

Uncertainty about Hugo Chavez's Health. Political Implications for Venezuela

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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On December 8, Chavez announced he'll return to Cuba. More surgery is needed. It'll be his fourth for cancer. Tests after his October reelection found no reoccurrence.

In late November, he returned to Havana for hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT). It enhances natural healing. It involves breathing 100% oxygen under increased atmospheric pressure. It's used to prevent bone decay from radiation therapy.

It treats many injuries, ailments, and illnesses. It's not for cancer. Chavez also received physiotherapy.

In Cuba, he experienced pelvic swelling and discomfort. Tests discovered new malignant cells.

He said another operation is "absolutely necessary....in the next few days. Actually the doctor told me it should have been yesterday."

At the same time, he's hopeful. He "hope(s) to be back soon. I leave full of hope," he said. "We are warriors, full of light and faith."

He acknowledged "risks in a process like this." He said "if anything happens that prevents him from performing his duties," he prefers Vice President Nicolas Maduro replacing him. He urged Venezuelans to elect him.

He served six years as foreign minister. He established important world contacts. He strongly supports Bolivarianism. Like Chavez, he fiercely criticizes US imperialism and neoliberal harshness.

Cuban doctors urged Chavez to undergo emergency surgery immediately. He delayed until he could entrust Maduro to act on his behalf until he returns. He also wanted to name him heir apparent.

Maduro wept as he vowed Venezuela would remain faithful to Chavez and Bolivarianism. "We are going to accompany President Chavez in prayer and in action," he said. "We've been with him in good" and bad times.

Chavez added that it's vital to "ensure the progress of the revolution, the victorious march of the revolution, building the new country, building the Venezuelan road to socialism, with broad participation and freedoms."

Oil Minister Rafael Ramirez read an oil workers statement. They vowed unbending Chavez

loyalty and support. They promised the same for Maduro.

He's a former union leader, legislator, National Assembly Speaker, and foreign minister. Some call him Chavez's most capable administrator and politician. He may be Venezuela's next president.

Political analyst Vladimir Villegas knew him since adolescence. He said his leadership background prepared him for what he may face now.

His views are strongly left of center. At the same time, he'll prioritize political stability. Maintaining Chavez's base is vital. He'll also have to deal effectively with disparate and fractious elements.

Before leaving early Monday, Chavez met with military commanders. He made Defense Minister Diego Molero admiral in chief.

He showed him and other commanders a golden sword. It belonged to Simon Bolivar. He said he fully trusts them. "I'm totally sure that our homeland is safe," he added. He urged them "not to give in to intrigue."

In the doorway of his plane before departing, he waved and shouted "Long live our homeland."

Supportive messages arrived from abroad. Cuban President Raul Castro and Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa welcomed him in Havana. "We've come in solidarity," they said.

Correa called him "a historic president, a great friend, and most of all an extraordinary human being. You are not alone in your struggle," he said.

In June 2011, Chavez was first diagnosed with pelvic cancer. After three surgeries and multiple rounds of chemotherapy and radiation treatment, he told Venezuelans he was totally cancer free. He was at the time.

Recovery isn't easy. Reoccurrence can follow remission. At the same time, many cancer patients recover fully. They live long, health, productive lives. Hopefully Chavez is one of them.

He gets superb care. He expressed faith for a full recovery many times. Venezuelans are justifiably concerned.

On December 9, thousands massed in Caracas supportively. They displayed flags, banners, and photos of a smiling Chavez. They're hopeful he'll return healthy. His new six-year term begins January 10.

One supporter spoke for others, saying:

"I love Chavez, and I'm worried. We don't know what's going to happen, but I trust that the revolution is going to continue on no matter what happens."

On Monday, the [Havana Times](#) headlined "Chavez Arrives in Cuba for New Cancer Operation," saying:

It'll be his fourth in 18 months. Some supporters fear he's deteriorating. Official information

about where his surgery will be conducted wasn't announced.

It's assumed to be at Havana's Medical Surgical Research Center (CIMEQ). It's Cuba's best equipped hospital. It provides world-class treatment. It's located west of the capital.

Under Venezuelan constitutional law, Article 233 states:

"The President of the Republic shall become permanently unavailable to serve by reason of any of the following events: death; resignation; removal from office by decision of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice; permanent physical or mental disability certified by a medical board designated by the Supreme Tribunal of Justice with the approval of the National Assembly; abandonment of his position....and by recall by popular vote."

If the President is permanently unavailable to serve during his first four years, a new election will be held "by universal suffrage and direct ballot" within 30 days.

"Between pending election and inauguration, the Executive Vice President shall assume the Presidency."

"If permanent unavailability occurs during his last two years, the Executive Vice President shall complete the term of office."

Article 234 states:

"A President of the Republic who becomes temporarily unavailable to serve shall be replaced by the Executive Vice President for a period of up to 90 days, which may be extended by resolution of the National Assembly for an additional 90 days."

"If the temporarily unavailability continues for more than 90 consecutive days, the National Assembly shall have the power to decide by a majority vote of its members whether the unavailability to serve should be considered permanent."

Under Article 235, "The absence of the President of the Republic from the territory of Venezuela requires authorization from the National Assembly or the Delegated Committee, when such absence continues for a period exceeding five consecutive days."

Venezuela's National Assembly authorized all Chavez visits to Cuba for healthcare purposes. On Sunday, they approved his travel request unanimously.

On January 10, Chavez's new term begins. If he's unable to serve within 30 days, new elections will be called. Hopefully they won't be needed.

Chavez is young. He's 58 years old. If restored to full health, many active years remain. He expresses "complete faith" in his recovery. "God willing, like the" previous surgeries and treatment, "we will be victorious in this new battle," he said.

"If there's anything I would insist upon in this new situation, this new battle....is on strengthening national unity, unity of all the popular forces, the unity of all revolutionary forces....my beloved militancy, allied parties, revolutionary currents, unity, unity, unity."

He referred to December 16. Venezuelans will vote again. At stake are local gubernatorial and legislative races. In 2008, United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) Chavista candidates won 17 of 22 governorships.

Polling suggests they'll do better this time. Bolivarianism should emerge triumphant. Hopefully uncertainty over Chavez's health won't change things.

Chavez said state adversaries "don't rest, and won't rest." They'll keep "creating intrigue, trying to divide, and above all, taking advantage of circumstances like this."

Dark forces never rest. Washington ones especially look for any way to replace Chavez. They tried for years and failed.

In 2011, Chavez said Washington may be responsible for a "very strange" bout of cancer affecting several Latin American leaders.

Argentina's Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner was diagnosed with thyroid cancer.

Others affected included Brazil's Lula Da Silva (throat cancer), current President Dilma Rousseff (axillar lymphoma), Colombia's Juan Manuel Santos (prostate cancer), and Paraguay's Fernando Lugo (lymphatic cancer).

Washington's dirty hands were behind a parliamentary coup ousting him illegitimately last June.

In June 2009, Obama orchestrated Honduran President Manuel Zelaya's removal. He also manipulated Haiti's electoral process in 2011. US stooge Michel Martelly was installed.

Chavez said:

"Would it be so strange that they've invented the technology to spread cancer and we won't know about it for 50 years?"

"Fidel always told me (to) take care. These people have developed technologies," he said.

"Take care what you eat, what they give you to eat. They inject you with I don't know what."

For decades, Washington tried and failed hundreds of times to kill Castro. Miraculously he survived. Other targeted leaders weren't as fortunate. Hopefully, Chavez will join the survivors. He's too important to lose.

A Final Comment

On December 12, Maduro said Chavez was recovering after undergoing six hours of successful surgery. "It has been a complex operation," he explained.

"We have been through complex moments of tension, but fortunately our commander's gigantic humanity once again demonstrates its fortitude."

"We want to thank the Venezuelan people for all the love they dedicated so this operation was completed correctly and successfully."

"We can say the president has beaten the first obstacle and now, with his medical team, he

will go on recuperating." He'll receive "special treatments," he added.

He addressed Chavez directly, saying:

"You have to come back. And we wait for you here, your children."

Chavez's post-operative period will last at least several days. It's unclear when he'll return to Venezuela. Perhaps it'll be before yearend.

Chavistas held a prayer vigil during his surgery. They held posters, joined hands, and sang hymns. One participant said, "We ask God to let him live."

Another feared Venezuelans might lose everything if he dies. Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa was with him in Havana. He called his operation "very delicate."

"He's passing through one of the hardest moments of his life. Our heart and our solidarity are with a historic president."

Since taking office in February 1999, he did so much for so many. Americans can't imagine benefits Venezuelans get. Hopefully he'll recover fully. Millions of supporters want nothing less.

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago and can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net.

His new book is titled "Banker Occupation: Waging Financial War on Humanity."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanII.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com and listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network Thursdays at 10AM US Central time and Saturdays and Sundays at noon. All programs are archived for easy listening.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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