

Venezuela's D-Day: Democratic Socialism or Imperial Counter-Revolution

The December 2, 2007 Constituent Referendum

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On November 26, 2007 the Venezuelan government broadcast and circulated a confidential memo from the US embassy to the CIA which is devastatingly revealing of US clandestine operations and which will influence the referendum this Sunday (December 2, 2007).

The memo sent by an embassy official, Michael Middleton Steere, was addressed to the head of the CIA, Michael Hayden. The memo was entitled 'Advancing to the Last Phase of Operation Pincer' and updates the activity by a CIA unit with the acronym 'HUMINT' (Human Intelligence) which is engaged in clandestine action to destabilize the forth-coming referendum and coordinate the civil military overthrow of the elected Chavez government. The Embassy-CIA's polls concede that 57% of the voters approved of the constitutional amendments proposed by Chavez but also predicted a 60% abstention.

The US operatives emphasized their capacity to recruit former Chavez supporters among the social democrats (PODEMOS) and the former Minister of Defense Baduel, claiming to have reduced the 'yes' vote by 6% from its original margin. Nevertheless the Embassy operatives concede that they have reached their ceiling, recognizing they cannot defeat the amendments via the electoral route.

The memo then recommends that Operation Pincer (OP) [*Operación Tenaza*] be operationalized. OP involves a two-pronged strategy of impeding the referendum, rejecting the outcome at the same time as calling for a 'no' vote. The run up to the referendum includes running phony polls, attacking electoral officials and running propaganda through the private media accusing the government of fraud and calling for a 'no' vote. Contradictions, the report cynically emphasizes, are of no matter.

The CIA-Embassy reports internal division and recriminations among the opponents of the amendments including several defections from their 'umbrella group'. The key and most dangerous threats to democracy raised by the Embassy memo point to their success in mobilizing the private university students (backed by top administrators) to attack key government buildings including the Presidential Palace, Supreme Court and the National Electoral Council. The Embassy is especially praiseworthy of the ex-Maoist 'Red Flag' group for its violent street fighting activity. Ironically, small Trotskyist sects and their trade unionists join the ex-Maoists in opposing the constitutional amendments. The Embassy, while discarding their 'Marxist rhetoric', perceives their opposition as fitting in with their overall strategy.

The ultimate objective of 'Operation Pincer' is to seize a territorial or institutional base with the 'massive support' of the defeated electoral minority within three or four days (before or after the elections – is not clear. JP) backed by an uprising by oppositionist military officers principally in the National Guard. The Embassy operative concede that the military plotters have run into serious problems as key intelligence operatives were detected, stores of arms were decommissioned and several plotters are under tight surveillance.

Apart from the deep involvement of the US, the primary organization of the Venezuelan business elite (FEDECAMARAS), as well as all the major private television, radio and newspaper outlets have been engaged in a vicious fear and intimidation campaign. Food producers, wholesale and retail distributors have created artificial shortages of basic food items and have provoked large scale capital flight to sow chaos in the hopes of reaping a 'no' vote.

President Chavez Counter-Attacks

In a speech to pro-Chavez, pro-amendment nationalist business-people (Entrepreneurs for Venezuela – EMPREVEN) Chavez warned the President of FEDECAMARAS that if he continues to threaten the government with a coup, he would nationalize all their business affiliates. With the exception of the Trotskyist and other sects, the vast majority of organized workers, peasants, small farmers, poor neighborhood councils, informal self-employed and public school students have mobilized and demonstrated in favor of the constitutional amendments.

The reason for the popular majority is found in a few of the key amendments: One article expedites land expropriation facilitating re-distribution to the landless and small producers. Chavez has already settled over 150,000 landless workers on 2 million acres of land. Another amendment provides universal social security coverage for the entire informal sector (street sellers, domestic workers, self-employed) amounting to 40% of the labor force. Organized and unorganized workers' workweek will be reduced from 40 to 36 hours a week (Monday to Friday noon) with no reduction in pay. Open admission and universal free higher education will open greater educational opportunities for lower class students. Amendments will allow the government to by-pass current bureaucratic blockage of the socialization of strategic industries, thus creating greater employment and lower utility costs. Most important, an amendment will increase the power and budget of neighborhood councils to legislate and invest in their communities.

The electorate supporting the constitutional amendments is voting in favor of their socio-economic and class interests; the issue of extended re-election of the President is not high on their priorities: And that is the issue that the Right has focused on in calling Chavez a 'dictator' and the referendum a 'coup'.

The Opposition

With strong financial backing from the US Embassy (\$8 million dollars in propaganda alone according to the Embassy memo) and the business elite and 'free time' by the right-wing media, the Right has organized a majority of the upper middle class students from the private universities, backed by the Catholic Church hierarchy, large swaths of the affluent middle class neighborhoods, entire sectors of the commercial, real estate and financial middle classes and apparently sectors of the military, especially officials in the National

Guard. While the Right has control over the major private media, public television and radio back the constitutional reforms. While the Right has its followers among some generals and the National Guard, Chavez has the backing of the paratroops and legions of middle rank officers and most other generals.

The outcome of the Referendum of December 2 is a decisive historical event first and foremost for Venezuela but also for the rest of the Americas. A positive vote (Vota 'Sí') will provide the legal framework for the democratization of the political system, the socialization of strategic economic sectors, empower the poor and provide the basis for a self-managed factory system. A negative vote (or a successful US-backed civil-military uprising) will reverse the most promising living experience of popular self-rule, of advanced social welfare and democratically based socialism. A reversal, especially a military dictated outcome, will lead to a massive blood bath, such as we have not seen since the days of the Indonesian Generals' Coup of 1966, which killed over a million workers and peasants or the Argentine Coup of 1976 in which over 30,000 Argentines were murdered by the US backed Generals.

A decisive vote for 'Sí' will not end US military and political destabilization campaigns but it will certainly undermine and demoralize their collaborators. On December 2, 2007 the Venezuelans have a rendezvous with history.

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