

Coup D'État Rumblings in Venezuela

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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The Bush administration tried and failed three prior times to oust Hugo Chavez since its first aborted two-day coup attempt in April, 2002. Through FOIA requests, lawyer, activist and author Eva Golinger uncovered top secret CIA documents of US involvement that included an intricate financing scheme involving the quasi-governmental agency, National Endowment of Democracy (NED), and US Agency for International Development (USAID). The documents also showed the White House, State Department and National Security Agency had full knowledge of the scheme, had to have approved it, and there's little doubt of CIA involvement as it's always part of this kind of dirty business. What's worrying now is what went on then may be happening again in what looks like a prelude to a fourth made-in-Washington attempt to oust the Venezuelan leader that must be monitored closely as events develop.

Since he took office in February, 1999, and especially after George Bush's election, Chavez has been a US target, and this time he believes credible sources point to a plot to assassinate him. That information comes from Alimamy Bakarr Sankoh, president of the Hugo Chavez International-Foundation for Peace, Friendship & Solidarity (HCI-FPFS) in a November 11 press release. Sankoh supports Chavez as "a man of peace and flamboyant champion of human dignity (who persists in his efforts in spite of) growing US blackmail, sabotage and political blasphemy."

HCI-FPFS sources revealed the plot's code name - "Operation Cleanse Venezuela" that now may be unfolding ahead of the December 2 referendum on constitutional reforms. According to Sankoh, the scheme sounds familiar - CIA and other foreign secret service operatives (including anti-Castro terrorists) aiming to destabilize the Chavez government by using "at least three concrete subversive plans" to destroy the country's social democracy and kill Chavez.

It involves infiltrating subversive elements into the country, inciting opposition within the military, ordering region-based US forces to shoot down any aircraft used by Chavez, employing trained snipers with shoot to kill orders, and having the dominant US and Venezuelan media act as supportive attack dogs. Chavez is targeted because he represents the greatest of all threats to US hegemony in the region - a good example that's spreading. Venezuela also has Latin America's largest proved oil reserves at a time supplies are tight and prices are at all-time highs.

Sankoh calls Washington-directed threats "real" and to "be treated seriously" to avoid extending Bush's Middle East adventurism to Latin America. He calls for support from the region and world community to denounce the scheme and help stop another Bush administration regime change attempt.

More information on a possible coup plot also came from a November 13 Party for Socialism and Liberation article headlined “New US plots against the Venezuelan Revolution.” It states Tribuna Popular (the Communist Party of Venezuela) and Prensa Latina (the Latin American News Agency) reported: “Between Oct. 7 and Oct 9, high-ranking US officials met in Prague, Czech Republic, with parts of the Venezuelan opposition (where they were) urged to convene social uprisings, sabotage the economy and infrastructure, destroy the food transportation chain and plan a military coup.” It said Paul Wolfowitz and Madeleine Albright attended along with Humberto Celli, “a well-known coup-plotter from the Venezuelan party Accion Democratica.”

The article further reported Tibisay Lucena, The National Electoral Council chairman, said the Venezuelan corporate media was “stoking a mood of violence amongst right-wing students” through a campaign of agitprop, and Hermann Escarra from the “pro-coup” Comando Nacional de la Resistencia openly incited “rebellion” last August and then called for constitutional changes to be stopped “through all means possible.”

The Venezuelan news agency, Diaria VEA, also weighed in saying “anonymous students planned on committing acts of destabilization” as the December 2 vote approaches. Venezuelan Radio Trans Mundial provided proof with a recorded video of a youth dumping gasoline into an armored vehicle, ramming metal barricades into police on top of other vehicles, and knocking them from their roofs and hoods onto the ground.

The Threat of Street Protest Violence

For weeks, protests with sporadic violence have been on Venezuela’s streets as anti-Chavistas use middle and upper class students as imperial tools to destabilize the government and disrupt the constitutional process. The aim is to discredit and oust the Chavez government and return the country to its ugly past with Washington and local oligarchs in charge and the neoliberal model reinstated.

Venezuela’s Foreign Minister, Nicolas Maduro, weighed in on this on November 8. He accused Washington of meddling by staging violent Caracas street protests against proposed constitutional reforms to extend the country’s participatory social democracy. Referring to a November 7 shootout at Caracas’ Central University, he said: “We don’t have any doubt that the government of the United States has their hands in the scheme that led to the ambush yesterday” that Chavez calls a “fascist offensive.” Several students were wounded on the streets from a clash between pro and anti-Chavez elements.

“We know the whole scheme,” Maduro added, and he should as it happened before in 2002, again during the disruptive 2002-03 oil management lockout, and most often as well when elections are held to disrupt the democratic process. These are standard CIA operating tactics used many times before for 50 years in the Agency’s efforts to topple independent leaders and kill them. Chavez understands what’s happening, and he’s well briefed and alerted by his ally, Fidel Castro, who survived over 600 US attempts to kill him since 1959. He’s now 81 and very much alive but going through a difficult recovery from major surgery 15 months ago.

Chavez has widespread popular support throughout the region and from allies like Ecuador’s Raphael Correa and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega who expressed his “solidarity with the revolutionary people of Venezuela and our friend Hugo Chavez, who is being subjected to aggression from a counterrevolution fed by the traitors from inside the country and by

the empire (referring to the US).” He compared the situation to his own country where similar efforts are being “financed by the United States Embassy” in Managua to support elements opposed to his Sandinista government even though it’s very accommodative to Washington.

Even Brazil’s Lula chimed in by calling Chavez’s proposed reforms consistent with Venezuela’s democratic norms, and he added: “Please, invent anything to criticize Chavez, except for lack of democracy.”

Constitutional Reform As A Pretext for Protests

Washington’s goal from all this is clear, but why now? Last July, Chavez announced he’d be sending Venezuela’s National Assembly (AN) a proposed list of constitutional reforms to debate, consider and vote on. Under Venezuelan law, the President, National Assembly or 15% of registered voters (by petition) may propose constitutional changes. Under articles 342, 343, 344 and 345, they must then be debated three times in the legislature, amended if needed, and then submitted to a vote that requires a two-thirds majority to pass. Finally within 30 days, the public gets the last word, up or down, in a national referendum. It represents the true spirit of democracy that’s unimaginable in the US where elitists control everything, elections are a sham, and the people have no say.

That was true for Venezuela earlier, but no longer. In its history, there have been 26 Constitutions since its first in 1821, but none like the 1999 Bolivarian one under Chavez that’s worlds apart from the others. It created a model participatory social democracy that gave all citizens the right to vote it up or down by national referendum and then empowered them (or the government) later on to petition for change.

On August 15, Chavez did that by submitting 33 suggested amendment reforms to the Constitution’s 350 articles and explained it this way: The 1999 Constitution needed updating because it’s “ambiguous (and) a product of that moment. The world (today) is very different from (then). (Reforms are) essential for continuing the process of revolutionary transition” to deepen and broaden Venezuelan democracy. That’s his central aim – to create a “new geometry of power” for the people along with more government accountability to them.

Proposed reforms will have little impact on the nation’s fundamental political structure. They will, however, change laws with regard to politics, the economy, property, the military, the national territory as well as the culture and society and will deepen the country’s social democracy.

The National Assembly (AN) completed its work on November 2 adding 25 additional articles to Chavez’s proposal plus another 11 changes for a total of 69 articles that amend one-fifth of the nation’s Constitution. The most important ones include:

- extending existing constitutional law that guarantees human rights and recognizes the country’s social and cultural diversity;
- building a “social economy” to replace the failed neoliberal Washington Consensus model;
- officially prohibiting monopolies and unjust consolidation of economic resources;
- extending presidential terms from six to seven years;

- allowing unlimited presidential reelections so that option is “the sovereign decision of the constituent people of Venezuela” and is similar to the political process in countries like England, France, Germany and Australia;
- strengthening grassroots communal councils, increasing their funding, and promoting more of them;
- lowering the eligible voting age from 18 to 16;
- guaranteeing free university education to the highest level;
- prohibiting foreign funding of elections and political activity;
- reducing the work week to 36 hours to promote more employment;
- ending the autonomy of Venezuela’s Central Bank to reclaim the country’s financial sovereignty the way it should be everywhere; today nearly all central banks are controlled by private for-profit banking cartels; Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul wants to end that status in the US and correctly explains the Federal Reserve Bank is neither federal nor does it have reserves; it’s owned and run by Wall Street and the major banks;
- adding new forms of collective property under five categories: public for the state, social for citizens, collective for people or social groups, mixed for public and private, and private for individuals or private entities;
- territorial redefinition to distribute resources more equitably to communities instead of being used largely by economic and political elites;
- prohibiting sexual orientation discrimination and enacting gender parity rights for political candidates;
- redefining the military as an “anti-imperialist popular entity;”
- in cases where property is appropriated for the public good, fair and timely compensation to be paid for it;
- protecting the loss of one’s home in cases of bankruptcy; and
- enacting social security protection for the self-employed.

The National Assembly also approved 15 important transitional dispositions. They relate to how constitutional changes will be implemented if approved until laws are passed to regulate them. One provision is for the legislature to pass 15 so-called “organic laws” that include the following ones:

- a law on “popular power” to govern grassroots communal councils (that may number 50,000 by year end) that Chavez called “one of the central ideas....to open, at the constitutional level, the roads to accelerate the transfer of power to the people (in an Explosion of Communal (or popular) Power;” five percent of state revenues will be set aside to fund it;
- another promoting a socialist economy for the 21st century that Chavez champions even

though he remains friendly to business; and

— one relating to the country's territorial organization; plus others on education, a shorter workweek and more democratic changes.

Under Venezuelan law, and in the true spirit of democracy, these proposed changes will be for citizens to vote up or down on December 2. The process will be in two parts reversing an earlier decision to do it as one package, yea or nay. One part will be Chavez's 33 reforms plus 13 National Assembly additions, and the other for the remaining 23 articles.

Coup D'Etat Rumblings Must Be Taken Seriously

Now battle lines are drawn, opposition forces are mobilized and events are playing out violently on Venezuela's streets. The worst so far was on November 7 when CNN falsely reported "80,000" anti-Chavez students demonstrated "peacefully" in Caracas to denounce "Hugo Chavez's attempts to expand his power." The actual best estimates put it between 2000 and 10,000, and long-time Latin American expert James Petras calls the protesters "privileged middle and upper middle class university students," once again being used as an imperial tool.

In their anti-government zeal, CNN and other dominant media ignore the many pro-Chavez events writer Fred Fuentes calls a "red hurricane" sweeping the country. An impressive one was held on November 4 when the President addressed hundreds of thousands of supporters who participated in an 8.5 kilometer Caracas march while similar pro-reform rallies took place at the same time around the country. They're the start of a "yes" campaign for a large December 2 turnout that's vital as polls show strong pro-reform support by a near two to one margin.

In an effort to defuse it, orchestrated opposition turned violent and officials reported eight people were injured in the November 7 incident. No one was killed, but one was wounded by gunfire when at least "four (masked) gunmen (who looked like provocateur plants, not students) fir(ed) handguns at the anti-Chavez crowd." In an earlier October demonstration, opposition students clashed with police who kept them from reaching the National Assembly building and a direct confrontation with pro-Chavez supporters that might have turned ugly.

It did on November 7 when violence erupted between pro and anti-government students, but it wasn't as reported. Venezuelan and US corporate media claimed pro-Chavez supporters initiated the attack. In fact, they WERE attacked by elements opposing the President. They seized this time to act ahead of the referendum to disrupt it and destabilize the government as prelude to a possible planned coup.

One pro-Chavez student explained what happened. She and others were erecting posters supporting a "yes" referendum vote when they were attacked with tear gas and crowds yelling they were going to be lynched. Avila TV had the evidence. Its unedited footage showed an opposition student mob surrounding the School of Social Work area where pro-Chavez students hid for safety. They threw Molotov cocktails, rocks, chairs and other objects, smashed windows, and tried to burn down the building as university authorities (responsible for security) stood aside doing nothing to curtail the violence. Another report was that corporate-owned Univision operatives posing as reporters had guns and accompanied the elements attacking the school in an overt act of complicity by the media.

The pattern now unfolding on Caracas streets is similar to what happened ahead of the April, 2002 aborted coup attempt, and Petras calls it “the most serious threat (to the President) since” that time. The corporate media then claimed pro-government supporters instigated street violence and fired on “unarmed” opposition protesters. In fact, that was later proved a lie as anti-Chavez “snipers” did the firing as part of the plot that became the coup. A similar scheme may now be unfolding in Caracas and on other campuses around the country as well.

In his public comments, Foreign Minister Maduro accused the major media and CNN of misrepresenting events and poisoning the political atmosphere. It’s happening in Venezuela and the US as the dominant media attacks Hugo Chavez through a campaign of vilification and black propaganda.

US Corporate Media on the Attack

On November 12, The Venezuela Information Office (VIO) reported that growing numbers of “US print newspapers lodged attacks against Venezuela” using “outdated cold-war generalizations” and without explaining any of the proposed democratic changes. Among others, they came from the Houston Chronicle that claimed:

— constitutional reforms will “eliminate the vestiges of democracy” in Venezuela when, in fact, they’ll strengthen it, and the people will vote them up or down;

— Chavez controls the electoral system when, in fact, Venezuela is a model free, fair and open democracy that shames its US equivalent. The Chronicle falsely said reforms will strip people of their right to due process. In fact, that’s guaranteed under article 337 that won’t be changed.

VIO also reported on a Los Angeles Times editorial comparing Chavez to Bin Laden. It compounded that whopper by claiming reforms will cause a global recession due to higher oil prices that, of course, have nothing to do with changes in law. In another piece, the LA Times inverted the truth by falsely claiming a public majority opposes reforms. Then there’s the Miami Herald predicting an end to freedom of expression if changes pass and the Washington Post commenting on how high oil prices let Chavez buy influence.

The Post then ran an inflammatory November 15 editorial headlined “Mr. Chavez’s Coup” in which it lied by saying November 7 student protesters “were fired on by gunmen (whom) university officials later ‘identified’....as members of government-sponsored ‘paramilitary groups’ when, in fact, there are no such groups. The editorial went on to say Chavez wants to “complete his transformation into an autocrat (to be able to) seize property....dispose of Venezuela’s foreign exchange reserves....impose central government rule on local jurisdictions and declare indefinite states of emergency” as well as suspend due process and freedom of information. Again, misinformation, deliberate distortion and outright lies from a leading quasi-official US house organ.

Rupert Murdoch’s Wall Street Journal weighed in as well with its lead anti-Chavez attack dog and all-round character assassin extraordinaire, Mary Anastasia O’Grady. This writer has tangled with her several times before and earlier commented how one day she’ll have a serious back problem because of her rigid position of genuflection to the most extreme hard-right elements she supports. Her latest November 12 column was vintage O’Grady and headlined “More Trouble for Chavez (as) Students and former allies unite against his latest

power grab.”

Like most of her others, this one drips with vitriol and outrageous distortions like calling Chavez a “dictator” when, in fact, he’s a model democrat, but that’s the problem for writers like O’Grady. Absent the facts, they use agitprop instead. O’Grady writes: “Mr. Chavez has been working to remove any counterbalances to his power for almost nine years (and) has met strong resistance from property owners, businesses, labor leaders, the Catholic Church and the media.” Now add opposition well-off students. Omitted is that the opposition is a minority, it represents elitist interests, and Chavez has overwhelming public support for his social democracy and proposed reform changes including from most students O’Grady calls “pro-Chavez goons.”

Once again, she’s on a rampage, but that’s her job. She claims the absurd and people believe her – like saying the media will be censored, civil liberties can be suspended, and government will be empowered to seize private property. He’s a “demagogue,” says O’Grady, waging “class warfare,” but opposition to reform “has led to increased speculation (his) days are numbered.” Wishing won’t make it so, and O’Grady uses that line all the time.

The New York Times is also on the attack in its latest anti-Chavez crusade. It’s been a leading Chavez critic for years, and Simon Romero is its man in Caracas. On November 3, he reported “Lawmakers in Venezuela Approve Expanded Power for Chavez (in a) constitutional overhaul (to) enhance (Chavez’s) authority, (allow) him to be reelected indefinitely, and (give) him the power to handpick rulers, to be called vice-presidents, (and) for various new regions to be created in the country....The new amendments would facilitate expropriations of private property (and allow state) security forces to round up citizens (stripped of their) legal protections” if Chavez declares a state of emergency – to make him look like Pakistan’s Musharraf when he’s mirror opposite.

Romero also quoted Jose Manuel Gonzales, president of Venezuela’s Fedecamaras (chamber of commerce), saying “Venezuelan democracy was buried today” and anti-Chavez Roman Catholic church leaders (always allied with elitists) calling the changes “morally unacceptable.” Then on November 8, Romero followed with an article titled “Gunmen Attack Opponents of Chavez’s Bid to Extend Power” and implied they were pro-Chavez supporters. Again false. Still more came on November 10 headlined “Students Emerge as a Leading Force Against Chavez” in an effort to imply most students oppose him when, in fact, these elements are a minority.

His latest so far is on November 17 titled “Chavez’s Vision Shares Wealth and Centers Power” that in fairness shows the President addressing a huge crowd of supporters in Maturin on November 16. But Romero spoiled it by calling his vision “centralized, oil-fueled socialism (with) Chavez (having) significantly enhanced powers.” Then he quotes Chavez biographer Alberto Barrera Tyszka who embarrassed himself and Romero saying the President is seizing and redirecting “power through legitimate means (and this) is not a dictatorship but something more complex,” the ‘tyranny’ of popularity.” In other words, he’s saying democracy is “tyranny.” The rest of the article is just as bad with alternating subtle and hammer blow attacks against a popular President’s aim to deepen his socially democratic agenda and help his people.

Romero’s measured tone outclasses O’Grady’s crudeness that’s pretty standard fare on the Journal’s notorious opinion page. He’s much more dangerous, however, with a byline in the influential “newspaper of record” because of the important audience it commands.

One other notable anti-Chavez piece is in the November 26 issue of the magazine calling itself “the capitalist tool” – Forbes. It shows in its one-sided commentary and intolerance of opposing views. The article in question, headlined “Latin Sinkholes,” is by right wing economist and long-time flack for empire, Steve Hanke. In it, he aims right at Chavez with outrageous comments like calling him a “negative reformer (who) turned back the clock (and) hails Cuba, the largest open-air prison in the Americas, as his model. His revolution’s enemy is the marketplace.” He then cites a World Bank report saying “Venezuela is tied with Zimbabwe as this year’s champion in smothering economic freedom,” and compounds that lie with another whopper.

Point of fact – Venezuela and Argentina have the highest growth rates in the region and are near the top of world rankings in recent years. Following the devastating oil management 2002-03 lockout, Venezuela’s economy took off and grew at double digit rates in 2004, 05 and 06 and will grow a likely 8% this year. Hanke, however, says “Venezuela’s economic performance under Chavez has been anemic (growing) at an average rate of only 2% per year. In the same article, he aims in similar fashion at Ecuador’s Raphael Correa calling him “ruthlessly efficient (for wanting to) pull off a Bolivarian Revolution in Ecuador.” Hanke and most others in the dominant media are of one mind and never let facts contradict their opinions. Outliers won’t be tolerated even when it’s proved their way works best.

There’s lots more criticism like this throughout the dominant media along with commentators calling Chavez “a dictator, another Hitler (and) a threat to democracy.” Ignoring the rules of imperial management has a price. This type media assault is part of it as a prelude for what often follows – attempted regime change.

Further Venezuela Information Office (VIO) Clarification of Facts on the Ground

On November 15, VIO issued an alert update to dispel media inaccuracies “about Venezuela’s constitutional reforms and the student protests” accompanying them. They’re listed below:

- Caracas has a student population of around 200,000; at most 10,000 participated in the largest protest to date, and VIO estimates it was 6000;
- the major media ignore how the government cooperates with students and made various accommodations to them to be fair to the opposition;
- Venezuelan police have protected student protesters, and article 68 of the Constitution requires they do it; it affirms the right of all Venezuelans to assemble peacefully;
- in addition, student protest leaders linked to opposition parties were granted high-level meetings with government officials to present their concerns;
- on November 1, their student representatives met with directors of the National Electoral Council (CNE) and presented a petition to delay the referendum;
- on November 7, they again met with National Tribunal of Justice officials and presented the same petition;
- on November 12, Minister of Interior and Justice Minister, Pedro Carreno, met 20 university presidents to assure them the government respects university autonomy and their students’ right to assemble peacefully;

— VIO reported what really happened at another November 1 protest after students met with CNE officials; some of them then tried to chain themselves to the building while others charged through police lines and injured six officers; in addition, one student had 20 liters of gasoline but never got to use it criminally; after the incident, the CNE president, Tibisay Lucena, issued a public statement expressing his disappointment about this kind of response to the government's good faith efforts; and

— VIO said students and university presidents from across the nation filed a document with the Supreme Court on November 14 supporting constitutional reform. Chief justice Luisa Estela Morales praised their coming and said the court's doors are open to anyone wanting to give an opinion. The dominant media reported nothing on this. It also ignored the government's 9000 public events throughout the country in past weeks to explain and discuss proposed reforms and that a hotline was installed for comments on them, pro or con.

— finally, when protests of any kind happen in the US, police usually attack them with tear gas, beatings and mass arrests to crush their democratic spirit and prevent it from being expressed as our Constitution's First and most important amendment guarantees. In Venezuela, the spirit of democracy lives. It never existed in the US, and we want to export our way to everyone and by force if necessary.

Here's a November 15 breaking news example of our way in action. At 8:00AM, 12 FBI and Secret Service agents raided the Liberty Dollar Company's office in Evansville, IN and for the next six hours removed two tons of legal Ron Paul Dollars along with all the gold, silver and platinum at the location. They also took all location files and computers and froze Liberty Dollar's bank accounts in an outrageous police state action against a legitimate business. This move also seems intended to impugn the integrity of a presidential candidate gaining popularity because he defies the bellicose mainstream and wants more people empowerment.

Chavez champions another way and answered his critics at a November 14 Miraflores Presidential Palace press conference where he denounced them for lying about his reform package. He explained his aim is to strengthen Venezuela's independence and transfer power to the people, not increase his own. "For many years in Venezuela," he said, "they weakened the powers of the state as part of the neoliberal imperial plan....to weaken the economies of countries to insure domination. While we remained weak, imperialism was strengthened," and he elaborated.

He then continued to stress his most important reform "is the transfer of power to the people" through an explosion of grassroots communal, worker, student and campesino councils, formations of them into regional and national federations, and the formation of "communes (to) constitute the basic nucleus of the socialist state." Earlier Chavez stated that democratizing the economy "is the only way to defeat poverty, to defeat misery and achieve the largest sum of happiness for the people." He's not just saying this. He believes and acts on it, and that's why elitists target him for removal even though he wants equity for everyone, even his critics, and business continues to thrive under his government. But not like in the "good old" days when it was all one-way.

Venezuelan Business is Booming – So Why Complain?

Business in Venezuela is indeed booming, and in 2006 the Financial Times said bankers

were “having a party” it was so good. So what’s the problem? It’s not good enough for corporate interests wanting it all for themselves and nothing for the people the way it used to be pre-Chavez. Unfair? Sure, but in a corporate-dominated world, that’s how it is and no outliers are tolerated. Thus Hugo Chavez’s dilemma.

Last June, Business Week (BW) magazine captured the mood in an article called “A Love-Hate Relationship with Chavez – Companies are chafing under the fiery socialist. But in some respects, business has never been better.” Writer Geri Smith asked: “Just how hard is it to do business in Venezuela” and then exaggerated by saying “hardly a day passes without another change in the rules restricting companies.” Hardly so, but what is true is new rules require a more equitable relationship between government and business. They provide more benefits to the people and greater attention to small Venezuelan business and other commercial undertakings like an explosion of cooperatives (100,000 or more) that under neoliberal rules have no chance against the giants.

Nonetheless, the economy under Chavez is booming, and business loves it even while it complains. It’s because oil revenues are high, Chavez spends heavily on social benefits, and the poor have seen their incomes more than double since 2004 when all their benefits are included. The result, as BW explains: “Sales of everything from basics” to luxury items “have taken off....and local and foreign companies alike are raking in more money than ever in Venezuela.” In addition, bilateral trade has never been higher, but American business complains it’s caught in the middle of a Washington – Caracas political struggle.

The article continues to show how all kinds of foreign business is benefitting from cola to cars to computer chips. Yet, it restates the dilemma saying “As Chavez continues his socialist crusade, there are signs of rising discontent,” and it’s showing up now on the country’s streets with the latest confrontation still to be resolved, one way or another.

Events Are Ugly and Coming to A Head

Through the dominant media, Washington and Venezuelan anti-Chavez elements are using constitutional reform as a pretext for what they may have in mind – “to arouse the military to intervene” and oust Chavez, as Petras notes in his article titled “Venezuela: Between Ballots and Bullets.” He explains the opposition “rich and privileged (coalition) fear constitutional reforms because they will have to grant a greater share of their (considerable) profits to the working class, lose their monopoly over market transactions to publicly owned firms, and see political power evolve toward local community councils and the executive branch.”

Petras is worried and says “class polarization....has reached its most extreme expression” as December 2 approaches: “the remains of the multi-class coalition embracing a minority of the middle class and the great majority of (workers) is disintegrating (and) political defections have increased (including 14) deputies in the National Assembly.” Add to them former Chavez Defense Minister, Raul Baduel, who Petras believes may be “an aspirant to head up a US-backed right-wing seizure of power.”

The situation is ugly and dangerous, and lots of US money and influence fuels it. Petras puts it this way: “Venezuelan democracy, the Presidency of Hugo Chavez and the great majority of the popular classes face a mortal threat.” An alliance between Washington, local oligarchs and elitist supporters of the “right” are committed to ousting Chavez and may feel now is their best chance. Venezuela’s social democracy is on the line in the crucial December 2

vote, and the entire region depends on it solidifying and surviving.

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