US 'hegemony' in the region (that) trumps the need to regain dignity and protect its investments abroad." Left out of the commentary is any mention that Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba and Brazil are sovereign states with the right to support whatever

policies and other countries they wish without needing US approval to do it.

About the only final comment the Journal writer can make is to claim Guatemala has the "solid backing of the 'more serious democracies' in the region - such as Colombia and Mexico." It's likely what the writer means by "serious" is those countries' elections are about as free and fair as ours - meaning, they only are for the power-elites controlling them who arrange the outcomes they want.

The June 23 Wall Street Journal editorial was a typical example of what this newspaper calls journalism and editorial commentary. This writer follows it to learn what the US empire likely is up to. In the case of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, it's no doubt up to no good. The continued hostile rhetoric is clearly to signal another attempt to oust the Venezuelan leader at whatever time and by whatever means the Bush administration has in mind. Stay tuned.

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