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ENGLISH EDITION | *The artillery of ideas* **INTERNATIONAL**

A plan for peace

Venezuela proposed a plan for peace in the region, beginning with an end to Colombia's 60-year old civil war

Venezuela and Colombia broke relations last week after Colombia accused Venezuela of harboring "terrorist" groups and gave the Venezuelan government a 30-day "ultimatum" for international intervention. President Chavez denounced evidence of an imminent attack against Venezuela, backed by the United States.

On Thursday, Venezuela presented a plan for peace with Colombia before South American nations.



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Happy Birthday Mr. President!

On Wednesday, July 28, President Hugo Chavez turned 56. At the stroke of midnight, his Twitter account (@chavezcandanga) was flooded with birthday wishes recognizing the important presence of a man who has given his life, knowledge and strength to fight for social justice and equality in Venezuela. Chavez has confronted coup d'etats, assassination attempts and an international opposition to his policies, yet he has forged on with the support of millions of Venezuelans and Latin Americans who believe in his vision for a better world. Born on July 28, 1954 in the poor, rural village of Sabaneta, Barinas, Hugo Chavez has four children from two marriages: Rosa Virginia, Maria Gabriela, Hugo Rafael and his youngest, Rosines. Chavez earned a university degree in Military Science and Arts with a speciality in Communications from the Venezuelan Military Academy in 1975. It was there that he developed his passion for the ideals of Independence hero Simon Bolivar. After a failed, but popularly-supported, military rebellion on February 4, 1992, Chavez spent two years in prison. Upon his release, he began to build a political movement nationwide. In 1998, he ran for president and won with a 56% majority. During his first year as president, Venezuelans drafted and ratified a new constitution. In 1999, Chavez ran again for president under the new constitution, and won with a 59.76% vote. He was reelected for a second term in December 2006 by 64%, a landslide victory.



Media with a political agenda

Due to financial crimes committed by a main shareholder of Globovision, a leading anti-Chavez television station, the Venezuelan government may soon acquire significant ownership of the media outlet. While local and international media have cried censorship and violations of press freedom, the Globovision situation has raised questions about the role of media in society.

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UN Declares Access to Water a Fundamental Right

The United Nations General Assembly has declared for the first time that access to clean water and sanitation is a fundamental human right. In a historic vote on Wednesday, July 28, 122 countries supported the resolution, and over forty countries abstained from voting, including the United States, Canada and several European and other industrialized countries. There were no votes against the resolution.

The resolution was proposed by the government of Bolivia, led by President Evo Morales, who also insisted that the 884 million people currently

with no access to clean water be guaranteed their basic human rights. On Thursday, President Morales thanked the countries that supported the Bolivian initiative and called for immediate action to implement this newly recognized right.

"Water is a human right and not a private business. Once the international community recognizes that clean water is a human right, it should be administered by mayors, governors and national governments, and never by private businesses".

In 2000, the former pro-privatization Bolivian government sold

the water rights in Cochabamba, a tropical, populated province, to Bechtel, a US corporation and major defense contractor. Water prices skyrocketed and Bolivians engaged in mass protests and rebellions against the privatization of their water resources. The uprisings forced Bechtel to abandon its claim on Bolivia's water.

"Clean water is a service and should never be an object of merchandise", declared President Morales, adding that "this victory is not a triumph of Evo Morales, or Bolivia, but of the people of our world".

Chavez: US and Colombia plan to attack Venezuela

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez denounced last Saturday US plans to attack his country and overthrow his government. During a ceremony celebrating the 227th birthday of Independence hero Simon Bolivar, Chavez read from a secret memo he had been sent from an unnamed source inside the United States.

"Old friend, I haven't seen you in years. As I said to you in my three prior letters, the idea remains the generation of a conflict on your western border", read Chavez.

"The latest events confirm all, or almost all, of what those here discussed as well as other information that I have obtained from above", the letter continued.

"The preparation phase in the international community, with the help of Colombia, is in plain execution", manifested the text, referring to last Thursday's session in the Organization of American States (OAS), during which the Colombia government accused Venezuela of harboring "terrorists" and "terrorist training camps" and gave the Chavez government a "30-day ultimatum" to allow for international intervention.

The letter continued with more details, "I told you before that the events wouldn't begin before the 26th, but for some reason they have moved forward several actions that were supposed to be executed afterward".

"In the United States, the execution phase is accelerating, together with a contention force, as they call it, towards Costa Rica with the pretext of fighting drug trafficking".

On July 1, the Costan Rican government authorized 46 US war ships and 7,000 marines into their maritime and land territory.

The true objective of this military mobilization, said the letter, is to "support military operations" against Venezuela.

ASSASSINATION AND OVERTHROW

"There is an agreement between Colombia and the US with two objectives: one is Mauricio and the other is the overthrow of the government", revealed the document. President Chavez explained that "Mauricio" is a pseudonym used in these communications.

"The military operation is going to happen", warned the text,



After Venezuelan President Chavez revealed intelligence data during a national address on Saturday, indicating the imminence of an aggression against his government via Colombia with support from the US, the country

"and those from the north will do it, but not directly in Caracas".

"They will hunt 'Mauricio' down outside Caracas, this is very important, I repeat, this is very important".

President Chavez revealed he had received similar letters from the same source alerting him to dangerous threats. He received one right before the capture of more than 100 Colombian paramilitaries in the outskirts of Cara-

cas on maximum alert. On Sunday, the Venezuelan President suspended an important trip to Cuba to celebrate the July 26th anniversary of the Moncada Battle. Chavez was to meet with Fidel Castro and give the key address at the Moncada commemoration.

"After reviewing intelligence reports and other information all night, I have decided to suspend my trip to Cuba", declared Chavez on Sunday before tens of thousands of members from the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). "The possibility of an armed attack against Venezuela from Colombia is too high".

Chavez also warned the US government that in the event of a military attack against Venezuela from Colombia or elsewhere, all oil supply will be suspended. "Let the United States know, that if any aggression is waged against

cas that were part of an assassination plan against the Venezuelan head of state, and another in 2002, just days before the coup d'etat that briefly ousted him from power. "The letter warned of snipers and the coup", explained Chavez, "and it was right, the information was true, but we were unable to act to prevent it".

US MILITARY EXPANSION

This information comes on the

us, we will cut off all oil supply to them. Not a single drop of oil for the United States!"

Venezuela currently supplies more than 15% of US oil needs, but also has seven oil refineries in US territory and over 14,000 gas stations run by CITGO, a Venezuelan-owned company. In January, the US Geological Survey (USGS) determined that Venezuela has the largest recoverable oil reserves in the world, with over 500 billion barrels.

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley declared Monday the US "has no intention of engaging in military action against Venezuela", but also backed Colombia's accusations of "terrorists" in Venezuelan territory. "Colombia presented a persuasive case...These are serious charges and they deserve to be fully investigated", added Crowley.

heels of the decision last Thursday to break relations between Colombia and Venezuela, made by President Chavez after Colombia's "show" in the OAS.

"Uribe is capable of anything", warned Chavez, announcing that the country was on maximum alert and the borders were being reinforced.

Last October, Colombia and the US signed a military agreement permitting the US to occupy sev-

en Colombian bases and to use all Colombian territory as needed to complete missions. One of the bases in the agreement, Palanquero, was cited in May 2009 US Air Force documents as necessary to "conduct full spectrum military operations" in South America and combat the threat of "anti-US governments" in the region.

Palanquero was also signaled as critical to the Pentagon's Global Mobility Strategy, as outlined in the February 2009 White Paper: Air Mobility Command Global En Route Strategy, "USSOUTHCOM has identified Palanquero, Colombia (German Olano Airfield SKPQ), as a cooperative security location (CSL). From this location nearly half of the continent can be covered by a C-17 without refueling".

The 2010 Pentagon budget included a \$46 million USD request to improve the installations at Palanquero, in order to support the Command Combatant's "Theater Posture Strategy" and "provide for a unique opportunity for full spectrum operations in a critical sub region of our hemisphere where security and stability is under constant threat from narcotics funded terrorist insurgencies, anti-US governments, endemic poverty and recurring natural disasters".

The May 2009 Air Force document further added that Palanquero would be used to "increase our capacity to conduct Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR), improve global reach...and expand expeditionary warfare capability".

In February 2010, the US National Directorate of Intelligence (NDI) classified Venezuela as "Anti-US Leader" in the region in its annual threat assessment.

The US also maintains forward operation locations (small military bases) in Aruba and Curacao, just miles off the Venezuelan coast. In recent months, the Venezuelan government has denounced unauthorized incursions of drone planes and other military aircraft into Venezuelan territory, originating from the US bases.

These latest revelations evidence that a serious, and unjustified conflict is brewing fast against Venezuela, a country with a vibrant democracy and the largest oil reserves in the world.

T/ Eva Golinger

A Plan for Peace



Maduro denounced Colombia's intent to provoke aggression against Venezuela, and called on social movements across the region to mobilize

against the US military bases in Colombia and throughout Latin America. "Every day, the Uribe government is spreading more lies and endangering our stabil-

ity. The fight against US military bases and the struggle for regional peace should be shared by social movements throughout Latin America".

On Thursday, Foreign Ministers of the Union of South American nations (Unasur) meet during an emergency summit in Quito, Ecuador, to discuss the Colombia-Venezuela conflict. Formed in 2004, Unasur includes Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guyana, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela.

"We hope that all these diplomatic and political measures to control government security will avoid desperate actions that could lead to more harm to the region", Maduro told reporters after meeting with Chilean Foreign Minister Alfredo Moreno.

COLOMBIA REJECTS PEACE

Colombia's government rejected the "peace proposal", calling it "intervention" and "meddling" on the part of the Venezuelan government. "We believe peace comes about through security, and as long as neighboring countries harbor terrorists, there can be no

peace", said Colombia's Foreign Minister Jaime Bermudez.

Bermudez also stated he had little "expectation" that the UNASUR meeting would accomplish anything.

SUPPORT FOR VENEZUELA

During Maduro's South American "peace tour", he received letters and statements from social movements, artists, intellectuals, unions and political groups expressing solidarity and support for Venezuela.

"In every country we visited we have received expressions of solidarity from social movements, unionists, indigenous communities, workers, women's rights activists, farmers, intellectuals and others. All are in agreement with our struggle for peace against war and with the defensive actions taken by President Hugo Chavez", affirmed the Venezuelan Foreign Minister.

"The people of Colombia need to stop Uribe's madness", he added, "and our plan is to declare South America a 'zone of peace'".

T/Eva Golinger

Colombia-Venezuela dispute should be resolved in South America

Last week, Colombia's ambassador to the Organization of the American States (OAS) accused Venezuela of harboring 1,500 guerillas, and asked for the OAS to take action. The timing was noteworthy to many observers. President Lula da Silva of Brazil noted that it "seemed strange that this occurs a few days before Uribe leaves office. The new president has given signals that he wants to build peace [with Venezuela]. Everything was going well until Uribe made this accusation".

Venezuela responded by breaking diplomatic relations with Colombia. It had previously cut off much of its trade with Colombia over the past two years, in response to Colombia's agreement with Washington to expand its mili-

tary presence at seven US military bases in Colombia.

Of course, Uribe does not necessarily take orders from Washington, but it would be naive to assume that someone who has received more than \$6 billion USD from the US would not check with his benefactors before doing something like this. The fact that the US State Department immediately took Colombia's side in the dispute is further indication that they approved. Even Washington's allies in the region did not take sides, with the government of Chile, for example, issuing a neutral statement; this would have been the normal diplomatic protocol for Washington too, if this were not part of a political and public relations campaign against Venezuela.

Other governments clearly saw Colombia's action as a political

move, and were upset with what looked like the OAS being manipulated for these purposes. President Lula said that the venue of the dispute should be moved to UNASUR, because the US would tilt the negotiations toward Colombia and against Venezuela.

Ecuador's foreign minister, Ricardo Patiño, strongly criticized the head of the OAS, Jose Miguel Insulza, for not having consulted before granting Colombia's request for a meeting of the OAS permanent council. Patiño said that Insulza had shown his "absolute incapacity" to direct the organization and to "look for peace in the region".

Bolivia's president, Evo Morales, had even harsher rhetoric for Uribe, calling him "a loyal representative of the US government, with its military bases in Colombia designed to provoke a

war between Venezuela, Ecuador and Nicaragua".

This dispute highlights the importance of the institutional changes that the left-of-center governments in Latin America are trying to make. The increasing importance of UNASUR, displacing the OAS, has become vital to Latin American progress and stability. For example, because of the influence of the US the OAS failed to take stronger action to restore the democratically elected government of President Zelaya of Honduras after the coup d'etat last year.

When Bolivia was having problems with attempts by the separatist, extra-parliamentary opposition - including violence and de-stabilization efforts - it was UNASUR that met in Santiago in September 2008 and threw its weight behind the democratic

government of Evo Morales.

When the US decided last fall to expand its presence at the military bases in Colombia, Unasur reached an agreement - which included Colombia - that prohibited these bases from being used for any actions outside of the country.

As to the substance of Colombia's latest claims, guerillas and paramilitaries have been crossing the 2,000km border with Venezuela - much of it dense jungle, mountains and all kinds of difficult terrain - for decades. There is no evidence that anything has changed recently, and nothing to indicate that the Venezuelan government, which has extradited guerillas to Colombia, supports any armed groups.

T/Mark Weisbrot

Venezuela: Small nations together can change the balance of power

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez received his Guyan counterpart, Bharat Jagdeo in the presidential palace of Miraflores last week, boosting regional cooperation and leading to the signing of 4 new agreements between the neighboring countries

The visit is Jagdeo's second to Venezuela, the first taking place in 2001 when he attended the III Summit of the Association of Caribbean States in Margarita Island.

President Chavez spoke about the significance of Jagdeo's visit in advancing Venezuela's integrationist foreign policy.

"Venezuela has retaken the stance of unity", Chavez said. "We need to complement each other in all aspects: politics, culture, and economy".

Relations between the two South American nations have been growing steadily over the past few years as Venezuela has focused on establishing Latin American cooperation outside the dictates of United States foreign policy.

President Jagdeo, for his part, complimented the role that Venezuela has played in forging alternatives to a uni-polar world and standing up for a just foreign policy.

"Guyana has always admired your government in many ways", Jagdeo told Chavez. "In international forums, not all of the voices are always listened to and small countries such as ours cannot prosper simply because the rules of the current system, economic theory and the World Trade Organization don't allow us to compete on equal footing with the big countries".

COOPERATION AND TRADE

Trade between Guyana and Venezuela has reached close to \$3 million USD for the first 5 months of this year, 70% of which is accounted for by Venezuelan exports of metals, minerals, chemicals, and food items to its neighbor.



The agreements signed by the two nations last week focused on further cooperation in the areas of agriculture, fuel, and the resolution of conflicts surrounding fishing areas.

A commitment was made between the two nations to study the possibilities of increased commercial trade of rice and a memorandum of understanding was signed for Venezuela to supply Guyana with 4 thousands tons of urea, a chemical compound used for agricultural fertilizers.

Other memorandums were signed related to the supply of A1 jet fuel to Guyana and the creation of a committee, made up of officials from the Foreign Relations Ministries of both countries, to investigate and resolve fishing incidents occurring in the waters between the two nations.

The two governments also agreed to study the possibility of constructing a gas pipeline from Eastern Venezuela to Suriname, Guyana's eastern neighbor.

EL ESEQUIBO

A controversial topic touched upon during Jagdeo's visit to Caracas was the decades-long territorial dispute that has existed

between Venezuela and neighboring Guyana.

The region known as the Essequibo, named after the river that marks the border between Guyana and the zone disputed by Venezuela, was legally annexed from the latter by England in 1899 under dubious circumstances and constitutes some 70% of what is now considered Guyana's territory.

In the 1960s, while Guyana was undergoing its transition to independence, Venezuela stepped up pressure to reclaim the zone.

Last week, President Chavez admitted that in the past, Venezuela was seen as an ally by the United States in the fight against progressive governments such as that of Guyana in the 1960s.

Guyana's pre-independence government of Cheddi Jagan openly defied the United State's embargo on Cuba and signed economic agreements with members of the Eastern European communist bloc.

"The Yankee Empire identified Guyana as a second Cuba and for that reason, in the past, Venezuela was used as a base for aggression against this country and all of the neighboring Caribbean", explained the Venezuelan President.

Both countries have agreed to resume talks on the Essequibo under the auspices of the United Nations Good Office. Norman Girvan, an esteemed diplomat, has been appointed by the UN General Secretary to mediate discussions regarding the territory.

Roy Chaderton, current Venezuelan ambassador to the Organization of American States, will represent Venezuela in the future discussions.

"We had it in our heads for many years that you were our enemies and the truth is that we are brothers", Chavez told Jagdeo. "This is a fine demonstration that despite historical differences, both governments are brothers".

GUYANA AND ALBA

President Jagdeo, while in Venezuela, also expressed Guyana's desire to join ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance of the People of Our America.

ALBA was founded in 2004 as a regional alliance to counter US hegemony in Latin America and promote economic, political, and cultural integration between nations.

Initially, President Chavez said, Guyana would join ALBA in the

capacity of observer "to attend meetings, join the Bank of ALBA and look for financing to counter poverty and hunger".

There are currently 9 ALBA member countries including Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua.

SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

The Venezuelan head of state also received the presidents of the Caucas nations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia last week.

Eduard Kokoiti and Sergei Bagapsh visited Caracas as part of their trip to Latin America to strengthen ties with countries in the area and build support for their cause of independence.

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia declared themselves independent from Georgia in the early 1990s, resulting in years of armed conflict.

Russia was the first country to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent nations in August of 2008.

Since then, Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nauru have also recognized the independence of the two countries.

South Ossetian President, Eduard Kokoiti, expressed his gratitude to Venezuela for its support in its struggle against the state of Georgia.

"This is an historic day because today we are in the capital of a friendly state, one of the first to support the Russian Federation in its recognition of the independence of South Ossetian and Abkhazia", he said.

During the visit, four agreements were signed between the new nations and Venezuela including the mutual establishment of ambassadors, a memorandum of understanding regarding political consultations, and joint declarations pertaining to general cooperation.

"You have in Venezuela, a brother country", President Chavez told his counterparts last week. "Count completely on all of us in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and our humble brotherhood".

T/ Edward Ellis

Mission Barrio Adentro: A socialist concept of Medicine

In Venezuela, the concept of social medicine in which health is viewed as an essential part of humanism and as a right of every citizen and not a business, continues to grow. The work of Mission Barrio Adentro, a Cuba-Venezuela initiative, has been fundamental to achieve this end



The relationship between Cuba and Venezuela has developed steadily since October 30, 2000, when Presidents Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro of Cuba signed a Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement Cuba-Venezuela.

In April 2003, the first Cuban doctors of Mission Barrio Adentro arrived to Caracas to jumpstart the social program, which was soon extended to the rest of the country. The initial goal was to bring healthcare into poorer communities, where most people had never had any medical care and had little or no access to preventive healthcare campaigns.

The mission currently is run by Cuban and Venezuelan doctors as part of an overall healthcare strategy and state policy of the Chavez administration, explained Vice-Minister of Health Networks, Iver Gil.

Today, more than 15,000 doctors are working in Mission Barrio Adentro, with a large percentage of Venezuelan doctors now working with human sensitivity and social commitment.

There are approximately 30,000 Cuban collaborators, including medical and technical staff in hospitals throughout the country, with the goal of strengthening the national public health system.

NEW HOSPITALS AND CLINICS

The objective this year is to complete the construction of more than 500 comprehensive diagnostic centers (CDI), where Venezuelan and Cuban doctors provide care and counseling in the areas of healing, promotion and prevention. Students are also trained in social medicine at these

centers, based on the notion that healthcare is a right, not a commodity, and is essential to aid in the improvement of quality of life in Venezuelan communities.

"It's a joint program with doctors and communities working together to improve the quality of life and health of residents. We are now developing integral health community services, so that communities have an area or network with medical health services at the preventive, diagnostic and treatment levels to promote health and prevent disease", explained Vice Minister Gil.

Gil reported that in the next two months 17 more CDIs should be inaugurated and 64 new hospitals built, along with the renovation of other public hospitals in specific areas such as operat-

ing rooms, laboratories, delivery rooms, emergency, among others.

Gil stressed that the most important aspect of Mission Barrio Adentro is the promotion of social medicine, curative and preventive healthcare and proper rehabilitation.

"In many areas that never had access to medical consultations before, there are now popular, free clinics. During the program, we have increased the number of neighborhood clinics from 4,000 to 11,000 nationwide", said Gil.

TRAINING

Vice-Minister Iver Gil also explained that previously in Venezuela, medical education was elitist, with limited spaces at universities. "A medical degree was seen only as a profession to make money or earn large sums of money, and the concept was of a doctor waiting in his office for the patient to come with problems".

With the new concept of socialist healthcare in the country, Gil noted the whole medical community is being reshaped.

There are currently more than 28,000 students of Comprehensive Community Medicine studies in six experimental national universities. "In five years, we have incorporated more than 8,000 students into the public hospital system who will graduate in December next year, trained in social, socialist, integral medicine, which takes into

account the community environment and not just the body or the sick person alone, but also how we live and how we can improve the quality of our lives. This is a process that includes home visits, and students are forming these clinics and networks in their own communities".

PROVISION OF MEDICINE

The Ministry of Health has several strategies to ensure the provision of medicines and medical equipment for communities, hospitals and clinics.

Alliances with ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas) countries and UNASUR (Union of South American Nations), including Argentina, Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Paraguay, have enabled agreements to buy medicines at low prices.

Also, Gil noted that through these partnerships, major surgical equipment for hospitals and other medical supplies have been acquired.

"Now we are engaging in agreements to enable Venezuelan industries to produce pharmaceutical drugs in our own country. This involves the transfer of technology and know-how from other nations, which is an essential part of these accords", he said.

T/ Pearl Nguyen,
Translation by EG

P/ Venezuelan News Agency
(AVN)

Evo Morales: US using anti-drug policy to justify military bases

The President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, declared on Tuesday that the anti-drug policy supported by the United States has been used as a pretext to establish new military bases in Colombia.

"The illegal drug trade is not only an economic and a social issue, but also a political one, which is being used to justify US military bases in Latin American nations, and also to put at risk the peace of the region", warned Morales.

During a presentation with Cesar Guedes Morales, representative of the Organization of Nations against Drug Trafficking and Crime, President Morales declared



that Bolivia, contrary to the counter narcotics policy of the United States, is fighting against drugs with "sovereignty and dignity".

Morales was firm in his decision to fight against drugs, however he said the United States and other industrialized nations should take responsibility for the substantial increase of the illicit drugs market in their countries. He also warned that the United States is using this issue as an excuse to exercise control over the region.

The Bolivian President explained that since the 1980s, when he was a union leader in the tropical region of Cochabamba, "The United States tended to discredit union leaders, accusing them of being reds or communists in order to justify repression against them".

President Morales revealed that drug traffickers in Bolivia have better technology than the police forces, and more equipment than the Armed Forces. He asked for help from the international community to balance this situation and effectively fight against this problem.

The Bolivian head of the state, and also former union leader of Bolivian coca leaf growers, assured that his country is engaging in real efforts to fight against drug trafficking, however there are technical and financial limitations. "That's why the international community should

help us to stop the illegal drug trade".

"Our biggest weakness is the lack of the necessary equipment, technology and radars to fight drug trafficking", he said.

Bolivia, the world's third largest producer of coca leaf after Peru and Colombia, is capable of manufacturing 113 tons of coca per year. Coca cultivation in-country occupies 30,900 hectares, however only 12,000 are considered legal for traditional indigenous use.

T/ Venezuelan News Agency
(AVN)

The miracle of sight

The Venezuelan and Cuban health care program, which performs free eye surgery for people around Latin America has treated over 1 million patients since 2004, according to data released by the Venezuelan government earlier this month

The social program, known as Mission Miracle, is one of the many agreements signed between Cuba and Venezuela in the area of health care.

Completely free of charge, the program provides vision related surgery to low-income individuals who would otherwise not have the financial resources for these operations.

"Providing medical attention is a very important act", said Noris Villalonga, Coordinator of Mission Miracle in the Venezuelan states of Lara, Yaracuy, and Portuguesa. "I think the value of providing the people with excellent care where there is quality and humanity is immeasurable".

MORE THAN ONE MILLION TREATED

According to official statistics, the exact number of patients treated by the Mission has reached 1,139,798 with an average of 5,000 operations occurring on a weekly basis in 74 medical centers around Venezuela.

"We travel all over our assigned



regions to make diagnoses, so that underserved populations receive this attention because the costs of eye surgery are very high and there are people that don't have the resources", explained Villalonga.

In the first four months of 2010, the Mission has helped 101,112 people recover or repair their vision.

The majority of problems treated by the program include pterygium, cataracts, strabismus, retinopathies, glaucoma, myopia, ptosis, and difficulties in the cornea.

HEALTH CARE FOR HUMANITY

Although the vast majority of surgeries are performed on Venezuelans, residents from other Latin American nations have also benefited from the program.



This year, 3,398 operations have been performed on non-Venezuelans. Lida Segura is one of the 5,733 Ecuadorans who has been attended by the mission since 2005.

Segura recently received an operation in the state of Lara and spoke about the difference that it will make in her life.

"I'm 82 years old and I haven't

been seeing well for some 4 years now in either of my eyes. When I can see well, I will go out again and for this I am really happy. Now I can already see clearer thanks to the operation", she said.

"This has never happened... None of the earlier presidents cared about us, they only denied us assistance", indicated Segura, thanking Ecuadoran President Rafael Correa and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez for the chance to receive the free medical assistance.

Another Ecuadoran patient, Frenda Villasilva, commented on the quality of care and the significance that improved eyesight will have for her.

"I have been treated better than in my own home. I'm 65 years old and you can imagine what it means

to be able to see well at this age. To have 20-20 vision is to be practically reborn", she exclaimed.

Residents of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay have all benefited from the free operations.

Last week, the Venezuelan National Assembly approved a law laying the groundwork for the program to reach the residents of El Salvador.

Salvadoran doctors will evaluate eye-related illnesses and select patients who will then receive treatment in Venezuela.

During its initial phase, Mission Milagro was based in Cuba where 204,000 Venezuelans in need of care were sent for surgeries.

Venezuela is now the site of the operations where Cuban and Venezuelan doctors work side by side.

Of the over 900,000 operations that have been carried out in Venezuela, 570,902 have been performed by Cubans and another 368,643 has been performed by Venezuelans.

"I am a doctor and a health promoter", declared Coordinator Villalonga. "For me it's a great responsibility that I must assume with dignity. Health cannot be played with. And to be able to receive such a great number of our Latin American brothers and sisters is the most amazing thing because it integrates us more as a region".

**T/ Edward Ellis
P/ Agencies**

Revolutionary progress in education

The Chavez administration has created thirteen new universities in the past ten years

While speaking to 326 graduates - 323 Venezuelans and three Guatemalans - at the new Sports University last week, President Chavez compared the state of higher education to the situation he found on arriving to the presidency 11 years ago.

"They were creating private universities throughout the country, while at the same time they were drowning and abandoning public universities", he explained.

Among the 13 universities founded by the government is the Bolivarian University of Venezue-

la (UBV), a national university that forms part of the higher education mission, Mission Sucre, which currently has 230,000 students. It was created seven years ago.

Others include the National Experimental University of the Armed Forces, which has 237,000 students; the National University of Arts, with 2,300 students; and the National Experimental University of Sur del Lago, with 6,000 students. The Chavez government has also recently created six new technical universities in different states.

During the graduation ceremony, President Chavez highlighted the creation of a new indigenous university, which has a campus in the state of Amazonas and another one in the state of Bolivar, with a total enrolment of 810.

The Sports University of the People of the South (Universidad Deportiva de los Pueblos del Sur) has over 15,000 students.

JOBS FOR NEW GRADS

The Venezuelan President also announced the state was making available 16.1 million bol-

ivares (\$3.7 million USD) to fund salaries of 405 new professionals from a pool of graduates of the Sports University and the Cuban International School for Physical Education and Sport.

"We have approved all the resources for your incorporation into these jobs working in national sports", said Chavez.

Those in the new posts will work together with health and education social programs, the Ministry of Sport and the Sports University to implement a strategic plan to improve national sports.

"The objective of this graduation is to guarantee that all Venezuelans can play sports, have recreational activities, a healthy life and that sports become a tool for the construction of a society of equals", affirmed President Chavez.

The Sports University has three distinct degree programs: Physical Activity and Health, Technical Management of Sport, and Sports Training.

T/ Steven Mather
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Globovision: When media step beyond their limits

Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez announced last week that his government will soon possess 48% of the stock of the opposition television station Globovision, entitling it to appoint a government member to the private channel's board of directors. In recent years, Globovision has become the leading political voice for the anti-Chavez movement.

As expected, news of the government's incorporation in the conservative television station has caused a stir in the international press. Private media outlets around the world are selling the development as an attempt by the Venezuelan government to alter the editorial content of the station and thereby silence dissent in the country. But, as is the norm with international reporting on Venezuela, the media's spin on events and the reality of the situation do not match up.

The fact that the government will be appointing a representative to the board of directors of Globovision is, at least in part, a direct legal result of the corruption and criminal activity of one of the station's wealthy corporate executives. Nelson Mezerhane, former owner of the now defunct Banco Federal in Venezuela, fled the country after violating multiple banking laws, leaving his bank's clients and their savings in limbo. The government was forced to intervene in the bank in order to protect customers' deposits and Mezerhane's assets have been seized. Among those assets is a 25.8% stake in Globovision.

Another 20% of the stock that the government will assume is the result of the death of Luis Nuñez, former co-founder of Globovision. Because public media concessions are not inheritable property according to Venezuelan law, Nuñez's stake in Globovision will regress to the state.

These two events form the legal basis for the government's incorporation in the private station. Yet, despite the ostensibly legitimate actions being taken by the government, accusations of a clamp down on freedom of speech in Venezuela persist as corporate media conglomerates use the situation to foster the perception that the country is under the mandates of a power-hungry "dictator" bent on eliminating critics.



MANIPULATION AND DISTORTION

International reports labeling Globovision as the "last opposition broadcast television station remaining" in Venezuela create the false impression that voices critical of the government are somehow being silenced. The reality is quite the opposite, however, as the vast majority of print and radio media in Venezuela continue to be dominated by the country's conservative opposition while multiple private broadcast television stations present critical perspectives regularly.

Stations such as Venevision and Televen often cover opposition political events during news broadcasts and provide the viewing public with dissenting opinions during talk show programs.

The difference between the aforementioned television stations and Globovision is that Venevision and Televen present their criticisms responsibly, in a fashion that maintains some semblance of democracy and balance in programming.

Globovision, on the other hand, is as strident in its hatred for the government as it is manipulative in the information that it presents to the Venezuelan public.

Although the private station is currently being hoisted up by international media outlets and right-wing NGOs as a posterchild for democracy and freedom, the channel's history of sowing panic and fear in the population tells a different story.

COUP SUPPORT

Perhaps the best example of Globovision's anti-democratic character is that of the failed coup d'état carried out against the popularly elected government of Hugo Chavez in April 2002. The private media in Venezuela, including Globovision, actively colluded with opposition political groups and business leaders to orchestrate the build up to and the execution of the violent coup which left 17 civilians dead and caused widespread panic throughout the country.

Globovision alongside other private television stations manipulated video images during

the coup, repeating ad infinitum the outright lie that government supporters had fired upon innocent demonstrators, thereby justifying the coup.

Notwithstanding subsequent investigations that have proven the mendacity of the private media's claims, Globovision's President, Guillermo Zuloaga, has continued to repeat this patently false version of events surrounding the coup d'état and has publicly lamented the fact that the coup was a failure. Zuloaga recently fled Venezuela after being indicted for the hoarding of 17 luxury vehicles on his Caracas estate. He remains a fugitive from Venezuelan justice, taking refuge in the United States.

From December 2002 – February 2003, Globovision and the private media played the role of cheerleaders for a management lock-out of the oil industry which caused widespread hardship for the population and crippled the country's economy for months. The lockout was a decidedly political act with the sole purpose of bringing down the government of Hugo Chavez.

On October 13, 2008, continuing with its virulent anti-Chavez line, Globovision invited Rafael Poleo, the owner of the opposition newspaper Un Nuevo Tiempo, to appear on the talk show "Alo Ciu-

dadano" where he publicly stated that President Chavez, "needs to be careful not to end up like Mussolini with his head hanging upside down".

In May of 2009, Globovision's director, Alberto Ravell, used unofficial and alarmist information regarding an earthquake near Caracas to launch politically motivated attacks against the Venezuelan government before the latter had provided the public with verifiable information regarding the situation.

Venezuela's penal code rightfully prohibits domestic media outlets from using panic and violence to incite the population, acts which Globovision has clearly committed to the point of subversion in its efforts to bring down the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez.

If, in the United States, a private television station broadcasting over public airwaves engaged in violent and inciting acts with the purpose of overthrowing the elected government of Barack Obama, that station would undoubtedly be eliminated. In fact, as Noam Chomsky has reminded us when writing on the topic, subversion in the United States is punishable by death.

Yet, the anti-democratic principles which underpin Globovision's complete lack of journalistic standards are the same that are being defended by international media conglomerates and foreign "human rights" organizations as they come to the rescue of the private station and its cabal of corporate executives. Such a defense is indicative of the interests that these groups represent, interests that have nothing to do with freedom of speech.

Over the years, corporate media outlets have made an art form out of misinforming the international community regarding current affairs in Venezuela.

The recent situation pertaining to Globovision is not an exception. Inaccurate coverage continues to distort the reality on the ground, depriving the international public of the information it deserves and needs to make an educated assessment of the democratic changes underway in the country.

OPINION

Pentagon Papers 2.0: Afghanistan

This set of documents is unquestionably the most important history so far of key parts of the US war in Afghanistan. These are reports of troops and commanders in the field to other military officials - this is where they tell the truth, to themselves. It is significant that the Obama administration has not tried to claim the reports are not accurate. What they are trying to do is to have it both ways: claiming that disclosure of the reports somehow endangers US troops, but at the same time disparaging the documents as showing nothing we didn't already know.

These reports, of events already past, are hardly likely to endanger the troops in Afghanistan - the people and insurgencies in Afghanistan and Pakistan don't need Pentagon documents to know what US/NATO forces are actually doing in their countries.

The documents probably will have a significant impact on the US/NATO war though - just not what the White House is warning of. These reports will likely stoke even greater global anger around the world, as evidence filters out to those far from Afghanistan and Pakistan who didn't already know what the US/NATO occupation looks like. That will certainly mean rising anger towards US policies and unfortunately towards Americans as a whole... but more importantly it will spur enormous anti-war activity in places like Europe, Canada, Australia, and Turkey. And that means greater pressure on those governments still providing troops for Washington's war in Afghanistan. And most important of all, they will mean greater pressure than ever on the Obama administration to end the war and especially on the US Congress to vote NO on next week's supplemental war funding bill.

There is no evidence yet of a new smoking gun among the individual documents. But taken as a whole, the documents provide a collective arsenal of evidence of a



brutal war that never did have a chance to "succeed" - and evidence of what a government, through two administrations, were determined to keep secret from its own people and the rest of the world.

The documents chronicle escalating Special Forces' operations, drone attacks, and more. They describe activities like those of Task Force 373, a death squad that goes after named individuals on a kill-or-capture list. No trial, of course. Who knows how much of the intelligence that lands someone on that list is rooted in a neighborhood feud or tribal or political power struggle?

General McChrystal's and now General Petraeus' "nation-building" efforts are failing. In places like Marja, last spring's poster-city of a new US-backed "government-in-a-box," the hand-picked mayor-in-a-box, who spent most of the last 15 years living in Germany, is so unpopular that he has to be ferried into town on US military helicopters for occasional meetings, and then quickly whisked away. The much-heralded spring 2010

So if the war becomes more of an air war, and drones are called in to do more of the dirty work so US troops are not at risk, and more Afghan or Pakistani civilians are killed as a result, well that's just part of the cost of war

offensive in Kandahar is on apparently permanent delay.

I haven't read even a fraction yet of the 92,000 reports covering 250,000 pages. But the overviews provided by the international journalists who are certainly consistent with the view that the "counter-insurgency" approach is already giving way to an old-fashioned Bush-style counter-terrorism war. That would mean that claims that protecting Afghan civilians is most important, would fade in favor of acknowledging that the military's role is simply to kill whoever they

decide are the bad guys. So if the war becomes more of an air war, and drones are called in to do more of the dirty work so US troops are not at risk, and more Afghan or Pakistani civilians are killed as a result, well that's just part of the cost of war.

The documents include evidence of far more civilian deaths than were ever reported in the press. Many of them were probably never even mentioned - or asked about - in the virtually non-existent Congressional oversight of these years. They detail massive levels of corruption, extortion, and constant violence inflicted on Afghan civilians by the US-backed, US-trained and US-funded militias known as the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police.

And they demonstrate, again, the continuing links between Pakistan's top military intelligence agency, the ISI, and the top leadership of the Taliban - despite claims by Secretary of State Clinton and others in the Obama administration that Pakistan is a reliable US ally that just

needs to work a little harder on going after terrorists. The Obama administration's answer to the documents simply repeats their efforts to blur the very distinct organizations known as the Afghan Taliban (mostly based in Pakistan but operating in Afghanistan) and the Pakistani Taliban (who target the Pakistani government, and against whom that government has indeed acted) into a generic presence in Pakistan known as "the terrorists" or "the Taliban." Pointing to Islamabad's actions against the Pakistani Taliban says nothing about their officials' ties with and apparent support for the Afghan Taliban.

The Wikileaks Papers provide a treasure trove of new evidence of what we already knew: this war has already failed. Every death, of Afghan civilian and of US or NATO soldier, is needless. Every dollar spent on military actions in Afghanistan and Pakistan is wasted. The cost of this occupation and this war - in Afghan blood, in US and NATO military blood, in the billions of dollars needed for jobs at home and real reconstruction in Afghanistan and elsewhere - is too high. We need to stop the funding for escalation now, bring the troops and contractors home, support Afghan and regional/UN diplomacy, and begin the long effort of making good on our huge debt to the peoples of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Maybe, just maybe, this 21st century Pentagon Papers - the 2.0 version: Afghanistan - will provide the spark of anti-war outrage to make that happen.

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