

The Balkanization of Bolivia

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Translated from the Spanish by by Scott Campbell

The arrest and confinement of still-prefect [governor] of Pando, Leopoldo Fernández, has inspired a systematic campaign of disinformation in some media outlets allied with this separatist feudalism; and although it's clear that the State of Siege in Pando was a popular and democratic measure to stop the bloodbath and reign in the coup d'état fostered in Santa Cruz – where the Italian Mafioso Marco Marino Diodato could be working from once again – the long battle ahead is will be played out in the media, where the ethics of communication will founder between the democratic truth and the bad faith of the genocidal coup-makers.

“They must be crazy to try to overthrow a president who has nearly 70% popular support as expressed in the ballot boxes during the August 10 referendum,” said journalist Amalia Pando last Tuesday night on the program Cabildeo [Lobbying] that is broadcast on the Bolivian state television channel.

And it is that coup attempt which effectively led to the genocide on September 11 in El Porvenir – with the slaughter of tens of indigenous peasants and various students in addition to deaths at the Cobija airport, which began three weeks earlier with the violent takeover of public administration buildings in the “autonomous” departments [states] (Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija y Chuquisaca), leading to the closing of natural gas pipelines to Brazil and Argentina – it was a coup d'état that could have culminated in the overthrow of indigenous president Evo Morales. “This was a coup d'état, any way you look at it, from wherever you look at it,” affirmed the journalist with complete conviction.

The failure of the coup, manifested in the jailing of prefect Leopoldo Fernández and the opening of a dialogue between the government and those from the “media luna” [literally “half-moon”, the lowlands comprising eastern Bolivia], means, says Amalia Pando, that the Balkanizers have ended up committing “hara-kiri”; since the only things they've gained is that Santa Cruz is at the point of suspending its International Fair (one of the principal events for Santa Cruz's businesspeople). But furthermore, after the failed coup, Santa Cruz de la Sierra has transformed itself from one of the country's most tidiest, happy and prosperous cities and into a place where fear, racism and unproductiveness abounds.

The healthy absence of Reyes Villa

The certainty that what happened in Pando was part of a coup plotted amongst the “autonomous” prefects to be executed all over the nation can also be corroborated by events in Cochabamba, where in the month of August in the days before the referendum, both thugs and citizens in good faith fooled by civic functionaries, politicians and “legal”

team of then-prefect Manfred Reyes Villa, prepared – incidentally for these same days in September – for the launching of a campaign to force in this department a “referendum on autonomy” – in “media luna” style (that is to say to turn Reyes Villa into the “governor”).

Since last march, Reyes Villa’s lawyers and opposition members of parliament began a campaign to collect signatures in favor of this referendum that would have been held in September. Fortunately, Reyes Villa was removed from office on August 10 and we Cochabambans freed ourselves just in time from becoming protagonists and victims of the barbarous and painful acts committed by the “autonomous youth” these past weeks in the districts within the separatist orbit of Santa Cruz.

Thanks to Reyes Villa disappearing from the scene, Cochabamba today is the seat of dialogue, peace reigns in this district for the good of the country; and the separatist coup failed in grand measure because the Balkanizers couldn’t rely on the services of Reyes Villa and his boys in this central region of Bolivia.

Furthermore, in recent days “Datos & Análisis” received information that at the end of July the Italian Mafioso and drug-trafficker Marco Marino Diodato was in Cochabamba, hanging around the city of Tiquipaya. He fled from Santa Cruz in October 2004 after assassinating Departmental Prosecutor Mónica Von Borries, who was investigating the connections between him and large landowners who were laying waste to the country in those days. It can be presumed that Diodato was organizing groups of hired killers all over the “media luna” (including Cochabamba until August 10). The recent events in Pando have the unmistakable seal of that murderer who arrived in the 1970s, under the auspices of the CIA, together with the European paramilitaries of Klaus Barbie to serve under Banzer and García Meza [Bolivian dictators]. For what’s been seen, today Diodato works for Leopoldo Fernández, Rubén Costas [prefect of Santa Cruz] and Branco Marinkovic [powerful Santa Cruz businessman].

Vindicating Quintana

The truth of the genocide has images so moving that to see them brings tears to the eyes. One video, amongst various similar ones, which shows tens of peasants fleeing the hired killers across the river from El Porvenir, swimming, while the murderers take target practice, making the waters shake with their bursts of fire and leaving the dead to be carried by the current, is concrete proof that shows the criminal fury with which the coup-makers tried to quash the democratic social base of the government, which is diverse and therefore can also be massacred. The hit men arrived to the spot in official vehicles belonging to the Prefecture of Pando, armed with weapons that were taken from the national government by Leopoldo Fernández when he was Minister of Government for General Banzer.

And nevertheless, the Podemos [right-wing political party] legislators, who defend prefect Fernández and his hired killers presumably prepared by Diodato, say that those who were killed caused the confrontation. “What confrontation is it with a group of hired killers shooting to kill as if hunting ducks; shooting them in the back while the victims fled swimming?” asks Amalia Pando.

“The problem is that there are people who deny the truth simply as a political position and say that everything that happens is Evo Morales’ fault, and that underlies a strategy of misinformation that today is a big challenge for us Bolivian journalists,” said Amanda Dávila,

also a journalist, who was invited to Amalia's set.

Amanda Dávila expressed indignation that is shared by a majority of honest Bolivian journalists in regard to the way in which certain media outlets play the murderers' game, twisting the facts. During the retaking of the Cobija airport, the editors of some news stations from the east only showed the soldiers shooting into the air, creating a false image of them as repressors (when a week earlier the same soldiers chose to let themselves be assaulted by "Unionist Youth" [a fascist youth organization in Santa Cruz], including those who took their weapons, instead of opening fire); but these editors hid the images of the commandos armed by Fernández and find themselves behind the cameras uttering insults and threats; provoking.

"For example, Minister [of the Presidency, e.g. Prime Minister] Juan Ramón Quintana was accused of going to Pando to commit abuses, when in fact what this minister did, as President Evo Morales' closest associate, was to risk his own skin going to such a critical area, and finally, with the correct measure of implementing a State of Siege, pacifying the area, something that relieved all Bolivians and for which we should be thankful," said the journalist.

Some outlets accused Quintana of interfering in judicial affairs that should have been undertaken by the National Public Prosecutor's Office, and tried, unsuccessfully, to generate a conflict between the Minister of the Presidency and the Public Prosecutor over the arrest of Leopoldo Fernández, deliberately ignoring that Quintana - whose presence in Pando just hours after the September 11 massacre signaled a transcendent act of a national government with popular features - led the capture of the Pandino prefect not for the massacre in El Porvenir (where Fernández acted without a doubt as at least the intellectual author, a fact that the Public Prosecutor with justly establish); but for organizing aggressive rallies and meetings in the city of Cobija while the State of Siege restricted these types of activities.

Leopoldo Fernández, a simple prefect who refused to recognize that his immediate superior is the President of the Republic, wanted to ensure his illegitimate "autonomous decree," that would convert him into a pseudo-governor, prevailed, even in spite of the existence of a democratic and constitutional measure such as the State of Siege. Such is the corrupt essence of separatism and its "departmental autonomy."

The means for imprisoning Leopoldo Fernández legally apply to all those infringe upon the Writ of Good Governance that rules during the State of Siege, in whatever part of the world. Fernández's role in the bloodbath will be explained by the Public Prosecutor; but as long as the State of Emergency is in effect the author of this genocide must remain behind bars for having treacherously broken the government's decree. This is a simple fact, but many media outlets don't report it in such a manner. "This, the correct and transparent handling of information during this crisis, is a problem which we will have to reflect on, as a union, all Bolivian journalists," argues Amanda Dávila.

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