

The Venezuelan Recall Referendum ... Beware Jimmy Carter!

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On August 15, 2004, Venezuelan voters will decide on a referendum, which has the utmost world historic and strategic significance. What is at stake is nothing less than the future of the energy world, the relations between the US and Latin America (*particularly Cuba*), and the political and socio-economic fate of millions of Venezuela's urban and rural poor.

If Chavez is defeated and if the Right takes power, it will privatize the state petroleum and gas company, selling it to US multinationals, withdraw from OPEC, raise its production and exports to the US, thus lowering Venezuelan revenues by half or more.

Internally, the popular health programs in the urban "ranchos" will end along with the literary campaign and public housing for the poor. The agrarian reform will be reversed and about 500,000 land reform recipients (*100,000 families*) will be turned off the land.

This will be accomplished through extensive and intensive state bloodletting, jailing and extrajudicial assassination, and intense repression of pro-Chavez neighborhoods, trade unions and social movements.

- The apparently "democratic" referendum will have profoundly authoritarian, colonial and socially regressive results if the opposition wins.

Regionally, an anti-Chavez outcome will tighten the grip of US and Europe on Latin America's oil resources; the denationalization of the petroleum industry in the post-Chavez period will follow in the footsteps of Lula's privatization of Petrobras in Brazil, Gutierrez' privatization in Ecuador and the continuity of private foreign ownership in Argentina, Bolivia and Peru.

Control of Venezuela's oil will heighten US control over world oil, decrease its dependence on the Mid East, especially with high intensity conflict in Iraq now, Saudi Arabia and Iran in the future.

Equally important the US will eliminate the strongest opponent of ALCA — the free trade treaty — and pave the way for direct US control over the rules and regulations for trade and investment in the hemisphere.

Strategically, the US takeover of Venezuelan oil will have grave consequences on the Cuban economy as Washington will abruptly end exports and its client regime will likely break relations.

- Direct colonial control over Iraq and Venezuela, two of the top suppliers of oil will increase US global power over its competitors, while serving as an “object lesson” to potential opposition regimes.

The “referendum” in Venezuela emerges as a major clash between the US and OPEC, US imperialism and Latin American nationalists, neo-liberalism and social nationalism, between US-backed authoritarian ruling elites and endogenous socially conscious urban workers, unemployed, small business people, landless rural workers and small peasants.

These historical confrontations find their specific focus in the referendum.

The events leading up to the referendum speak eloquently of the crass US intervention, the violent tactics of the elites, the rule or ruin strategy of the opposition, the unbridled totalitarian propaganda of the privately owned mass media. The opposition has backed a violent military coup (*which was defeated*); it organized a bosses’ lockout that almost destroyed the economy (*which ended in defeat*); it organized a contingent of over 130 Colombian military and paramilitary forces with the aid of active Venezuelan officers to sow violence — that was aborted by Venezuelan intelligence.

Equally ominous, in the campaign to secure signatures for the referendum, fraudulent identity cards were massively produced and distributed, tens of thousands of deceased, incapacitated and coerced had their signatures forged and thousands of signatures were written by a single hand.

Opposition corruption and fraud was rife but the official international observers urged the Chavez government to accept them and proceed to the referendum. More ominously among the key voices that made their presence felt were the ubiquitous Jimmy Carter and Jose Miguel Vivanco of Human Rights Watch.

The Unknown History of James Carter

The two faces of imperial power include the iron fist military intervention and the “soft sell” of electoral frauds, intimidating diplomacy and democratic blackmail. Jimmy Carter is “the quiet American” of Graham Greene fame, who legitimates voter fraud, blesses corrupt elections, certifies murderous rulers, encourages elections, in which the opposition is funded by the US state and semi-public foundations, and the incumbent progressive regime suffers repeated violent disruption of the economy.

Behind the simple and humane facade, Carter has a strategy to reverse progressive regimes and undermine insurgent democrats. Carter and his “team” from his Center probe and locate weaknesses among insecure democrats, particularly those under threat by US-backed opponents and thus vulnerable to Carter’s appeals to be “pragmatic” and “realistic” — meaning his barely disguised arguments to accept fraudulent electoral results and gross US electoral intervention.

- Carter is a quiet master in mixing democratic rhetoric with manipulation of susceptible democrats who think he shares their democratic politics.

The international mass media feature his self-promoted overseas trips to conflictual countries and above all his phony “human rights” record. The mass media provide Carter with the appearance of democratic credentials.

In fact, his frequent political interventions have been dedicated to sustaining dictators, legitimizing fraudulent elections and pressuring popular democratic candidates to capitulate before US-backed opponents. Carter has deliberately and systematically worked over the past quarter of a century to undermine progressive regimes and candidates and promote their pro-imperialist opponents.

Today in Venezuela, faced with a referendum of dubious validity, backed by the most rancid reactionaries, Carter once again poses as a “neutral monitor” while working with the anti-Chavez opposition to first legitimate the referendum then to provide opportunities for its favorable outcome.

Carter has said absolutely nothing about strenuous US funding of the opposition — a blatant violation of any democratic, electoral process — activities which would be felonious in his own country, the USA. He calls for “fair reporting” by the hysterically anti-Chavez mass media, knowing full well that, with a wink of his eye, they have free rein to provide exclusively favorable coverage of the opposition and uniformly negative disinformation about Chavez.

In exchange, Carter secured from Chavez a promise to avoid compulsory national chain broadcasts. Carter refuses to recognize that the electoral playing field is not equal, yet under the guise of “free press” he defends the right of the media oligarchs to voice venomous lies, denying the electorate the right to hear both sides.

Carter refuses to recognize the intimidating effects of US military maneuvers in the Caribbean, the belligerent statements of undersecretary of state of Latin American Affairs Noriega against Chavez and the hyperactivity of the US Ambassador Shapiro in support of the anti-Chavez forces.

▪ Above all Carter ignores the plots, fraudulent practices and paramilitary activities leading up to and beyond the referendum.

Focusing on enforcing the Government’s compliance with electoral procedures and ignoring the highly prejudicial context of the election, Carter is fulfilling his role of a “set-up man” for either an electoral victory of the opposition or in the event of a defeat, for a post-election pretext for violent coup. Carter’s history provides an extremely useful context for substantiating these observations and affirmation.

Carter Certifies a Stolen Election: Dominican Republic 1990

In 1993, I spent several hours interviewing Juan Bosch, the Dominican Republic’s most notable democratic political leader. He told me that in the aftermath of the presidential elections of 1990, which he legally won, his opponent, the rightist, pro-US Juan Balaguer, engaged in massive theft, witnessed by poll watchers. Jimmy Carter headed the mission “monitoring” the election. Bosch presented Carter with a wealth of documents and testimony, witnesses and photos of Balaguer supporters dumping ballots in the river. Carter acknowledged the corruption and fraud, but urged Bosch to accept the results “to avoid a civil war”. Bosch accused Carter of covering up to gain a US client. He led a march of 500,000 in protest. Carter certified Balaguer as the product of a “free election” and left. Balaguer proceeded to repress, pillage and privatize basic services.

Haiti I: Carter the Smiling Blackmailer

In 1990, Bertrand Aristide, a very popular former priest was leading in the polls with over 70% against a US-backed former World Bank functionary, Marc Bazin with barely 15% of popular support. Jimmy Carter, the self-styled neutral electoral monitor, set up a meeting with Aristide in which he demanded that Aristide withdraw from the elections in favor of the unpopular US candidate in order to avoid a “bloodbath”. Carter did everything in his power to frighten Aristide and deny the populace its right to choose its president. Carter must have known in advance from his contacts with President Bush (Senior) that Washington was intent on preventing Haiti from taking an independent road. Eight months after Aristide’s accession to the Presidency, a coup, backed by the US took place. Aristide was ousted and replaced and Carter’s preferred candidate, Marc Bazin, was appointed Prime Minister, backed by a paramilitary terrorist group called FRAPH that instituted a “bloodbath” killing more than 4,000 Haitians. Carter and Bush, the quiet diplomat and the President with the iron fist worked in tandem, when the first failed, the latter stepped in.

Haiti II: General Cedras — Sunday School Teacher — 1991-94

With Aristide out of the way, the US-backed regime proceeded to massacre thousands of Haitian supporters of the former elected President. The key member of the governing junta was General Cedras. With thousands of Haitians fleeing his brutal regime and heading for Florida, Jimmyb Carter spoke in defense of the bloody General Cedras, “I believe and trust in General Cedras.” Later Carter gushed, “I believe he would be a worthy Sunday school teacher.” Carter later certified the respectability of the disreputable dictator on his way to exile — after emptying the treasury. President Clinton convoked a meeting with Aristide in Washington. A Congressional aide privy to the meeting told me that Clinton’s aide handed Aristide a neo-liberal program and list of cabinet ministers and told him his return to Haiti was contingent on accepting Washington’s dictates. After many hours of psychological pressure, threats and arguments, Aristide capitulated. Clinton allowed him to return. Carter welcomed the return of “democracy”-US style.

Ten years later when Aristide refused to comply with threats from the US to privatize public utilities and break relations with Cuba (*which was providing hundreds of doctors and nurses for Haiti’s public health system*), the US sponsored a paramilitary attack, followed by a US invasion. Aristide, the elected President, was kidnapped by US forces and flown — virtually blindfolded — to the Central African Republic. Carter did not protest the gross US intervention but questioned Aristide’s election. Carter’s criticism of Aristide (*at a time when Aristide was a prisoner in the Central African Republic*) provided a fig leaf of legitimacy for the US invasion, kidnapping, occupation and establishment of a murderous puppet regime. The US intervention in Haiti was seen in Washington as a “dress rehearsal” for an invasion of Venezuela.

Nicaragua 1979: Part I — Carter and Somoza

In June 1978, President Jimmy Carter sent a private letter to the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza lauding Somoza for the “human rights initiatives” while he criticized Somoza publicly. Carter had made “human rights” a centerpiece of his interventionist propaganda (Morris Morley, Washington, Somoza and the Sandinistas, 1994, pp 115-116). This two-faced policy occurred during one of the bloodiest periods of Somoza’s rule when he was bombing cities sympathetic to the revolution. Carter’s rhetorical declaration of concern for human rights was for public consumption, his private assurances to Somoza encouraged

the dictator to continue his scorched earth policy.

Nicaragua May 1979: Part II — Carter Proposes Intervention

In June 1993 the Foreign Minister under the late Panamanian President Torrejos told me of President Carter's briefest regional meeting. It took place less in May 1979 less than two months before Somoza was overthrown. Carter convened a meeting of foreign ministers of several Latin American countries who were opposed to Somoza's dictatorship. President Carter entered and immediately tabled a proposal to form an "Inter-American Peace Force", a military force of US and Latin American troops to invade Nicaragua to "end the conflict" and support a diverse coalition. The purpose, according to the former Panamanian minister present, was to prevent a Sandinista victory, preserving Somoza's National Guard and replace Somoza with a pro-US conservative civilian junta. Carter's proposal was rejected unanimously as unwarranted US intervention. Carter in a pique ended the meeting abruptly. Carter's attempt to throttle a popular revolution to preserve the Somocista state and US dominance clearly belied his pretensions of being a "human rights" President. His legacy of using "Human Rights" to project imperial military power became standard operating procedure for Reagan, Clinton and both Bush presidencies.

Afghanistan: Carter Finances the Invasion of Islamic Terrorists

In the late 1970's Afghanistan was ruled by a nationalist secular regime allied with the Soviet Union. The regime promoted gender equality, free universal education for women and men, agrarian reform including the redistribution of feudal estates to poor peasants, the separation of religion and the state and adopted an independent foreign policy with a Soviet tilt. Beginning at least as early as 1979, the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia orchestrated a massive international recruiting campaign of Islamic fundamentalist to engage in a "Jihad" against the "atheistic communist regime." Tens of thousands were recruited, armed by the US, financed by Saudis Arabia and trained by the CIA and Pakistani Intelligence. Pakistan opened its frontiers to the flood of armed invaders. Internally the displaced Mullahs, horrified by the equality and education of women, not to speak of the expropriation of their huge land holdings, joined the Jihad en masse.

The Carter Presidency (*and not Reagan*) was responsible for the organization, financing, training of the Islamic uprising and the terror campaign which followed. Zbig Brzezinski later wrote of the US-Afghanistan campaign as one of the high points in US Cold War diplomacy—it provoked Soviet intervention on behalf of the secular Afghan ally. Even when confronted with the consequences of the total devastation of Afghanistan, the rise of the Taliban and Al Queda and 9/11, Carter's former National Security Adviser, Brzezinski replied that these were marginal costs in comparison with a war which successfully hastened the fall of the Soviet Union. President Carter's intervention in Afghanistan initiated the Second Cold War, which was pursued with even greater intensity by Reagan. Carter backed a series of surrogate wars in Angola, Mozambique, Central American, the Caribbean and elsewhere. Carter was clearly an advocate and practitioner of the worst kind of imperial intervention and a master of public relations: he was an early practitioner of "Humanitarian Imperialism" — humane in rhetoric and brutally imperialist in practice.

The Carter Factor: Venezuela 2002-2004

Nowhere and at no time does Jimmy Carter, the kindly-appearing human rights rhetorician, pose a more dangerous threat to democratic freedoms and national independence than he

does today in Venezuela.

With the ardent backing of the violence-prone opposition, Carter has frequently intervened in Venezuelan politics, presenting himself as a neutral mediator. At every step of the way Carter has moved to legitimate an opposition engaged in coups, uprisings, paramilitary terrorists and bosses lockouts devastating the economy.

Carter convinced President Chavez to “reconcile” with the elite leaders and supporters of a violent coup which briefly overthrew his elected government. He continually pressured the elected President to negotiate and “share power” with an opposition even after he had won six national elections.

Carter refused to recognize Chavez’ electoral victories and constitutional mandates — instead he supported the opposition’s demand for new unscheduled elections and then promoted the “referendum”. Carter endorsed the referendum results pronounced by the opposition — even though there were gross electoral violations. He then exercised pressure on the National Electoral Council to accelerate its examination of votes — urging them to get on with the referendum.

Carter never acknowledged hundreds of thousands of instances of voter fraud (*as he refused to do in the case of Juan Bosch’s stolen victory earlier*) and fraudulent identity cards. Carter was acting in Venezuela as the “Quiet American” — one espousing high ideals while engaged in dirty tricks. The historical record is abundantly clear — Carter cannot be trusted to act as a “neutral observer”. He has been and is today a partisan of US imperial interests and is not merely an “observer” but an active, insidious partner of US clients. He continues to defend and promote any political opposition or regime, any ruler or “coordinator” which will defeat popular movements and progressive governments.

Carter is not a democrat! He is a lifelong partisan of the US Empire. He is especially dangerous as the Venezuela referendum approaches.

The US is illegally providing millions of dollars to the anti-Chavez opposition via the National Endowment for Democracy and other “foundations.” And the Carter Institute will be there to legitimate fraud and deceit: to question the questions for the referendum and the election if Chavez wins. Carter is especially likely to take advantage of some opportunist politicians who surround Chavez and are prone to make concessions to secure “democratic legitimacy” from the presence of this envoy of Empire. Carter fits into the larger strategy of US-backed coups and lockouts, paramilitary violence and support of Colombia’s military threat.

No one in the Chavez regime intent on an honest referendum can permit this pious hypocrite to play any role in Venezuela.

An Afternote: Other Human Rights Mercenaries

The US imperial state is mobilizing all of its organizational resources to defeat Chavez. In addition to Carter, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and a small army of NGOs (*local and international*), are active on behalf of the US-orchestrated anti-Chavez campaign.

“Human Rights” Director Vivanco is among the most blatant early interveners: Shortly after President Chavez concurred with the National Electoral Council (CNE) decision to convoke the referendum, Vivanco announced a “report” in which he declared that Venezuela “was

suffering a constitutional crisis that could affect its already fragile institutions.” He accused the Chavez government of “purging and taking over the judiciary.” He called for the “intervention of the US-dominated Organization of American States.”

To force the Chavez government to conform to his declaration, Vivanco demanded that the World Bank and IMF suspend aid directed at “modernizing” the judicial system. Over the past 3 years, HRW has followed the State Department’s lead in attacking Chavez democratic credentials — overlooking his participation (*and victory*) in **six** free electoral contests and his generous acceptance of the dubious signatures backing the referendum. HRW totally ignored the vast voter fraud by the opposition, echoing the line of the opposition. HRW leaders are rife with former US officials including its recent recruitment of Marc Garlasco, a former Defense Intelligence Agency official, as a senior military analyst.

HRW played a major role in demonizing Yugoslavia’s President Milosovic, supported the US invasion of the Balkans and was silent over US war crimes, including the bombing of civilian targets, the KLA’s assassination of over 2,000 Serb civilians and the ethnic purge of 200,000 non-Albanians from Kosovo. During the peace negotiations between President Pastrana and the FARC, which the US opposed and was keen on disrupting, Mr. Vivanco and HRW issued a “report” claiming that the FARC was violating all the terms of the peace negotiations — something no other human rights group on the ground in Colombia claimed — in order to pressure Pastrana to break negotiations and resume the military campaign, which he subsequently did. HRW, like the Carter Center, has already intervened on the side of the authoritarian US-backed opposition. It has smeared the independence of the courts to pressure it to conform to the opposition, it has rejected the democratic deliberations of the Venezuelan Congress and its vote on judicial reform, it has openly declared the government as illegitimate and it has already called for a US-backed intervention via the OAS.

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