

The US is supporting egregious human rights abuses in Colombia

US drowing in hypocrisy: War abroad, austerity at home



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Anti-Chavez opposition de-unifies

The Venezuelan opposition has been struggling to choose a candidate to contest front-runner President Chavez in October's presidential elections. Set to hold primaries on February 12, the list of candidates has slowly been reducing as runners make pacts with each other or fail to garner enough public or financial support. Attempting to present a "unified ticket", candidates disagreed on a collective platform and criticized each other's strategies. | page 3



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Venezuela advances in drug war

Venezuela's successes in combating drug trafficking have been lauded internationally. | page 5

Politics

US Republican race of idiots

Fidel Castro calls Republican race a "competition of idiocy & ignorance". | page 6

Venezuela: Guaranteeing food security and development for future generations

The South American nation has been focusing on agricultural production and infrastructure development in order to ensure food sovereignty

Venezuelan President Chavez emphasized the need to continue developing long-lasting mechanisms to guarantee food sovereignty and security in the South American nation. Venezuela has seen a major increase in food consumption and availability throughout the past decade, as the government has focused on national production and subsidizing farmers, distributors and even food markets. Chavez, making the remarks during his Sunday program, *Alo Presidente*, also underlined the importance of improving infrastructure to expand domestic development. | page 2



Venezuela creates new social network

Tamara Pearson

The new Venezuela social network, called Plaxed (www.plaxed.com), which allows streams of short posts (200 characters), as well as event invitations, polls and questions, was created as an alternative site so that files or personal details found on the network "aren't blocked, erased,

or followed" by US laws, said its creator, Cesar Cotiz, a systems engineer student.

The idea for the website began over a year ago, but was on trial for a long time. "Then the project became a success, we had 10,000 people register in just one day, which collapsed our servers", Cotiz said.

"We want a social network specifically for Venezuela, for

phones and for desktops, and that is completely free", Cotiz said.

Plaxed is still under development. Based on the freeware, StatusNet, it still contains a lot of English, which is gradually being replaced. It has no advertising, and its name, according to Cotiz, doesn't mean anything.

"It's important that Venezuelans gradually take on new technology and create new social networks...in order to start

Attorney General Carlos Escarra dies



On Wednesday, Venezuelans were shocked at the news of Attorney General and revolutionary lawyer Carlos Escarra's abrupt death after suffering a heart attack earlier that morning. Escarra was a well-known and prominent figure within the Bolivarian Revolution, who helped draft the 1999 Constitution and later went on to become a Supreme Court Justice, a leading legislator and member of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Escarra, who was a part of President Chavez's movement in the early 1990s and a long-time member of Venezuela's Communist Party, was widely known for his constitutional scholar and his astute use of the law. He was a professor of law at Venezuela's Andres Bello Catholic University in Caracas for 33 years. In August 2011 he was named Attorney General.

Carlos dedicated his life to the fight for social justice. He was a friend and will be dearly missed.

to eliminate this dependence that we have on websites made in other countries, which fall under the law of those countries, so they can take the information we put there at any time and do whatever they want with it", said Luigino Bracci, an information systems graduate.

Social networking in Venezuela has experienced a growth in recent years in Venezuela, as internet usage has risen to 40%.

Venezuela: Guaranteeing food sovereignty and improved infrastructure

Food security, agro-industrial development and investment in infrastructure were some of the top themes addressed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez last Sunday during the 377th transmission of his weekly television program, *Alo Presidente*

T/COI
P/Presidential Press

Broadcasting from the Presidential Palace of Miraflores in the capital of Caracas, Chavez cited the increases that his country has seen in meat production and the higher levels of consumption that Venezuelans now enjoy as a result of the current government's food sovereignty measures.

During the year 2011, the socialist leader pointed out, there was an increase of 8 percent in chicken production as well as double digit gains in buffalo meat and eggs.

This has been matched by an overall increase in meat consumption, rising from 16.1 kilos per Venezuelan per year in 1998 to 24 kilos in 2011. Likewise, rice intake has seen a jump from 10.7 kilos before the arrival of the Bolivarian Revolution, to 24 kilos currently.

For the same period, Chavez explained, Venezuelans have also seen an increase in chicken consumption, reaching more than 40 kilos per person in 2011 - over triple the figure of 12.5 kilos in 1998.

During his broadcast, the head of state communicated via satellite with a number of agro-industrial workers and public employees participating in the development of sugar processing and packaging plants in the states of Barinas and Carabobo.

In the plains state of Barinas, Chavez received an update from Land and Agricultural Minister



Juan Carlos Loyo who, accompanied by workers of the Ezequiel Zamora Agro-Industrial Complex, reported an output of two thousand tons of sugar daily from the plant and the imminent increase of this production to 4,500 tons by next week.

These numbers currently represent, Loyo said, 11 percent of national consumption and the goal is to continue expanding sugar cane cultivation.

"By 2014, thanks to a financing plan in place, we'll be able to achieve a harvest of fourteen thousand hectares [34,500 acres] which will bring this sugar mill to its potential capacity of seven thousand tons a day", the minister affirmed.

Similarly, while making contact with workers in the Children of Bolivar packaging plant in the central state of Carabobo, Chavez listened to Leyla Torres, Coordinator of the factory, as she described the process of receiving and encasing Venezuelan staples.

"We're organized in order to distribute and package sugar and black beans so that we can

guarantee these products for our families", Torres said. According to plant reports, the Children of Bolivar facility produces 35 kilos of sugar every minute for a weekly output of more than 33,000 tons.

Ricardo Javier, President of the state's agrarian financing body, FONDAS, also highlighted the fact that profits from the factory are being put to use for the benefit of the workers and the surrounding neighborhoods.

"The surplus [from the plant] doesn't go to private capital but rather it's reinvested in social projects in the community", he said.

TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

Chavez also discussed last weekend the question of transportation and commented that his government has assigned nearly 4.8 billion bolivars [\$1.1 billion] for infrastructure projects in 2012.

This includes the completion and initiation of more than 370 emergency road repairs as well as new public works in 23 of the

country's states and the Capital District.

More than 300 projects already have funding designated from 2011, the head of state informed, while 148 new projects in 18 states are ready to begin.

The socialist President also informed that the state airline company, Conviasa, has purchased a new fleet of planes from Brazil, opening up the creation of further international routes for the Caribbean nation.

"We're buying 20 Embraer planes from Brazil. The cost is \$814 million which will come through a financing plan from the National Economic and Social Development Bank of Brazil", he outlined.

Using a map to highlight Venezuela's geographic importance in the Western Hemisphere, Chavez spoke of the strategic necessity to continue advancing in the development of the nation's transportation infrastructure.

"You just need to see where Venezuela is situated on the map to conclude that it's an urgent need for us to have a powerful airline as well as the best

air and sea ports. We also need railways and highways - we're at the entrance of the continent", he asserted.

SUPPORT FOR DEFENSE MINISTER

Apart from food security and transportation, the Venezuelan President spoke out against the re-emergence of allegations emanating from Washington accusing the newly appointed Venezuelan Defense Minister, Henry Rangel Silva, of aiding narco-trafficking from Colombia.

Chavez affirmed his "total support" for Silva, after the US State Department called his appointment "worrying" earlier this month.

The statement from Washington follows on earlier allegations made by the US Treasury Department in 2008 that the General has links to the FARC guerrilla organization in Colombia - a 50 year old insurgent group that has been accused of drug trafficking to finance its rebellion.

The Venezuelan President dismissed the charges as a provocation of his government, citing the fact that the North American government has not produced a single piece of evidence to justify its claims.

"Imagine accusing a general like Rangel Silva of being a drug lord. The ones who are accusing are the drug lords", Chavez said.

Speaking on public television last week, Venezuela's representative to the Latin American Parliament, Roy Daza, lamented the renewal of tensions between his country and the United States, calling the allegations against Silva as "irresponsible, serious, and dangerous".

"When a political relation and even a human relation becomes so cynical, there's no possibility of dialogue. Our government is prepared to discuss any topic with the United States but this must be based on respect and the proper deference which must be given to a constitutionally democratic government such as Venezuela's", he said.

The de-unification of the Venezuelan opposition

T/COI
P/Agencies

This week Venezuelan opposition forces demonstrated a false showing of unity against President Hugo Chavez in preparation for next October's presidential elections. Holding a rushed press conference in an upscale Caracas hotel on Monday, the US-backed Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) formally announced the release of their "new" platform, a program of neoliberal policies for what they call a "National Unity Government".

Though the six pre-presidential MUD candidates were expected to sign the coalition's program, one of the candidates, Diego Arria, broke ranks before the 30-minute event ended, demonstrating, once again, the failure of efforts to unite the Venezuelan opposition. A second candidate, Pablo Medina, signed "with reserve".

The following day, another candidate, Leopoldo Lopez, dropped out of the race and announced his intentions to back right-wing candidate Henrique Capriles Radonski. The pact caused a frenzy amongst other runners and opposition members, who considered the decision an attempt to undermine their candidacies. Lopez and Capriles, who represent the extreme right-wing of the MUD were criticized by candidate Pablo Perez, supported by "social-democrats" from the AD and UNT parties. "You can't endorse the votes of the people", warned Perez. "In politics, 2 plus 2 doesn't equal 4".

Omar Barboza, spokesman for the UNT party accused Lopez and Capriles for attempting to sideline the other candidates. "Their pact just shows the fear they have for our candidate Pablo Perez. They are trying to run him out of the race".

The MUD held its final pre-presidential "debate" late Monday night in which internal fissures were left ever more evident to viewers.

A "NEW" WAY BACKWARDS

Ignoring facts and figures recognized both in Venezuela

and abroad, the MUD's recently-released "Program of a National Unity Government (2013-2019)" asserts that the government of democratically-elected President Hugo Chavez (1999-present) has "stepped all over participation, inclusion, and plurality", made Venezuela "one of the most vulnerable and unproductive economies in Latin America", and contributed to the "weakening of national sovereignty".

Failing to consider the mass mobilizations responsible for the elaboration and approval of the country's Constitution (1999), the consolidation of grassroots people's power through communal councils, communes, communal cities, and the numerous democratic elections held since Chavez first took office, the MUD platform did not elaborate on its own definition of "participation".

In contrast to what the MUD calls the "treasonous" governance of Venezuela's Chavez, the opposition grouping proposes, rather vaguely, "good government, a productive society, improvements in quality of life, and a wider range of international relations".

To achieve "good government", for example, the MUD proposes Venezuela's public administration be "modernized and made professional" so as to "adjust to the requirements of a modern state" – a common neoliberal description of how to reduce the number of public sector employees to a bare minimum.

With respect to the national economy, the MUD promises to "guarantee the right to private property and economic freedom", thus "freely developing private initiatives". Privatization is the bottom line of the economic policy for the Venezuelan opposition.

On foreign policy, of course, the MUD promises to promote "friendly" relations with "all countries" – especially the United States – and calls the Chavez policy of global multi-polarity "disrespectful of international norms".

According to the MUD's Pedro Benitez, one of the few allowed to speak at Monday's press conference, the coalition platform "of-

fers a radical change in democracy; a commitment to a new regime that serves as guarantor of life, property, and liberty".

Though the vagueness of the MUD platform allowed five of six pre-presidential candidates to sign on, one of the most right-wing and senior candidates, Diego Arria, declined to do so.

Frustrated by the exclusion of his campaign's call for a constitutional assembly, Arria complained that the MUD program "fails to get to the root of the problem" – the Bolivarian Revolution, its Constitution (1999), and the participatory democracy it depends on.

Seeking to dispel rumors of internal division, Avelo stressed to reporters that all possible opposition candidates vying for the chance to face President Chavez in this year's presidential election know they must "govern together so as to not govern alone".

The MUD coalition, he affirmed, is "united" in its commitment "to govern well" and that, he argued, is sufficient to avoid the coalition's pre- or post-election demise.

TOYING WITH HISTORY

Not surprisingly, Venezuela's anti-Chavez forces timed the release of their "new" 175-page

program to coincide with national events and discussions celebrating the 54-year anniversary of the end of the Marcos Perez Jimenez dictatorship (1945-1958). Forced to flee the country on 23 January 1958, Jimenez was overthrown by a coalition of popular forces and democratic members of the Venezuelan armed forces.

The fall of Jimenez marked the beginning of the Fourth Republic (1958-1998), a forty-year period in which Democratic Action (AD) and the Christian right-wing (COPEI), now major players in the opposition's MUD coalition, shared the power and privilege that came with governing an oil-rich "representative democracy".

Frustrated by the grassroots, participatory process that is the Bolivarian Revolution, the opposition's MUD coalition is counting on reactionary forces within Venezuela, and abroad, to return Venezuela to the pre-Chavez period.

According to the MUD's Pedro Benitez, the "historic" release of the coalition's platform is "the most important event to have taken place since 1958".

A FINAL LOOK AT MUD

Seeking to take full advantage of the day's historical significance, the MUD's pre-presidential candidates sat together Monday night for what was their final "debate" before primaries scheduled for February 12th. Claiming it to be the "beginning of the end" for the Chavez administration, the discussion hosted by privately owned radical opposition media outlet Globovision evidenced obvious differences

between the candidates and a sense of frustration in the run up to the primaries.

With polls predicting a landslide victory for President Chavez, the opposition candidates openly disagreed on how they might govern in a hypothetical post-Chavez Venezuela.

Candidates Pablo Medina and Diego Arria, for example, argued that the only viable way of governing post-Chavez would be by calling together a constitutional assembly to rid them of the burdens imposed by the Constitution of 1999. Not doing so, they affirmed, would force them to balance an opposition executive with a pro-Chavez, Bolivarian legislature. Aware that Medina and Arria were openly discrediting opposition calls for greater "separation of powers" in Venezuela, candidates Henrique Capriles Radonski and Pablo Perez stood by the MUD's supposed defense of the current magna carta.

In another telling example of opposition frustrations, right-wing US favorite Maria Corina Machado stressed that her opposition competitors "mustn't be naïve" in thinking that this year's presidential elections "are some sort of democratic celebration".

Hinting at a possible US-backed intervention, Machado argued that the opposition must consider alternative options come October, including the use of undefined "mechanisms necessary to defend the people". Machado later said in a press conference Wednesday that she would not allow the election to be "stolen" from her by President Chavez, claiming she would unquestionably be Venezuela's next president.



Road to Revolution: Commemorating 54 years of democracy, Venezuelans reflect



T/COI
P/Agencies

Last Monday, Venezuelans commemorated the 54th anniversary of the fall of the dictatorship of Marcos Perez Jimenez and the role that social movements played in the opening of new voting rights in the South American country.

On January 23, 1958, the military regime of Jimenez buckled under the pressure of an amalgamation of popular sectors including youth, workers and other activists who bound together to bring down the repressive and autocratic government of Venezuela's last ruling strong man.

Fundamental to the overthrow of the dictatorship was the Communist Party of Venezuela, the student and labor movements, and members of the political parties Democratic Action (AD), the Christian Democratic Party (COPEI), and the Democratic Republican Union (URD).

But just as Jimenez fled the country, the jubilation felt by

many who fought to bring the government down would soon be extinguished as seasoned veterans of earlier reform movements took advantage of the new political opening to consolidate power.

In the wake of the vacuum left by Jimenez's absence, the once progressive party of AD, led by Romulo Betancourt and the most politically astute of the organized resistance, was quick to take hold of the reins of government, entering into alliance with the Venezuelan upper classes and marginalizing its leftist members.

In December 1958, after returning from exile in the United States, Betancourt won the presidential elections and began a new era of political life in the country that, while freeing the country from the grip of dictatorship, would bring a new regime to bear upon the people.

THE REVOLUTION BETRAYED

As the nation celebrated the popular insurrection that led

to the downfall of Jimenez, the political apparatuses of AD, COPEI and URD entered into an accord, blessed by the United States, which set the parameters for Venezuela's new representative democracy.

Key to this agreement, known as the Punto Fijo Pact, was the exclusion of the Communist Party and more militant leftists from the new political structure.

In the words of author Garcia Ponce, the conspiracy against the communists and other activists who had paid the greatest price in the fight against Jimenez "amputated the popular content of January 23... in order to displace the leadership towards [AD, COPEI, and URD]".

The betrayal of the communists and the collusion of the new political cadre with Washington gave birth to a guerrilla movement in Venezuela which, while little mentioned in the history of the second half of the 20th century, would last for the duration of the 1960s.



A new period of repression was thus spawned by the Punto Fijo Pact which would see the widespread persecution of leftist sympathizers by members of the new elite as Venezuela followed Washington's cold war march against any and all proponents of revolutionary change in Latin America.

This trend would continue in Venezuela until the victory of Hugo Chavez as President in 1998 and the rise of the Bolivarian Revolution as the nation's most formidable political force.

AMBIVALENCE OVER LEGACY

At 54 years since his flight from Venezuela, Marcos Perez Jimenez is still considered a controversial figure in the country, especially among government supporters who have been split over the question of whether the date of January 23 should be celebrated at all.

Many Chavez backers cite the fact that the period marked the beginning of the infamous "Fourth Republic", an era associated with the country's current political opposition, the further concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, a domestic policy in line with Washington's interests, and the rise of neoliberalism.

Previously revered by COPEI and AD as a celebration of their role in the creation of a representative democracy in Venezuela, many proponents of Chavez's Bolivarian Revolution and direct democracy in the country have failed to see the relevance of lauding a 40-year period of rigid classism and oppression.

"What began was another dictatorship. It was a betrayal of

the will and the sacrifice of the people and we must all recognize this", President Hugo Chavez said of the date last year.

Former Vice President and journalist Jose Vicente Rangel has pointed out that during the period of Punto Fijo, more violations of human rights existed in the country than those that occurred under the Jimenez dictatorship.

Some socialists have even argued that a more nuanced approach to Jimenez's rule must be considered, pointing out the massive infrastructure projects built during his time as well as his desire to propel Venezuela onto the world stage with a clearly defined notion of progress.

"One could say that Venezuela won [with the downfall of Jimenez] by having free elections and a party system that didn't exist. But it also lost in the sense that it wanted to destroy what Jimenez did, which wasn't all negative. He had a project for the country, a national development vision that the era of Punto Fijo didn't even come close to obtaining", said UCV History Professor Diana Perez during an interview.

Regardless of the shades of opinion, the role of the grassroots social movements in overturning an anti-democratic government will continue to contribute to the legacy of January 23 by pro-Chavez activists as well as the Venezuelan population at large.

"Perhaps there's a debate and many people would conclude that the overall winners of January 23 were the dominant sectors. But it's also correct to highlight the role that different social sectors, such as the students, played in the struggle", Perez reflected.

Venezuela: 78 drug kingpins captured

T/COI
P/Agencies

Moving forward with the fight against narco-trafficking and the consumption of illicit drugs in the South American country, Minister of Interior and Justice, Tareck El Aissami, announced last Tuesday that more than 4.4 million doses of illegal substances were seized by Venezuelan authorities in 2011.

According to El Aissami, the drugs were destined for small scale dealers inside the country, referred to as “micro-traffickers”, and their confiscation represents a major step forward in the country’s national sovereignty and anti-drug plan put in place in 2009.

The seizures were also accompanied, the minister informed, by the further capture of more than 4.6 million kilograms of various chemical components used to process banned substances.

“This forms part of our actions related to the National Auditing Plan of businesses associated with these substances”, El Aissami elaborated.

The minister’s revelations came as part of an event in the capital of Caracas marking the 6th anniversary since the founding of Venezuela’s National Anti-Drug Office (ONA).



The activity also included the honoring of various officials for their efforts in halting the spread of narcotics and other illegal substances in the Caribbean nation.

Among the 79 “Fighters for the Nation” recognized on Tuesday was Defense Minister Henry Rangel Silva, a general of the Venezuelan Armed Forces who the US State Department has falsely accused of working with Colombian “narco-guerrillas”.

“The honor given to Minister Rangel Silva is a recognition of all the National Bolivarian Armed Forces who, without a doubt, have put themselves at the vanguard of this battle for the dignity of the human cause”, El Aissami declared.

Dismissing unsubstantiated charges wielded against Silva by Washington, the Interior and Justice Minister defended Venezuela’s armed forces in the

face of foreign destabilization attempts.

“As long as the empire tries to point the finger at the officials of our Armed Forces, our institutions and our people will dig in their heels next to President Chavez and respond with dignity to this slander”, he asserted.

Citing the fact that Venezuela has been declared by the United Nations for the 6th consecutive year as a country free of the culti-

vation of illegal drugs, El Aissami praised the Chavez administration for the results born of its independent anti-narcotics policies.

Since Venezuela officially broke ties with the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in 2004, the South American nation has doubled its confiscation of illegal substances and has apprehended 78 major drug kingpins, he noted.

“Never before have we achieved so many favorable results in such a short period of time”, El Aissami stated.

In related news, the Venezuelan government announced last Tuesday the deportation of three foreign drug lords sought by the International Police (INTERPOL).

Letourneau Luc, Oscar Hernandez, and Adalberto Arboleda; Canadian, US and Colombian citizens respectively, have all been wanted by their home governments for crimes related to the sale and distribution of heroin and cocaine.

The Interior and Justice Ministry informed earlier this week that Hernandez was apprehended by Venezuelan security forces in the city of Maracaibo on January 4, Arboleda in the city of Mariara in the state of Carabobo last January 11, and Luc in Margarita Island on May 16, 2011.

Brazil and Venezuela advance Security and defense cooperation

T/AVN

Brazil’s Defense Minister Celso Amorim arrived in Venezuela Tuesday afternoon to meet with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and other members of the government in order to develop actions aimed at solidifying a South American defense system.

“We have a series of issues. One of the most important of them is strengthening the South American Defense Council”, said the Venezuelan President as he welcomed the Brazilian official.

Other significant issues approached in the meeting included peace and unity amongst nations of the South, said Chavez, who quoted independence hero Simon Bolivar, “Peace, my port is peace”.

Minister Amorim applauded the words of President Chavez and added that together they are developing a South American view of defense, “without rivalries, and that prepares us to live in a more complex world, with big challenges”.

Bilateral accords were also consolidated during the meeting.

Amorim was at the forefront of Brazil’s Foreign Ministry for eight years, during the administration of Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva, and was known as one of the best foreign ministers in the world. He became defense minister under the government of Dilma Rousseff, inaugurated last January 2011.

DEFENSE COLLABORATION

On Wednesday Venezuelan Defense minister, Henry Rangel Silva, met with his Brazilian counterpart, Celso Amorim, and underscored the importance for Armed Forces of countries in the region to integrate and

complement each other in order to guarantee the internal protection to the South American continent.

“The dynamics of the meeting assured us that this bilateral and multilateral relation of cooperation is going on the right path. We are going to achieve the mutual consolidation of our of our Armed Forces in order to offer protection to all of South America and develop a dissuasive element to ward off those who threaten us externally”, Rangel added.

He described the meeting as pleasant and productive in which a group of agreements were considered, including the aforementioned integration that is “so necessary”.

“We can’t achieve anything without integration”, the Venezuelan Defense Minister insisted.

For his part, Amorim said they mainly discussed issues relating to security, technology and defense, but also education and the military in both nations. All those different points were touched on with the objective of strengthening bilateral relations.

“We talked about other big themes, like more cooperation in our borders, the fight against drug trafficking and the role of the Armed Forces”, he commented and agreed that it’s necessary to act jointly so as to achieve the proposed goals.

Amorim announced that a second meeting will be held at the beginning of March “and new conclusions could arise which will be included in the next bilateral meeting between President Dilma Rousseff (Brazil) and President Hugo Chavez (Venezuela)”.



Participatory democracy central to next phase of Venezuelan Revolution, says Chavez

T/ Rachael Boothroyd
P/ Presidential Press

The current Venezuelan government is to pursue a policy of more socialism, social justice and revolutionary, participatory democracy if successful in winning this year's 2012 presidential elections, said President Hugo Chavez on Sunday.

The Venezuelan President made reference to what would constitute the next phase of the Bolivarian revolution during his weekly television show *Aló Presidente*.

"Some people want to go backwards...we will continue with more socialism, more democracy and more social justice", he explained, contrasting the Venezuelan political opposition's vision for the country with that of the revolutionary government.

In the second program broadcast since he returned to the show following his cancer diagnosis last year, the leader of Venezuela's United Socialist Party (PSUV) explained that a newly elected PSUV government would continue to advance towards the goals outlined in

the Simon Bolivar Plan for the Nation throughout the 2013-2019 period.

Originally implemented in 2007, the plan was designed to summarize the government's strategic lines for advancing towards "21st century socialism". Some of the main focuses outlined in the project are; transforming the nation's dominant values along humanist and socialist lines, creating an endogenous productive model and a participatory democratic system, implementing measures to increase social inclusion and reconfiguring the country's geopolitical relations.

Future government policy would be geared towards furthering these objectives but with a concentration on developing organized society and protagonistic democracy, said Chavez.

"We want to unleash popular creativity from below, participation and protagonism from the grassroots bases, so that they can bring forward their ideas", said the Venezuelan leader from the Miraflores presidential palace.

With the initial six year period of the plan coming to an end, Chavez said it would be neces-

sary to undertake a review of how much the government had been able to progress along these lines since 2007.

"It is a constant battle against capitalist values", said the President, who added that replacing the country's dominant ideals with socialist ones would be "fundamental" to future government policy.

"This is related to everything, socialist ethics, we're not going to be carrying out the Knowledge and Work Mission in order to strengthen capitalist ethics, or capitalist values... When undertaking big projects or small projects, we always have to ask ourselves, where is the socialism in this project?" he said.

The President went on to state that the government will further define the main guidelines for the next stage of the Revolution during a public event in February, when the PSUV is due to commence its electoral campaign. According to predictions from national opinion polls, the current government of Hugo Chavez is set to win the October presidential elections by a wide margin standing on a socialist platform.

www.venezuelanalysis.com

Fidel Castro calls Republican race 'competition of idiocy and ignorance'

T/ Paul Haven

Fidel Castro lambasted the Republican presidential race as the greatest competition of "idiocy and ignorance" the world has ever seen in a column published Wednesday, and also took shots at the news media and foreign governments for seizing on the death of a Cuban prisoner to demand greater respect for human rights.

Castro's comments came in a long opinion piece carried by official media two days after Republican presidential hopefuls at a debate in Florida presented mostly hard-line stances on what to do about the Communist-run island, and even speculated as to what would happen to the 85-year-old revolutionary leader's soul when he dies.

Cuba has become an important issue as the candidates court Florida's influential Cuban-American community in an effort to win the biggest electoral prize so far in the primary season.

Castro said he always assumed the candidates would try to outdo each other on the issue of Cuba, but that he was nonetheless appalled by the level of debate.

"The selection of a Republican candidate for the presidency of this globalized and expansive empire is – and I mean this seriously – the greatest competition of idiocy and ignorance that has ever been", said the retired Cuban leader, who has duelled with 11 US administrations since his 1959 revolution.

Castro also disputed international media accounts about the January 19 death of Wilman Villar, a 31-year-old Cuban prisoner, saying the man was not a dissident and not on a 50-day hunger strike as human rights groups and the island's opposition claim.

Castro reiterated the government's contention that Villar was a common criminal sent to prison for domestic violence, and that he received the best medical attention possible. Washington and several European governments have condemned Cuba for his death, and Amnesty International says it was about to put Villar on a global list of prisoners of conscience.

Villar has become a cause celebre for opponents of the Cuban government, but he was not a well known figure, even among island dissidents, before his death.

Republican candidate Mitt Romney said during Monday's debate that Villar died "fighting for democracy" and that his death highlighted the need to remain firm on Cuba. Washington has maintained a near-50-year trade and travel embargo on Cuba.

Another Republican candidate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, said he would authorize increased covert operations to bring down the Cuban government. And at another moment of Monday's debate, Romney and Gingrich sparred over whether Castro's soul would go to heaven or hell.

When asked what he would do as president if he found out Castro had died, Romney said he would first "thank Heavens" that the bearded revolutionary had finally "returned to his maker", to which Gingrich replied "I don't think Fidel's going to meet his maker. I think he's going to go to the other place".

Castro didn't refer to the comments specifically in his opinion piece, saying that he was too busy with other things to waste any more time analyzing the Republican competition.

T/ Daniel Kovalik

P/ Extract of Fernando Botero painting

As Noam Chomsky has often cautioned, when considering foreign relations, and especially military intervention, states should always heed the primary Hippocratic oath – “First, do no harm”. The US has certainly disregarded this admonition with reckless abandon in Latin America, and Colombia is the foremost example of this, at least at the present time. Human Rights Watch appears to concur with this judgment.

Thus, Human Rights Watch (HRW) just released its annual human rights report on Colombia, and it is not pretty. The punch line of the report is most damning of the United States and its role in that country’s abysmal practices – undoubtedly, the very worst of this hemisphere.

As HRW concludes, after its litany of atrocities being committed by the Colombian state and its paramilitary (death squad) allies,

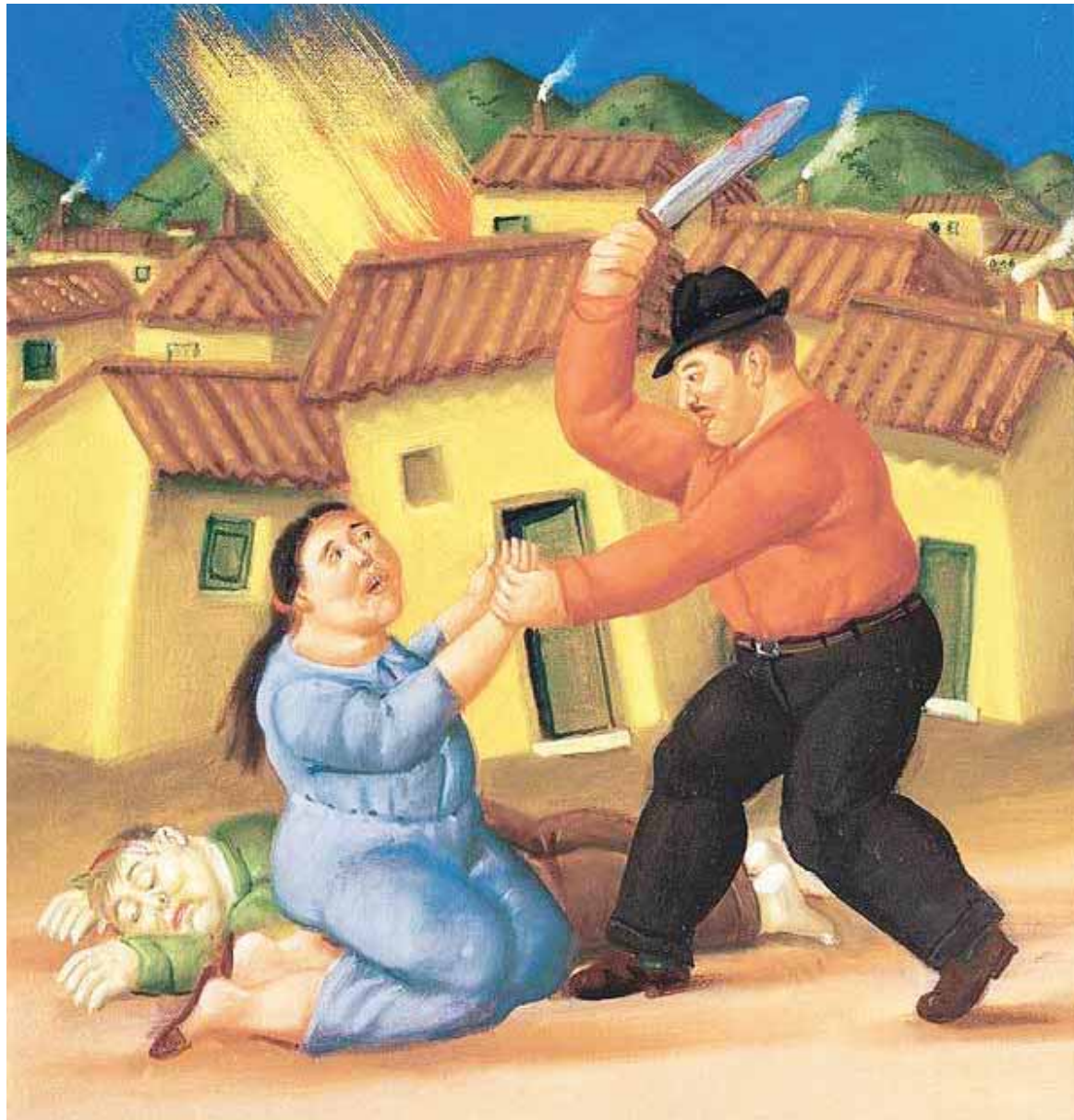
The US remains the most influential foreign actor in Colombia. In 2011 it provided approximately US \$562 million in aid, about 61 percent of which was military and police aid. Thirty percent of US military aid is subject to *human rights conditions, which the US Department of State has not enforced*. In September 2011 the State Department certified that Colombia was meeting human rights conditions.

HRW explains in detail that the human rights violations the U.S. is aiding and abetting in Colombia are indeed the worst imaginable. As HRW explains, “in Colombia paramilitary successor groups continue to grow, maintain extensive ties with public security force members and local officials, and commit widespread atrocities. There has also been ongoing violence against rights defenders, community leaders, and trade unionists”.

According to the HRW report, the paramilitary death squads, whose power flows from “[t]olerance of the groups by public security forces”, actively “engage in drug trafficking; actively recruit members, including children; and *commit widespread abuses against civilians, including massacres, killings, rapes and other forms of sexual violence,*

The US is supporting egregious human rights abuses

US Shame in Colombia



threats and forced displacement”. HRW notes that, “[i]n January 2011 Colombia’s national police chief publicly stated that *such groups are the largest source of violence in Colombia*”. This is a significant admission because the US, to justify its continued military support for Colombia, would have the public believe that it is the left-wing guerillas who are most responsible for the violence in Colombia. In fact, this is not true. Rather, it is the paramilitary death squads who bear this responsibility, and it is these death squads, allied as they are with the official Colombian security forces, which are being supported by the military aid the US is sending to that country.

Moreover, while the US attempts with a straight face to portray Colombia as a “democracy”, contrasting this with countries such as Cuba or Ven-

ezuela which the US claims lack democratic values, the recent HRW report makes it clear that Colombia is not recognizable as a democracy in any real sense. Thus, HRW explains that, “Candidates campaigning for the nationwide and local elections in October 2011 were also frequently killed amid reports of alleged links between candidates and armed groups. According to the Colombian NGO Mision de Observacion Electoral, 40 candidates were killed in 2011, representing a 48 percent increase in such crimes reported during the 2007 local elections”.

If the murder of political candidates were not bad enough, HRW explains that there is “ongoing infiltration of the political system by paramilitaries and their successor groups... Colombia’s Ombudsman’s Office reported that 119 municipalities faced a high risk of elec-

toral violence or interference by paramilitary successor groups during the October 2011 local elections”.

In addition, as HRW explains, the Colombian military has been guilty of more than 3,000 extrajudicial killings of civilians in what is known as the “false positive” scandal wherein “army personnel murdered civilians and reported them as combatants killed in action, apparently in response to pressure to boost body counts”. This “pressure to boost body counts”, moreover, is coming ultimately from the US which is pursuing an aggressive anti-insurgency policy which rewards the Colombian military for its killing of guerrillas.

Meanwhile, and of special concern to the labor movement in the US, HRW confirms that Colombia remains the most dangerous country in the world for trade unionists with 28

unionists killed in 2011. And, this year has gotten off to a horrible start. Thus, in recent days, three (3) trade unionists have been killed in Colombia – at least one (Victor Manuel Hilarion Palacios) by the Colombian armed forces themselves. In another instance, Mauricio Rondono, a leader of the USO union (the oil union of Colombia and that country’s oldest union) was murdered along with his wife, leaving five children orphaned. Again, such killings do nothing to slow down US aid to the Colombian regime.

Much is to be learned from the case of Colombia. For one, it puts a lie to the US claim, often used to justify US military intervention, of supporting democracy and human rights abroad. In the case of Colombia, the US is indeed fueling massive human and labor rights abuses by supporting a regime that it is literally at war with its own people.

This brings us to the next and most important lesson – violence is not working in Colombia to end the insurgency or to bring about positive change. And yet, it is violence that the US is choosing to use ostensibly to advance such ends. Apparently, the US (the proverbial hammer seeing nails everywhere) does so because violence has become the only tool the US knows to solve problems, despite the fact that this violence almost invariably exacerbates these problems and indeed creates many others. It is clear that in Colombia the only viable solution for a lasting peace, and for real prosperity, is a negotiated settlement to the armed conflict. Tragically, it is such a settlement which the US has refused to support over the years.

Indeed, as *Colombia Reports* explained, the US has actually put out a call in recent days for countries throughout the region to step up concerted, violent assaults on the guerillas in Colombia. Meanwhile, as *Colombia Reports* also explained, it is Cuba which is hosting secret peace talks between insurgents and the Colombian government.

As in the case of Haiti where the Cubans have sent doctors to fight cholera and the US sent soldiers to fight the population, it is Cuba which is playing a positive, peaceful role in our hemisphere; not the US. This fact should be humbling to our leaders in the US if they indeed know humility or shame.

Drowning in Hypocrisy

US: War abroad; austerity at home

Paul Craig Roberts

Former editor of the Wall Street Journal and Assistant Secretary of the US Treasury.

The US government is so full of self-righteousness that it has become a caricature of hypocrisy. Leon Panetta, a former congressman who Obama appointed CIA director and now head of the Pentagon, just told the sailors on the USS Enterprise, an aircraft carrier, that the US is maintaining a fleet of 11 aircraft carriers in order to project sea power against Iran and to convince Iran that “it’s better for them to try to deal with us through diplomacy”.

If it requires 11 aircraft carriers to deal with Iran, how many will Panetta need to project power against Russia and China? But to get on with the main point, Iran has been trying “to deal with us through diplomacy”. The response from Washington has been belligerent threats of military attack, unfounded and irresponsible accusations that Iran is making a nuclear weapon, sanctions and an oil embargo. Washington’s accusations echo Israel’s and are contradicted by Washington’s own intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Why doesn’t Washington respond to Iran in a civilized manner with diplomacy? Really, which of the two countries is the greatest threat to peace?

Washington sends the FBI to raid the homes of peace activists and puts a grand jury to work to create a case against them for aiding a nebulous enemy by protesting Washington’s wars. The Department of Homeland Security unleashes goon cop thugs to brutalize peaceful Occupy Wall Street demonstrators. Washington fabricates cases against Bradley Manning, Julian Assange, and Tarek Mehanna that negate the First Amendment by equating free speech with terrorism and spying. Chicago mayor and former Obama White House chief-of-staff, Rahm Israel Emanuel, pushes an ordinance that outlaws public protests in



the City of Chicago. The list goes on. And in the midst of it all Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other Washington hypocrites accuse Russia and China of stifling dissent.

Washington’s grotesque hypocrisy goes unremarked by the US “media” and in the debates for the Republican presidential nomination. The corrupt Obama “Justice” Department turns a blind eye while goon cop thugs commit gratuitous violence against the citizens who pay the goon cop thugs’ undeserved salaries.

But it is in the War Crimes Arena where Washington shows the greatest hypocrisy. The self-

righteous bigots in Washington are forever rounding up heads of weak states whose countries were afflicted by civil wars and sending them off to be tried as war criminals. All the while Washington indiscriminately kills large numbers of civilians in six or more countries, dismissing its own war crimes as “collateral damage”. Washington violates its own law and international law by torturing people.

On January 13, 2012, Carol Rosenberg of McClatchy Newspapers reported that Spanish judge Pablo Rafael Ruz Gutierrez re-launched an investigation into Washington’s torture

of prisoners in Guantanamo Prison. The previous day British authorities opened an investigation into CIA renditions of kidnapped persons to Libya for torture.

Rosenberg reports that although the Obama regime has refused to investigate the obvious crimes of the Bush regime, and one might add its own obvious crimes, “other countries are still interested in determining whether Bush-era anti-terror practices violated international law”.

There is no question that Bush/Cheney/Obama have trashed the US Constitution, US statutory law, and international law. But Washington, having overthrown justice, has established that might is right. No foreign government is going to send its forces into the US to drag the war criminals out and place them on trial.

The War Criminal Court at the Hague is reserved for Washington’s show trials. No foreign government is going to pay Washington several hundred millions of dollars to turn Bush, Cheney, Obama and their minions over to them in the way the US bought Milosevic from Serbia in order to create the necessary spectacle at the War Crimes Tribunal to justify Washington’s naked aggression against Serbia.

No government can be perfect, because all governments are composed of humans, especially those humans most attracted by power and profit. Nevertheless, in my lifetime I have witnessed an extraordinary deterioration in the integrity of government in the United States. We have reached the point where nothing that our government says is believable. Not even the unemployment rate, the inflation rate, the GDP growth rate, much less Washington’s reasons for its wars, its police state, and its foreign and domestic policies.

Washington has kept America at war for ten years while millions of Americans lost their jobs and their homes. War and a faltering economy have exploded the national debt, and a looming bankruptcy is being blamed on Social Security and Medicare.

The pursuit of war continues. On January 23 Washington’s servile puppets—the EU member states—did Washington’s bidding and imposed an oil embargo on Iran, despite the pleas of Greece, a member of the EU. Greece’s final ruin will come from the higher oil prices from the embargo, as the Greek government realizes.

The embargo is a reckless act. If the US navy tries to intercept oil tankers carrying Iranian oil, large scale war could break out. This, many believe, is Washington’s aim.

It is easy for an embargo to become a blockade, which is an act of war. Remember how easily the UN Security Council’s “no-fly zone” over Libya was turned by the US and its NATO puppets into a military attack on Libya’s armed forces and population centers supportive of Gaddafi.

As the western “democracies” become increasingly lawless, the mask of law that imperialism wears is stripped away and with it the sheen of morality that has been used to cloak hegemonic ambitions. With Iran surrounded and with two of Washington’s fleets in the Persian Gulf, another war of aggression seems inevitable.

Experts say that an attack on Iran by the US and NATO will disrupt the flow of oil that the world needs. The crazed drive for hegemony is so compelling that Washington and its EU puppets show no hesitation in putting their own struggling economies at risk of sharply rising energy costs.

War abroad and austerity at home is the policy that is being imposed on the western “democracies”.