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TUESDAY March 30, 2010 No. 5 Bs. 1 CARACAS | ENGLISH EDITION | The artillery of ideas INTERNATIONAL

Venezuela and Ecuador: advancing social justice

Presidents Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa met to solidify relations and advance towards economic and social justice

Three new joint-ventures were created to strengthen commerce and energy trade between Ecuador and Venezuela, both anti-imperialist nations in revolution, seeking to overcome the discriminatory and competitive models of the past and build new systems based on mutual cooperation and solidarity. Fishing, chocolate and oil are the areas currently in development in these South American nations, members of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA).



Venezuela celebrates a festive week and saves on energy

This week Venezuela celebrates "holy week", also known as Easter in other nations where catholicism has a large presence. The religious festivities coincide with Jewish celebrations of Passover this year. Taking advantage of the national holiday, officially celebrated on Thursday and Friday, President Chavez declared the entire week as festive in an effort to save on energy. Due to a severe drought affecting the nation, Venezuela, dependent on hydroelectric energy for more than 70% of electricity, is facing great difficulties in maintaining the electricity supply for the nation's 27 million citizens. Rationing, conservation and other energy saving measures have been mandated during the past five months, during which time rainfall has been dangerously sparse.

This week's decision to suspend work activities in most sectors will ensure a savings of over 500 mega watts of electricity daily. "This measure was rigorously thought out and established in accordance with the State of Emergency that was declared last February 8, 2010 in the electricity sector", explained President Chavez, also emphasizing that the decision was not based on "laziness". Major public services will continue to operate throughout the week, as will restaurants, supermarkets, pharmacies, gas stations, hotels, media outlets, hospitals and clinics. But other industries and commerce should abide by the Presidential Decree, which seeks to protect Venezuelans from a more severe electricity crisis until the anticipated rainy season arrives.



Putin Visits Venezuela

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is visiting Venezuela this week, on an official mission to review and solidify existing agreements between the two nations. President Chavez announced that he was grateful to Russia for helping Venezuela "to bolster its defensive potential" in the face of "threats" coming from the United States.

Venezuela and Russia have made several agreements during the past few years for the purchase of high-tech weapons and their production in Venezuela. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev visited Venezuela in November 2008 and is scheduled to visit again during April 2010.

"This visit has great historic importance", declared President Chavez, referring to Putin as "one of the leaders of major resonance in world politics during the past decade". Relations between both countries have strengthened over the past three years as Russian and Venezuelan leaders have visited each others' countries and engaged in different agreements.

This is Vladimir Putin's first visit to Venezuela.



Colombian hostages freed

Senator Piedad Cordoba has done it again. This week, two hostages held by the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), were released to Cordoba in a unilateral gesture of peace. Cordoba has been leading peace efforts in Colombia for years now, despite defiance by the Uribe government. The Colombian Senator, a model of strong, afro-Colombian resilience, kept followers informed of developments via Twitter.

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Venezuela and Ecuador Building a Just and Sustainable Model

Presidents Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa had a productive meeting last Friday in Quito, and inaugurated three new joint-ventures that will aid their nations in advancing energy development and food sovereignty

The consolidation of projects in the areas of commerce, food and energy constituted the base of the VII trimestral meeting between Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, held last Friday in Quito, Ecuador. The goals of the bilateral agenda were aimed towards creating an equilibrium in commercial trade and to advance projects in the gas and oil industries.

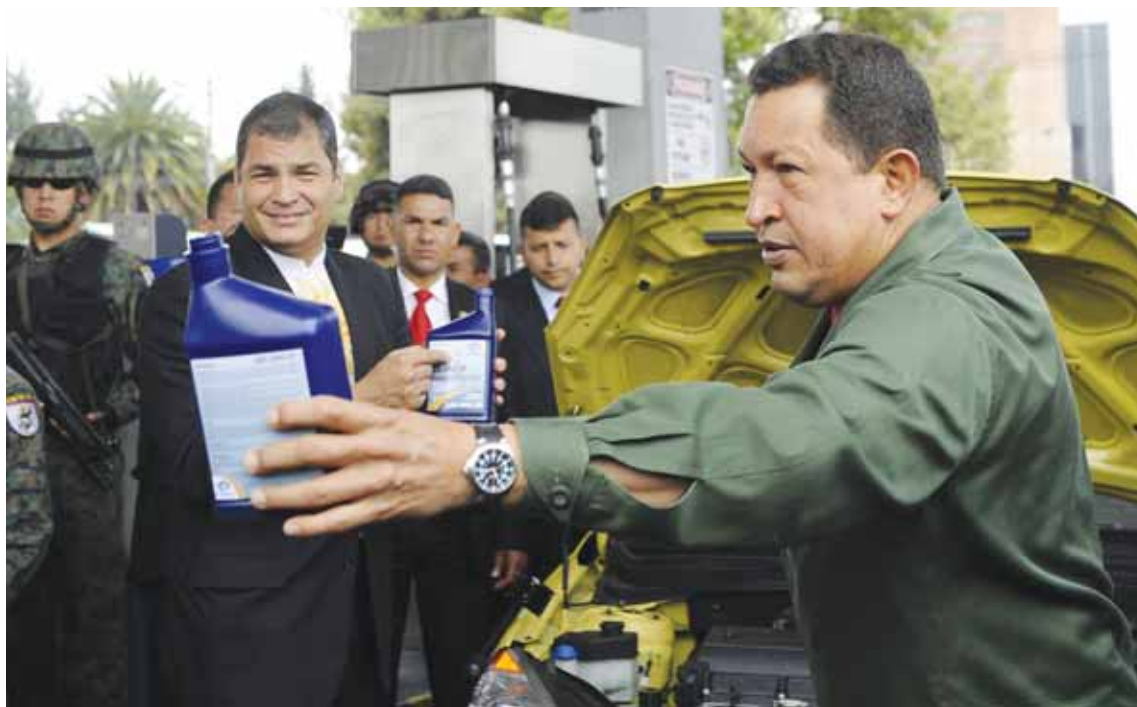
Chavez and Correa sustain periodic meetings to review the progress of joint projects considered part of a common strategic agenda that focuses on energy sovereignty, food sovereignty, financial and commercial sovereignty, knowledge sovereignty, and sovereignty in security and defense.

During last week's meeting, the two Heads of State and their cabinet members reviewed 32 agreements - of the more than 68 that exist between the nations - and determined that 67% were advancing well, while 33% needed an additional impulse.

Thirteen new agreements were signed by the two presidents in Quito, including a joint evaluation of the Oveja and Central Yopales oil fields in Venezuela's Orinoco River Basin, and the creation of a Bi-national Technical Commission of the Ecuador-Venezuela Fund for Development (Fevdes).

GRANNATIONALS

Three new grannational enterprises were also created, in the areas of fishing, mining and chocolate production. The Grannational Fishing and Aquaculture company and the Grannational Cocoa company were registered officially as joint-ventures between Ecuador and Venezuela, as was the constitution of the Grannational Mining company "Mariscal Sucre".



Chavez and Correa inaugurated Petrocomercial's new lubricant company in Quito last week

As part of the initiatives of the Grannational Fishing venture, Chavez and Correa announced the production of small-scale fishing in the Peripa reservoir in southeast Ecuador, where 9,000 tilapia (carp) will be farmed, and 2,000 kilos of clams in El Guamache, in the northeastern region of Venezuela, will also be produced, capable of multiplying to more than 10,000 kilos during the next seven months.

Regarding the Grannational Cocoa company, 4,311 credits were given to small chocolate producers in both Ecuador and Venezuela totaling more than \$980,000 USD, that will permit the construction of 14 storage centers for cocoa beans. Ecuador and Venezuela are top chocolate producing nations and Venezuela is known to have some of the finest and richest cocoa beans in the world, used for Belgian and Swiss chocolates.

COMMERCE AND ECONOMY

President Chavez manifested his government's willingness to increase imports from Ecuador, in order to achieve an equilibrium in trade between the two nations, which nears \$1 billion USD annually.

He also announced Venezuela's decision to establish a special mechanism to facilitate payment in dollars to Ecuadorian exporters and other commercial partners in member nations of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA). Venezuela currently has some debts

with foreign partners due to currency restrictions in place that seek to prevent capital flight as a method of crippling the nation's economy.

ENERGY

Presidents Chavez and Correa launched a new lubricant company, Petrocomercial, developed by the state-owned oil companies of both nations, Petroecuador and Petroleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). The lubricant Synthetic Racing 5W-40 was created to resist extreme conditions and compete on the international market with other lubricants priced higher, but of similar quality. Initially, the product will cover approximately 10% of local markets in both nations.

The new factory for mixing and packaging the lubricant, bought by PDVSA from a transnational corporation operating in Ecuador, has the capacity to produce 10 million gallons annually. For 2010, the goal is to reach 3.8 million gallons.

This joint project is the result of an agreement made in 2007 between both governments, focused on trading crude oil for derivatives, in order to increase the capacity of Ecuador's refineries.

PUNA ISLAND

PDVSA is also developing several projects on Puna Island, located in the Gulf of Guayaquil in southeastern Ecuador, which include the construction of 18 kilometers of roads, a new school and

the perforation of wells to extract drinking water. In 2009, PDVSA initiated the perforation of a gas well, but wasn't able to find the expected volume. Media outlets and opposition to President Correa attacked the government in the press for the failed operation.

Correa clarified that such attacks were unmerited since the initial perforations were just exploratory. "We just perforated the first well. That we didn't find commercial quantities doesn't mean we've failed, as the media have portrayed. Soon, we will initiate the second phase of exploration with another technique, the 3D seismic perforation", explained President Correa.

PACIFIC REFINERY

In July 2008, an agreement was signed between Ecuador and Venezuela to build a joint oil refinery off the Pacific coast of Ecuador. Despite criticisms from Ecuador's media regarding alleged obstacles to completion of the refinery, both Chavez and Correa reiterated the project "is advancing in accordance with its work schedule", and that media attacks are an attempt to diminish the geostrategic importance of this initiative. The refinery's operations are scheduled to begin in 2013.

POLITICS

Political issues were also discussed during the meeting between the presidents of Ecuador and Venezuela.

President Chavez reaffirmed that his government remains alert regarding the upcoming presidential elections in Colombia, and hopes that a new government will respect neighboring countries Venezuela and Ecuador, as well as others in the region. In March 2008, the Colombian government illegally invaded Ecuador's territory and bombed an area perceived as an outpost for the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), an organization labeled "terrorist" by the US and Colombia. The incident, which also resulted in the deaths of several Ecuadorian citizens, led to a rupture in relations between Ecuador and Colombia. Venezuela followed suit by also freezing relations with Colombia until the issue could be clarified. But the Colombian government, led by President Alvaro Uribe, never apologized for illegally violating Ecuador's sovereignty and subsequently lying about the events that occurred. Neither nation has recuperated relations with Colombia, although some efforts have been made during the past two years.

President Rafael Correa also questioned recent declarations made by Washington regarding alleged human rights violations in Ecuador. The State Department's Annual Report on Human Rights, published last week, singled out both Ecuador and Venezuela as human rights violators. In response, Correa ordered his Foreign Ministry to prepare a similar report regarding human rights violations in the United States, which include the existence of the death penalty, the legalization of torture and the presence of political prisoners in US territory.

The agreements established between Venezuela and Ecuador, as well as the joint ventures and projects developed by both nations, have the goal of dignifying and empowering the people of two countries with histories of exclusion, abandonment and misery. Today, Ecuador and Venezuela are strengthening integration and cooperation between their governments and people, in order to create a new world order, based on justice and a sustainable economic model that benefits all.

T/ ABN and Eva Golinger

The Pentagon is using Haiti as a Training Ground for Afghanistan

A recent report in the US military publication *Stars and Stripes* reveals the nature of the US military operation in Haiti

Combat units from Iraq and Afghanistan have been deployed in Haiti under the banner of a humanitarian operation. Conversely, Haiti is also being used as a military training ground for forces without in-theater combat experience.

According to a *Stars and Stripes* report (March 14, 2010): "Marines deployed to Haiti to render emergency aid following January's devastating earthquake are already training for the fight in Afghanistan".

Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit who were dispatched to Haiti in the immediate wake of the earthquake are now being deployed to Afghanistan. In fact, the decision to send them to Afghanistan was taken prior to their deployment in Haiti: "A small group of Marines stormed several small concrete buildings inside the wire



at their seashore camp while their comrades played the roles of Afghan insurgents, shouting "bang" as they engaged their opponents in a mock attack. The day before, when Lt Gen Dennis J. Hejlik, commanding general of the II Marine Expeditionary Force visited the Marines on shore, he

praised their good work in Haiti and asked them, "What's next for you when you get home?"

"Afghanistan", came the reply. As Huey helicopters buzzed overhead, Hejlik talked about the recent Marjah offensive, adding that there would be 20,000 Marines in Afghanistan by summer.

"You will join them next spring", he told the Marines at Carrefour. One of them, Sergeant Timothy Kelly, 23, of Johnston City, Illinois, said members of his unit learned about the Afghan mission just before they got orders to head for Haiti".

The training in Haiti "is geared

towards close-quarters battle tactics". "Only a couple [of Marines in Kelly's squad] have experience in Iraq or Afghanistan", he said.

"We have a lot of guys that aren't going to be here for that Afghan deployment. The ones who are, we might as well get them in the mind-set".

Another Marine at Carrefour, Lance Cpl. Keith Cobb, 23, of Soso, Mississippi, said the Afghan deployment will be his first time in a war zone. "I want to kill the terrorists and get rid of the bad people, but I would rather be here because I know I'm going home after this".

Close Quarters Battle (CQB) is fighting involving small combat units "which engage the enemy with personal weapons at very short range". The training imparted in Haiti is to be used in both urban warfare and counter-insurgency operations.

On March 25th, the US military reported that some 2,200 Marines, involved in humanitarian relief in Haiti had been withdrawn from the country.

T/ Michel Chossudovsky

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US Military Expansion in Latin America Increases

As US aggressions against Venezuela escalate and are evidenced through constant hostile declarations from US officials, the US Ambassador in Colombia revealed plans for new military bases in the region.

The declarations are almost daily. Venezuela "is a problem" in the region, declared US Sub-Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Arturo Valenzuela, during a conference last Friday. "It's something that must be resolved", indicated Valenzuela, who took over earlier this year for Thomas Shannon, a veteran diplomat and expert in imposing US agenda in Latin America, who now occupies the US Embassy in Brazil.

Washington has increased its accusations against the Venezuelan government, alleging com-



Brownfield, current US Ambassador in Colombia, was previously stationed in Venezuela

placent behavior that facilitates drug trafficking and terrorism, despite presenting no evidence to back such claims. The accusations form part of an ongoing campaign to discredit and isolate the Chavez administration in the international community, and to justify

aggressive tactics that seek to promote regime change in one of the world's largest oil producers.

MORE MILITARY BASES

As part of the efforts to raise regional hostilities, the US recently signed a military agreement with Colombia, permitting the occupation of more than seven Colombian military bases and use of the entire South American nation's territory for expanded "full spectrum" military operations. The agreement, severely criticized and questioned by a majority of Latin American countries, implies the largest US military expansion in regional history.

Official Air Force documents regarding the US military presence in Colombia indicated the bases would be used to "combat the constant threat...of anti-

American governments in the region...and prepare US Armed Forces for expeditionary warfare" in South America. Washington's intentions to prepare for war in the region have raised major concerns from neighboring countries that Colombia is opening the doors for military conflict against Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba and Ecuador – along with other countries the US considers as "insubordinate" to its agenda.

Last week, US Ambassador in Colombia, William Brownfield, revealed that other similar military agreements are ready to be signed with two Latin American nations, which he refused to name. "We are almost ready to sign a military cooperation agreement with two other countries in Latin America, whose governments have requested silence in

order to avoid the types of reactions the agreement with Colombia provoked", said Brownfield.

"In each country where we have military collaborations – right now that's in 120 countries – we need a legal agreement to regulate the obligations and norms of operations", he added. "President Obama supported the agreement with Colombia", confirmed Brownfield, and supports the other two that are ready to be signed.

The Pentagon has allotted special funds to improve installations in Colombia so they will fulfill Washington's needs. Military agreements with other Latin American nations, which could include Panama and Peru, will likely involve heavy funding and mobile troop presence in the region.

T/ Eva Golinger

Piedad Cordoba Leads Hostage Liberation in Colombia

The Colombian Senator, herself and her daughter once hostages of right-wing paramilitary forces, has been leading peace efforts in the country for years. Despite sabotage by the Colombian government, Cordoba and her group, Colombians For Peace, were able to free two more hostages this week. The world kept up with the emotional developments via Twitter

"They closed the helicopter doors, it's still really loud, Colombia, give peace a chance!", read one of Piedad Cordoba's tweets early Sunday (@piedadcordoba), as she boarded the helicopter that just hours later, brought Josue Calvo home. The Colombian Senator has been leading peace efforts for several years in her country, which has been plagued with a 60-year old civil war between right and left forces.

Colombia erupted in national violence after Jorge Gaitan's assassination in 1948, which many believe was attributed to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Gaitan was a charismatic leader, a leftist and a revolutionary, who was set to win the presidential elections before his assassination, during a time when Washington was overly eager to stop the spread of communism in the region. Ten years of non-stop violence followed in Colombia, later transforming into a civil war that has never ceased.

Though the armed leftist groups are classified as "terrorist" by Washington and the current Colombian government, the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), are still the remnants of the organizations that struggled against the imposition of the right-wing elite that has ruled the country since Gaitan's death. Paramilitary groups - linked to the current Uribe government - were formed to combat the FARC and the ELN, and subsequently became involved in Colombia's mass drug trade.

As the years and decades passed, kidnappings became a major tactic used by both sides to impose a state of fear and terror over civilian populations, and extort the other side for money and political and territorial gains.

Piedad Cordoba, Colombian Senator since 1994 and a controversial afro-Colombian and feminist figure, was kidnapped in 1999 by paramilitary forces led by Carlos Castano. She was held for several weeks and later forced into exile in Canada for over a year. Upon returning to Colombia, in 2002, she ran for Senate again and was elected by a landslide victory. Her daughter was subsequently kidnapped and held for several years by paramilitary forces, and two assassination attempts were made against Cordoba, after her return.

Nevertheless, Cordoba has been fighting ever since for peace in Colombia, and currently heads the organization Colombians For Peace. In Au-



Cordoba, above in white on the helicopter, negotiated Josue Calvo's release from captivity and accompanied him to freedom

gust 2007, President Alvaro Uribe agreed to appoint Cordoba as a mediator in the humanitarian exchange between the FARC and the government, which continues to hold approximately 500 members of the leftist guerrilla group.

Piedad Cordoba requested the help of President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela to mediate in the hostage release in late 2007. But in November 2007, President Uribe unilaterally suspended Chavez's role in the mediation efforts and threatened to end the entire negotiation process. Appeals were made by family members of the hostages, along with Cordoba herself, to allow Chavez to continue. In early 2008, President Chavez and Senator Cordoba achieved the first liberations of two hostages held by the FARC for over six years, Clara Rojas and Consuelo Gonzalez.

Since then, Cordoba has continued her efforts for peace and hostage release in Colombia.

UNILATERAL PEACE EFFORT

On Sunday, the FARC unilaterally freed Josue Daniel Calvo, the first of two Colombian military officers that the group had promised to release as a gesture of peace. The liberation of the military officer took place in a jungle region of southeastern Colombia. A humanitarian mission led by Piedad Cordoba picked Calvo up in a helicopter and flew him to Villavicencio, where his father and sister were anxiously awaiting his arrival. The government of Brazil provided the helicopters for his rescue.

Calvo, dressed in a light blue shirt and sweatpants, walked on his own from the helicopter, despite a knee injury obtained dur-

ing his year of captivity. More than 100 people belonging to Colombians For Peace, dressed in white shirts and holding white carnations, were waiting for Calvo, to welcome him home. "Humanitarian agreement, now", they yelled, the majority of whom were family members of hostages or ex FARC prisoners.

Despite an agreement with the Colombian government to cease military operations in the region in order to allow for the hostage liberation, Cordoba denounced that the guerrilla group had detected army flyovers over the area designated as a no-fly zone. The Uribe government has sabotaged past efforts to free hostages held by the FARC by flooding the area with Colombian military presence, and hence preventing the liberations.

WE WILL NOT REGRESS

"We are very pleased. There is no possibility that the hostage liberations will be paralyzed despite everything the Colombian government is doing to sabotage them. Pablo Emilio Moncayo should be released this Tuesday", affirmed Cordoba on Sunday afternoon. By the time of this printing, Moncayo will hopefully have been released.

Moncayo has been held by the FARC for more than 12 years. His father, Gustavo Moncayo, has led an effort for peace in Colombia during the past few years and, as part of his actions, marched from Bogota to Caracas two years ago. He has appealed to governments and social movements around the world to aid in peacemaking in Colombia. The release of his son Pablo, will be a huge achievement for this activist who has suffered the loss of his child during 12 years.

MINUTE BY MINUTE ON TWITTER

Cordoba used Twitter to inform followers around the world of the status of Calvo's liberation. "For two years, this has been a lot of work for Colombians For Peace. Tomorrow at 7am we depart to achieve our result. We hope for peace", she wrote on Saturday, after informing readers of her meetings with church and government representatives. "I have arrived to Villavicencio and am meeting with the High Commissioner for Peace and the Church to coordinate the operations", also posting photographs of meetings and key events.

"In just minutes we will be landing with good news for peace in Colombia. Peace is possible. Josue Calvo is free!", she wrote on Sunday afternoon from the helicopter where she flew together with the newly freed hostage. During the humanitarian mission, a "little girl with big black eyes" gave her a bird. "It's quiet and scared", tweeted Cordoba, later adding, "I will free the bird in Buenaventura when the humanitarian mission ends".

The bird was released late Sunday, after Calvo was safe with his family and Cordoba was gearing up for Tuesday's operation to rescue Pablo Moncayo after more than a decade of imprisonment.

T/ Eva Golinger

Cindy Sheehan interviews Venezuela's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Temir Porras

Keeping Hope Alive



Recently, I was given the honor of going to Venezuela to interview President, Hugo Chavez, and also had some extraordinary experiences along the way. I was able to travel to Uruguay with Chavez and his team to attend the inauguration activities of President Jose Mujica. I traveled with and got to know some amazing revolutionaries and dedicated Venezuelan public servants.

One of the people we traveled with was Temir Porras, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs in charge of Asia and the Middle East. I asked Temir if he would sit down with us for an interview. When I made the request I said, "Temir, I would love to interview you to ask you what you would do differently in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Palestine if you were president of the United States". He agreed to the interview but said the answer to that question was easy, "Everything!"

I asked him some other easy questions to begin the interview, in order to highlight the difference between an aggressive and violent foreign policy, like the US has, and the foreign policies of a so-called dictatorship, as Venezuela is referred to in US media.

Temir, how many illegal foreign wars of aggression is Venezuela currently involved in?

Temir: None.

Thank you. Temir, how many countries has Venezuela invaded lately?

Temir: None.

Temir, how many wars of any kind is Venezuela involved in?

Temir: Zero.

In stark contrast to the Empire where I was born and currently reside - the US is presently in the midst of two very illegal and immoral invasions and is regularly bombing in Pakistan and Yemen - Venezuela has a foreign policy based on "respect for sovereignty". The only time the US Empire respects a nation's sovereignty is if that nation carries water for the corporations, International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank.

Not only is the US involved in its own military misadventures, but it is also the foundation and support for Israeli aggression and occupation against Palestine. Again, Venezuelan policy on this issue is, in my opinion, the more principled one. In 2006 when Israel invaded Lebanon,

Venezuela: A Model of Foreign Policy

At a time when the international community has turned a blind eye to Israel's crimes towards Palestine, Venezuela has been one of few nations with the courage to openly condemn Israel for its crimes and express support for the Palestinian people.

President Chavez has been outspoken in his criticism of Israeli policies and has undertaken and proposed steps to hold Israel accountable for its actions. Venezuela, like many other Latin American countries, traditionally had friendly diplomatic relations with Israel. Since its existence, Israel has maintained military relations with right wing regimes in Latin America including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela. Israel has also been active in supporting several right-wing counterinsurgency groups in Latin America (acting as a proxy for the US) with weapons, advice and training to fight leftist governments.

Chavez, however, broke with this tradition in 2006, when he announced that he was withdrawing his senior diplomat from Israel in response to the invasion of Lebanon. The

Venezuelan President chose to take this course not because of any action Israel had taken against Venezuela, but because of Israel's treatment towards Palestinian and Lebanese civilians. Chavez later visited Syria and made a joint statement with the Syrian government calling on Israel to end its illegal occupation of the Golan Heights and abide by United Nations resolutions. Venezuela also sent a Boeing 707 with 20,000 tons of humanitarian aid to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis caused in Lebanon and Palestine due to Israel's aggressive actions. These statements and actions have made Hugo Chavez one of the most popular leaders in the Arab world and have led opposition political parties in Arab countries to urge their governments to copy Venezuela's actions towards Israel.

President Chavez's actions should be emulated by all members of the international community in order to stop the genocidal policies of the Israeli government.

T/ Nikhil Shah
www.globalresearch.ca

(with military hardware purchased by and through the US), Venezuela recalled its Ambassador from Tel Aviv. Then when Israel slaughtered Gazans at the end of 2008, Venezuela expelled Israel's Ambassador and closed down its embassy in Tel Aviv. There was not even a peep from official US channels against this aggression.

Vice Minister Porras was very generous with his time and very articulate in explaining Venezuelan foreign policy to us, but I was particularly interested in its Middle Eastern views.

The foreign policies of Venezuela are based on the concept that governments should completely honor and respect the sovereignty of other nations.

Troops and independent contractors should be immediately withdrawn from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the Palestinians deserve their own sovereign state within the Palestinian territory.

Temir was also very concerned with US aggression towards Iran and did not support sanctioning Iran, indicating, "it's up to the government of Iran whether it should have nuclear power and even a nuclear bomb".

No one likes nukes, but Iran's close regional neighbor is Israel, and everyone knows that Israel has many nuclear bombs - the only way to forestall that problem would be if every nation disarmed and conformed to International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) regulations, inspections and controls.

Towards the end of the interview, I asked Temir if he felt that the US occupations all over the world, but especially in Afghanistan, would cause the collapse of the US Military Empire as it did to the Soviet Union's - his answer was immediate and brief:

"I hope so".

I hope so, too - the only unfortunate thing is that when the Empire collapses it will cause turmoil and sorrow all over the world.

Temir had (in my opinion) unfounded optimism in the people of the United States that we will be able to turn this trend around before the collapse of the Empire takes the rest of the world down with it.

In solidarity with our children and the children of the world - I HOPE that Temir is correct.

T/ Cindy Sheehan

US Health Care Reform: Change?

For the past year, debate about health care reform in the US has raged on. President Obama spent most of his first year campaigning for a health care reform that had many critics skeptical. Recently the US Congress passed a bill that may have ended the ongoing debate

Critics of "Obamacare" – as opposition forces have called the US President's health care plan – have labeled the reform as both socialist and scandalous. For many months, the debate focused on a public option for health insurance, or a choice between public and private insurance for US citizens. The legislation that was passed last week after a year-long battle in Congress, advocates a Government mandated system requiring people to purchase insurance from the private sector at risk of legal infraction – a system far from socialist.

THE BILL IN BRIEF

The 2,500-page health care reform has many people in the US confused. Numerous US congress members have argued that the bill contains ambiguities that private companies could use to their advantage. However, major reforms in the law could bring insurance to approximately 40 million people in the US who previously were without health care and were excluded from medical treatment.

The health care reform bill mandates all US citizens to purchase private health insurance. Failure to do so will result in penalties imposed by the Federal Government. Private insurers will be forbidden to deny health insurance to those with pre-existing and expensive conditions. Most employers will be fined if they refuse to provide private health coverage for their workers. Government subsidies will be available to help small businesses purchase insurance from the private market.

Additional Government programs will aid in the cost of purchasing pharmaceuticals through expansion of the existing Medicare program and will allocate aid to those that do not qualify.



PROPONENTS OF THE BILL

Those in favor of the new health care legislation argue that medical spending in the US has been increasingly covered by the Government anyway, therefore rendering a Government mandated health care system inevitable. For example, when insurance companies cannot afford to insure senior citizens in a profitable way, the US Government foots the tab with Medicare.

The US media is promoting the health care bill, signed into law by President Obama after a narrow vote of 219-212 in the House of Representatives last week, as expanding the "safety-net" for the millions of poverty stricken US citizens. Media outlets also claim that ultimately, the bill will reduce Government spending after it revamps the existing \$2.5 trillion USD health care system. Washington already spends around 16% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare, which is much more than most other countries spend for a health system that is ranked surprisingly low among industrialized nations.

OPPONENTS OF THE HEALTH CARE BILL

Considered the world's wealthiest nation, the US has been unable to implement a socialized health care system that could compare with other nations in the developed world. Those opposed to the new law have

claimed that far from reform, the new initiative exacerbates the faults of the current system. Instead of a meaningful reform towards universal health care, the Government is catering to the whims of insurance, medical suppliers and pharmaceutical lobbyists, and exacerbating the control of powerful corporations over US domestic and foreign policy decisions.

Provisions within the law guarantee over thirty million new paying customers for the health industry; a number sure to bring large profits to private interests providing services. With the lack of a public option in the law, substantial competition to private companies is eliminated.

Members of Congress complain that many of the negotiations surrounding the composition of the bill were done secretly behind closed doors. Also, additional regulatory and enforcement spending around the reform is likely to increase, rather than decrease, Government deficit, adding to the debt burden of a nation already teetering on financial disaster.

Apparently, thirty-eight States are preparing to contest the law in US Federal Court. Some believe the law violates the US Constitution because it forces them to purchase a designated insurance and denies the freedom to choose.

SOCIALISM? LETS COMPARE

In 2003, Venezuela launched new reforms directed at improving basic social needs in areas such as education and health care. Universal educational efforts linked with other social programs garnered tremendous success in the eradication of illiteracy and the creation of opportunities for medical students – and other specialties – to learn their trade.

Venezuela's health care reform, encompassed in the *Barrio Adentro* program, granted millions of Venezuelans with free, universal medical access. Many had never even seen a doctor before. The innovative program, created with the aid of Cuba, focuses on preventive medicine, though it also provides for advanced medical treatment as well. Preventive medicine has been shown in many countries to be effective in lowering long-term health expenditures.

In 2009, the Venezuelan Government reinforced the *Barrio Adentro* program, in order to achieve further advances in what is considered one of the most important projects of the Chavez administration. *Barrio Adentro* relies on trade partnerships through the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA) to provide doctors and equipment, in exchange for services and products. It's a new kind of trade and commerce based

on cooperation, integration and solidarity. Venezuela and Cuba were the first nations in the region to initiate these efforts.

Venezuelan medical services are free to citizens and visitors alike. Adversaries of *Barrio Adentro* claim the medical staff is unqualified, yet those accusations are based on an elite discrimination of doctors who choose to work in the public sector and service poor communities, instead of running private, multi-million dollar clinics. Statistically, Venezuela has seen a dramatic rise in effective available health care for its citizens. Most of the services given for free in Venezuela are not offered or available to the uninsured in the US.

NOT REALLY UNIVERSAL

In the end, regardless of what health care reform will mean for the US, it is certain that it is neither universal nor socialist. Citizens will not be provided with coverage, but rather they will be forced to purchase it with threat of Government enforcement. Though this may be an advance for some in the US, many feel that health care could have been managed differently, so that it truly benefited the US people rather than the corporations.

T/ Benji Lewis

Interview: Joaquin Garcia Salabarría, Coordinator of Mission Barrio Adentro in Venezuela

Barrio Adentro has saved the lives of more than one and a half million Venezuelans

On April 16th, the first brigade of 53 Cuban doctors will celebrate their 7th anniversary in Venezuela

The conversation with Joaquin Garcia Salabarría, Coordinator of Mission *Barrio Adentro* in Venezuela, takes place between sips of Cuban coffee and the fresh Caracas breeze that enters through the window of his modest office.

The only objects decorating the room are old wicker furniture, maps that cover the walls indicating medical centers and clinics in the Caracas metropolitan area, and a television set.

Armed with a daily planner full of notations, Garcia Salabarría initiated the interview remembering that the anniversary of the first brigade of 53 Cuban doctors who came and set up clinics in the poor mountainside neighborhoods surrounding Caracas, will be celebrated next April 16th.

"Mission *Barrio Adentro* has grown rapidly. What was once a rapid response brigade to attend to poor Venezuelans who never had even seen a doctor, has become a program with more than 11,500 institutions that attend to everyone for free, including Integral Diagnostic Centers, popular clinics, odontology and ophthalmology offices, High-Tech Clinics and Integral Rehabilitation Centers", he commented.

A GENUINE VENEZUELAN REVOLUTION

The Coordinator of the 29,255 Cubans working in the program, of which 11,332 are doctors, underlined the fact that *Barrio Adentro* is a Venezuelan Government initiative that has surpassed the model of Cuban health care.

"This project of the Bolivarian Revolution is genuinely Venezuelan. Cubans participate in the program, and it has helped us a lot to increase our own experience in order to provide similar services in Cuba", revealed Garcia Salabarría.

"There are many elements that demonstrate the effectiveness



of *Barrio Adentro* and that it has achieved many goals in a short time period. It's a model deeply rooted in the communities, where the people play a principal role", he affirmed.

BARRIO ADENTRO, A MODEL TO BE REPRODUCED

"It's a giant university that should be reproduced. Today, 24,000 young Venezuelans are being trained as the doctors who will strengthen the program and focus on community-based medical care. They will progressively substitute the doctors, nurses, radiologists, physical therapists and medical technicians presently in Venezuela on an international mission", explained Garcia Salabarría.

More than 1,600 Venezuelan doctors and odontologists have completed post-graduate courses in the program, which also provides a source of employment for more than 15,000 Venezuelans, of which 1,426 are doctors, 1,095 are odontologists and 2,946 are nurses.

Ninety-seven percent of the network of *Barrio Adentro* servic-

es operates all day, every day, and its technology is active 98% of the time. Despite these overwhelming achievements, the program is a target of constant attacks in the national and international mass media.

THE PROGRAM, OBJECT OF MEDIA CRITICISM

"They attack *Barrio Adentro* because it's a concrete and material achievement of the Revolution, and one of the greatest advances made by the Chavez Government, and something that none of the other governments that came before ever achieved", affirmed Garcia Salabarría.

The program extends throughout all of Venezuela's territory, from the Amazon of Amacuro, to the Orinoco River Basin, to the poor neighborhoods of Caracas. Its principal objective is closing the gap of exclusion present throughout the history of health care in Venezuela, due to the neoliberal policies of governments prior.

In relation to the treatment by mass media given to the deaths of 69 Cuban doctors during the ex-

ercise of their work, Garcia Salabarría believes it's an offense to the memory of the fallen internationalists, but also to the Venezuelan people.

"I have more than enough fingers on my hand to count the number of lives lost to violent acts. We have said it before, and I'll say it again, the majority have lost their lives to sickness, transit accidents and even domestic accidents", he clarified.

Garcia Salabarría believes that this issue is used to campaign against the Chavez Government, manipulating the real news so that the significance of true internationalism is ignored.

"Beyond offending us, and the memory of our brothers and sisters, they denigrate the Venezuelan people, trying to portray them as ungrateful and cruel", he added.

"Those who said that we weren't doctors, that we came to steal the wealth of the country, now say that we are slaves to the Government. Well, they need to get it together and decide what we are to them", he implored.

"We are here until the Chavez

Government decides otherwise. Let the enemies of the *Barrio Adentro* Revolution say whatever they want, it's not important. What is important is the health of the Venezuelan people, and the care and warmth that they demonstrate to us every day".

MEDICAL HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

More than 1,605,224 lives have been saved by *Barrio Adentro*. The free health care program has given 452,660,685 consultations during seven years. In odontology, there have been more than 54,559,467 consultations and a total of 16,529,065 pairs of glasses have been provided for free to ophthalmology patients. Annually, the Chavez Government destines 800,000,000 bolivares (approximately \$200 million USD), for free medicine distributed through the program.

HEALTH CARE IN THE US

Joaquin Salabarría believes it's good news for the people of the US that a new law for health care reform has just been approved, even if it's not as ideal as many had hoped. He also thinks it's incredible that the United States - the richest country in the world - has the worst health care system on the globe. "In the United States there are more than 40 million people excluded from the health-care system. This is an expression of the capitalist model and how everything is transformed into merchandise, and the Government doesn't feel responsible for its own people. It's a shame that in the twenty-first century, a debate is barely beginning in the US regarding whether or not money should be used to attend to the health needs of the people", he remarked.

In Venezuela, there is no question that free, universal health care is essential to ensure human prosperity and long-term development, and to keep the nation healthy, happy and advancing. *Barrio Adentro* has made this goal a reality.

T & P/ Rafael Leyva

EDITORIAL

Vladimir Putin's visit to Venezuela this week is historic and emphasizes the major shift in the balance of global power that revolutionary nations in Latin America have created during the twenty-first century. Russia has become a major trade partner with Venezuela, but not just on a commercial level. Just like Presidents Hugo Chavez and Rafael Correa, of Ecuador, explained during their trimestral visit last week, the agreements made between these nations today are based on mutual benefit and development. Trade is no longer just about the sale of products and receipt of dollars, but is more focused on the transfer of technology and the assurance that partner nations will benefit from an exchange based on integration, cooperation and solidarity.

Within a few weeks, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev should also visit Venezuela, his second trip to the South American nation since 2008. Deals and agreements will be solidified and advanced in the areas of science and technology, and defense and security. As US aggression and military presence increases in the region, the relationship with nations such as Russia helps to create an equilibrium and provide Venezuela, and other countries subject to imperial hostilities, with trade partners that are not subordinate to Washington's agenda.

The announcement of several more military agreements between the US and some Latin American nations only furthers the concerns already prominent in the region: that Washington is seeking to promote a military conflict in order to justify increased intervention and ensure domination over regional strategic resources, such as oil. While relations with nations such as Russia will not halt Washington's efforts, they certainly will aid Venezuela and others to better defend themselves and continue with development projects to promote sovereignty and regional prosperity.

Presidential "Peacemaking" in Latin America

Barack Obama, the fourth US president to win the Nobel Peace Prize, joins the others in the long tradition of peacemaking so long as it serves US interests. All four presidents left their imprint on "our little region over here that has never bothered anybody", as US Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson characterized the hemisphere in 1945. Given the Obama administration's stance toward the elections in Honduras last November, it may be worthwhile to examine the record.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

In his second term as president, Theodore Roosevelt said, "The expansion of the peoples of white, or European, blood during the past four centuries has been fraught with lasting benefit to most of the peoples already dwelling in the lands over which the expansion took place", despite what Africans, Native Americans, Filipinos and other beneficiaries might mistakenly believe.

It was therefore "inevitable and in the highest degree desirable for the good of humanity at large, that the American people should ultimately crowd out the Mexicans" by conquering half of Mexico and, "It was out of the question to expect (Texans) to submit to the mastery of the weaker race". Using gunboat diplomacy to steal Panama from Colombia to build the canal was also a gift to humanity.

WOODROW WILSON

Woodrow Wilson is the most honored of the presidential laureates and arguably the worst for Latin America. Wilson's invasion of Haiti in 1915 killed thousands, restored virtual slavery and left much of the country in ruins. Demonstrating his love of democracy, Wilson ordered his Marines to disband the Haitian parliament at gunpoint for failing to pass "progressive" legislation that allowed US corporations to buy up the country. The problem was remedied when Haitians adopted a US-written constitution, under Marine guns. The achievement would



be "beneficial to Haiti", the State Department assured its wards.

Wilson also invaded the Dominican Republic to ensure its welfare. Both countries were left under the rule of vicious national guards. Decades of torture, violence and misery there come down to us as a legacy of "Wilsonian idealism", a leading principle of US foreign policy.

JIMMY CARTER

For President Jimmy Carter, human rights were "the soul of our foreign policy". Robert Pastor, Carter's national security advisor for Latin America, explained some important distinctions between rights and policy: Regrettably, the administration had to support Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza's regime, and when that proved impossible, to maintain the US-trained National Guard even after it had been massacring the population "with a brutality a nation usually reserves for its enemy", killing some 40,000 people.

To Pastor, the reason is elementary: "The United States did not want to control Nicaragua or the other nations of the region, but it also did not want developments to get out of control. It wanted Nicaraguans to act independently, except when doing so would affect US interests adversely".

BARACK OBAMA

President Barack Obama se-

parated the United States from almost all of Latin America and Europe by accepting the military coup that overthrew Honduran democracy last June. The coup reflected a "yawning political and socioeconomic divide", The New York Times reported. For the "small upper class", Honduran President Manuel Zelaya was becoming a threat to what they call "democracy", namely, the rule of "the most powerful business and political forces in the country".

Zelaya was initiating such dangerous measures as a rise in the minimum wage in a country where 60 percent live in poverty. He had to go.

Virtually alone, the United States recognized last November's elections (with Pepe Lobo the victor) held under military rule -- "a great celebration of democracy", according to Hugo Llorens, Obama's ambassador. The endorsement also preserved the use of Honduras' Palmerola air base, increasingly valuable as US military is being driven out of most of Latin America.

After the elections, Lewis Anselm, Obama's representative to the Organization of American States, instructed the backward Latin Americans that they should recognize the military coup and join the United States "in the real world, not in the world of magical realism". Obama broke ground in supporting the military coup.

The US Government funds the

International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which are supposed to promote democracy. The IRI regularly supports military coups to overthrow elected governments, most recently in Venezuela in 2002 and Haiti in 2004. But the NDI has been more discrete in its support for destabilization in Latin America. In Honduras, for the first time, Obama's NDI agreed to observe the elections under military rule, unlike the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations, still wandering in the world of magical realism.

Given the close connections between the Pentagon and the Honduran military, and the enormous US economic leverage in the country, it would have been a simple matter for Obama to join the Latin American/European effort to protect Honduran democracy. But Obama preferred the traditional policy.

In his history of hemispheric relations, British scholar Gordon Connell-Smith writes, "While paying lip-service to the encouragement of representative democracy in Latin America, the United States has a strong interest in just the reverse", apart from "procedural democracy, especially the holding of elections, which only too often have proved farcical".

Functioning democracy may respond to popular concerns, while "the United States has been concerned with fostering the most favorable conditions for her private overseas investment".

It takes a large dose of what has sometimes been called "intentional ignorance" not to see the facts. Such blindness must be guarded zealously if state violence is to proceed on course -- always for the good of humanity, as Obama reminded us again in his Nobel Prize address.

Noam Chomsky

Noam Chomsky is an internationally renowned linguist, scholar, writer and activist and author of more than 80 books. He is the most quoted person in world history.