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INTERNATIONAL



Strategic Integration

At the Unasur meeting this week in Argentina, South American nations agreed to pursue a regional energy initiative to secure and utilize strategic resources for the development and progress of member nations. The regional bloc reiterated its refusal to recognize the Honduran regime as legitimate and condemned the law passed last week in Arizona criminalizing immigrants.

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Analysis China and the US collide

As US empire continues in decline, China seeks to gain terrain and influence worldwide.

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Bolivia and Venezuela created new joint ventures and agreements to promote energy and food security in both nations.



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People's power in action

*Venezuelans celebrated International Worker's Day
and gave a lesson in participatory democracy*

This week Venezuelans held two major events demonstrating the inclusive and popular nature of the Bolivarian Revolution. Saturday's May 1st march commemorating worker's rights and history around the world saw tens of thousands in the Caracas streets, empowered and dignified by a government that finally values the importance of the labor force. And Sunday's primary elections in the PSUV made history in a nation used to handpicking candidates at the whim of the powerful.



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Venezuela assumes 49% of refinery in Dominican Republic

On Wednesday, president Hugo Chavez was in the Dominican Republic, signing a new agreement with his counterpart, president Leonel Fernandez, to acquire 49% of the Refindomsa oil refinery, currently belonging to the Dominican state. "This is a very important initiative, because it places us in the heart of the Caribbean. We will send our oil to be refined and distributed not just in the Dominican market, but also throughout the entire Central Caribbean region", explained president Chavez.

Venezuela's Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, Aura Mahuam-pi Ortiz, revealed that the Refindomsa refinery has the capacity to refine up to 34 million barrels of crude oil per day. "This is very important for Venezuela and for all members of Petrocaribe and in general for Latin America", she added.

The energy agreement with the Dominican Republic forms part of Petrocaribe, a cooperation program created by the Venezuelan Government in 2005 to provide low cost oil to Caribbean nations.

Venezuela also maintains a major oil refinery on the island of Curaçao, part of the Dutch Kingdom. The Isla Refinery has been leased by PDVSA, Venezuela's state oil company, since 1986, but in recent years, oil companies connected to powerful interests in the US, such as Valero Oil Company, owned by an associate of the Bush family, have tried to purchase the refinery from the Curaçao government. The US maintains an important strategic military base on Curaçao, which it uses to conduct espionage, reconnaissance and surveillance missions in the region.



Twitter Revolution

President Hugo Chavez entered the realm of cyberspace this week and opened an account on Twitter. In less than one week, @chavezcandanga has received over 200,000 followers from nations around the world. According to the official counter of the social network, www.twittercounter.com, more than 23,000 new followers on average per day have joined Chavez's account.

The projections estimate that within less than one month, @chavezcandanga will have more than one million followers. Chavez joins the ranks of other heads of state, such as US president Barack Obama and UK prime minister Gordon Brown, currently with Twitter accounts. But one huge difference exists between the Venezuelan President and the other world leaders: Chavez is actually reading, responding and using the information from Twitter to interact with people and resolve problems, when necessary.

During a televised event earlier this week, president Chavez read messages from his Twitter account and responded, in real time. He sent his first personal response to a young Mexican girl, wishing her sister Happy Birthday and telling her he's not a dictator, as her original tweet had insinuated, "@marianadelucio Hi Mariana. I am an anti-dictator and I love beautiful Mexico a lot. Wish your sister a Happy Birthday for me. Viva Mexico".

Many hope the Twitter relationship with Chavez will allow for people to enter into direct contact with the popular Latin American President.

The Union of the South advances

In a unanimous decision, the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), designated its first Secretary General, condemned the anti-immigrant law in Arizona, reiterated support for reconstruction efforts in Haiti and Chile and rejected the European Union's invitation to include the illegal Honduras regime in an upcoming summit with Latin American nations



On Tuesday, eight South American presidents met, together with high-level governmental representatives from four other regional nations, in the city of Campana, Argentina to celebrate the Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State of Unasur. The first issue on the agenda was the unanimous designation of ex Argentinean president Nestor Kirchner as the first Secretary General of the South American bloc.

The charismatic former president received the support of all Unasur member nations and was quickly sworn into office during the initial minutes of the meeting. The position of Secretary General will guarantee that Unasur operations and programs are implemented on a constant basis, instead of just during the frequent meetings held by high-level officials throughout the year.

SUPPORT FOR RECONSTRUCTION

South American nations reiterated their support for Haiti, as was expressed during an Extraordinary Summit on Haiti in February, held in Quito, Ecuador. A fund of over 100 million US dollars was established to aid reconstruction efforts in the devastated Caribbean island. Newly named Secretary General Nestor Kirchner was charged during Tuesday's meeting with coordinating the collection of funds from member nations in order to provide the humanitarian and infrastructure development help to Haiti.

During the meeting, support was also expressed for Chile, victim of a massive earthquake last month. Recently elected Chilean president, Sebastian Piñero, was present at the Unasur meeting for the first time, and thanked member nations for the support and solidarity provided to his country.

GREAT POTENTIAL

In declarations during the Unasur meeting in Argentina, Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez advocated Latin American unity. "We should make every effort to turn the page on the conflicts that have divided us for over 200 years and have kept us apart, and have impeded the necessary unity amongst us", he exclaimed, at the same time reiterating his willingness to dialogue with the future government of Colombia.

Presidential elections are scheduled for May 30, 2010 in Colombia, and Venezuela has expressed hope that a new Colombian president would aid in mending regional relations, instead of exacerbating tensions.

President Chavez underlined that the most important achievement of the recent Unasur meeting was the consolidation of the South American bloc. "What's important is that today we conclude this meeting with a Secretary General who will contribute extensively to institutionalizing the political organ of Unasur", he assured, adding that the continent is destined to unify and become a potential world power.

CONDEMNING RACISM

In their final declaration, the Presidents of Unasur included a firm rejection of the "criminalization" of Afro and Latino communities in the United States through the recent "anti-immigrant"

law passed in Arizona. The highly controversial Arizona immigration law permits the discretionary detention of individuals based on suspicion of race, ethnicity, language or immigration status, and is viewed by millions worldwide as a clear violation of basic human rights.

The South American leaders condemned the law as "racist" and a clear "abuse" of basic human freedoms and dignity. The majority of those affected by the law in Arizona are of Latin American descent, and countries throughout the region, together with social movements inside the United States, are rallying to persuade the Obama administration to rule the law unconstitutional and force its retraction.

HONDURAS:

NO LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT

Although there was not complete consensus on the issue of Honduras, Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa affirmed that a majority of Unasur members may choose to not attend the upcoming European Union - Latin America/Caribbean Summit scheduled for later this month in Madrid, Spain, because of the invitation extended to the current illegal regime in Honduras. "There is an overwhelming rejection" of the invitation made by Spain to the current regime leader in Honduras, Porfirio Lobo.

"We don't have to hide the fact that most of us are bothered by this" and it "will impede many Unasur nations from attending

the European Union summit", declared Correa. After the coup d'etat against president Manuel Zelaya last June 28th that ousted him from power, Honduras was expelled from the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Sistem of Central American Integration (SICA). Washington maneuvered to keep Zelaya from returning to power and instead, funded an illegitimate electoral process in the Central American nation that brought Porfirio Lobo to power. A majority of nations around the world have refused to acknowledge his regime as a legitimate government.

MILITARY BASES?

Despite a growing US military presence through defense agreements established with South American nations remaining the largest controversy in the region, the issue was not even addressed in the Unasur meeting this week. Presidents Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and Alan Garcia of Peru, both nations that have recently signed polemic military agreements with Washington, failed to attend the meeting, sending along their Foreign Ministers instead.

Last year, major tension was created through Colombia's defense cooperation agreement with Washington that allows US occupation of seven Colombian military bases and overall territorial usage for conducting regional military operations against what the Pentagon considers, "the threat of anti-US governments".

But Unasur was unable to mediate or resolve the conflict, nor influence Colombia into retracting the agreement with Washington. Last month, the Pentagon signed a similar, yet not as extensive, defense agreement with Brazil. Despite the threat posed to the region by allowing a further US military expansion in Latin America, no discussion or criticism was made regarding the issue.

Nonetheless, the disproportional US military presence in the region remains the largest threat to furthering Latin American integration and unity.



T/ Eva Golinger
P/ Agencies

When empires collide

The United States is an empire in decline. But while the US has steadily been loosing economic clout, it has also increasingly relied on political subversion through methods such as “colored revolutions” to promote regime change, influence through funding NGO’s, and even outright coup d’etats to impose its agenda. When those tactics have failed, military action has been initiated

While the US is in decline and struggling to make alliances, other strong and influential nations, such as China, are preparing to fill in the power gap. China has recently become the third voting power in the World Bank, after the US and Japan, and also holds a veto vote in the United Nations Security Council. China has also managed to displace US dominance in Latin America, Africa and Western Asia through economic ingenuity and peaceful methods, while simultaneously protecting itself from US political influence.

SECURING ALLIANCES; SECURING ENERGY

Economically depressed Djibouti is becoming further entrenched in the military real-estate market as China’s neighbor Japan joins the US in opening a military base along its strategic oil corridor. Prompted by US requests for Japanese forces in the area, the base represents the first major Japanese military presence off of the nation’s mainland since World War II (WWII) and could be in violation of its laws. Japan’s constitution strictly limits military operations to those of self-defense.

Similar to other US and allied military presence in the region, the base is presented as a headquarters for combating frequent, but questionable, piracy activity along the maritime transit route. Yet, it also appears to be an attempt by the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) to expand influence into the Asian-Pacific Theater. Japan has formerly sent troops to Iraq and has aided in logistical support for the war in Afghanistan, falling under the NATO umbrella.

Several nations’ navies patrol the tumultuous region, but Japan, the US and other NATO members will soon have the only permanent bases in the region.

Ironically, the plan comes at a time of immense protest against US military presence on Japan’s mainland. Since the end of WWII, the US military has occupied much of the prime land surrounding the Japanese coast. Locals complain of environmental



degradation, noise, friction with US military forces and threat of negative effects on their fishing industry. Hopes that the democratically elected Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, would decrease US military presence on the Japanese island of Okinawa have only led to discontent in light of the increased military alliance with Washington.

ATLANTIC MOVES TO COUNTER PACIFIC

Japan isn’t the only Pacific nation that is creating ties with NATO. The US/NATO strategy to control the world’s energy supply has continued to expand throughout the Asian region. The original rhetoric that NATO came in to existence solely to counter the “Soviet threat” has long since dissolved and NATO has become a tool to dominate economic trade and strategic resources worldwide.

Washington has also lost the majority of its industrial capabilities and economic sovereignty to countries like China, where subsistence wages are common and enable companies to survive on cheap labor

The US maintains a Pacific global missile network in Australia, Japan and South Korea, and late last year bolstered Taiwan’s arsenal with Patriot missiles, much to China’s dismay. A multibillion-dollar effort with Japan to expand the existing missile system in the region was also announced last month. NATO’s integrated missile system surrounds the entirety of Asia.

New Zealand, South Korea and Australia have troops stationed in support of NATO’s ground war in Afghanistan and in April, India and Singapore participated in war exercises with the US in the region.

With the amount of military consolidation in the Pacific and the threats to invade or directly attack Iran coming from Washington, China and the US appear to be on a collision course.

CHINA WON’T BEND

Russia and China are the two most significant powers in Asia capable of contesting NATO’s ongoing crawl eastward, but China’s close economic relations with the US increases its influence and power over strategic decisions. Following US military agreements with Pacific region nations, China openly threatened to take action that could lead to a devaluation of the US dollar. China holds an estimated \$1 trillion USD of Washington’s debt. As a response to this tacit threat, a trade war could erupt, though it would not likely benefit either country and could significantly impact the global economy.

The US dollar has been extremely overvalued worldwide, a policy that makes acquisition efforts for US financiers cheaper, but has caused severe detriment to the the US workforce, where nearly 50 million citizens depend on food stamps to survive. Washington has also lost the majority of its industrial capabilities and economic sovereignty to countries like China, where subsistence wages are common and enable companies to survive on cheap labor.

For many years China’s economy kept its currency fixed to the dollar instead of letting it float against other currencies on the global exchange market. In an unprecedented feat, China managed to industrialize itself rapidly in large part by relying on a weak currency against the dollar, which in turn made exports cheaper and more available to US consumers. Due to massive corruption in the US markets and a faltering economy, China has been increasingly diversifying its own economy by investing heavily in developing regions such as Latin America, Africa and other parts of Asia in order to find more reliable markets.

At present, China is considering revaluing its currency, which would make its exports to the US more expensive and could weaken the dollar. Following that announcement, Washington accused China of engaging in active currency manipulation, but later backed down as president Obama declared China’s currency a sovereign issue.

The contentious issue is Iran. China is opposed to any sanctions against Iran, one of its main oil suppliers, and does not want any more war in the region. China views the US/NATO-driven conflict as more about global hegemony than nuclear weapons. An attack against Iran could very easily trigger a World War III, and China, though it has been reserved with its military power, would no doubt protect its interests.

T/ Benji Lewis
P/ Agencies

Fresh faces for the Revolution

New levels of participation and incorporation of candidates from grassroots, youth and community movements characterized the electoral process to select Socialist Party candidates for the upcoming National Assembly elections in September

In a true showing of civility and grassroots participation, last Sunday members of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) elected 110 candidates for the upcoming legislative elections in September. More than 2.5 million members of PSUV, a newly formed political party to support the revolutionary process underway in Venezuela, came out to the polls in an unprecedented electoral event. In the past, candidates have been hand-picked or selected through "consensus" by party leaders and constituents, without input from the people.

At the crack of dawn on Sunday, registered members of PSUV lined up to vote at 3,820 polls across the nation, selecting from a total of 3,527 nominated candidates, although only voting for those corresponding to their regional area.

The nominations were completed in early March, after a collective decision regarding the proposal of candidates was made by party members during the Extraordinary Congress of the PSUV, which concluded last week. Each regional circuit, comprised of several assemblies and battalions of the Socialist Party, nominated candidates for the primary elections, a majority of which came from communities and had little or no public exposure.

"We need indestructible candidates that aren't afraid to confront the opposition and don't have any skeletons in the closet", emphasized president Chavez during the initial nomination phase. "We have to give the example of unity. Lets leave the shows and fights to the opposition, who are already stabbing each others' backs to chose candidates that won't be elected by the people but rather by themselves".

AN EXERCISE IN CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

Sunday's primary elections were overseen by the National Electoral Council (CNE) - the nation's elec-



toral body that regulates all voter processes in the country, and voting went smoothly. According to Minister of Interior and Justice Tarek El Aissami, no unusual incidents occurred and the process was carried out with "complete normality".

As president Hugo Chavez cast his vote around noon on Sunday, he applauded the process and recognized its importance for furthering citizen participation, "By electing candidates like this, we're guaranteeing a much deeper connection between the National Assembly and communities and grassroots movements". Cilia Flores, current president of the National Assembly, exclaimed as she voted, "This is a demonstration of what we'll see on September 26th, a huge popular victory that strengthens the revolution and the leadership of president Hugo Chavez".

YOUTH AND NEW FACES

One of the most anticipated outcomes of the primary elections was whether or not the same party leaders and members would retain positions of power, or if new names would surface, demonstrating an overall desire of Venezuelans to replenish government with fresh faces.

Of the final 110 elected candidates, twenty-seven are under 35 and twenty-two are women. Only 30%



of the candidates chosen in the primaries are currently legislators seeking re-election, which means 70% are new faces, at least in this area of government.

Nonetheless, many of the elected candidates also currently have positions working for mayors or governors or in ministries, are members of state political bureaus of the PSUV, while a similar proportion do not hold any sort of political position at present.

Some of the more well known figures victorious in Sunday's primaries included Aristobulo Isturiz, vice president of the northeastern region of the PSUV bureau and previous Minister of Education; Freddy Bernal, ex mayor of Caracas; PSUV youth leader Robert Serra; Andreina Tarazona, youth leader; Jorge Amorin, community media activist and urban youth journalist; and Dario Vivas, current vice president of the National Assembly.

Rodriguez also contrasted the candidates "imposed by the opposition through media or US influence. Our constituents chose young people to be in the vanguard of the PSUV, but in the opposition parties, students

and youth were displaced and demeaned by the traditional 'dinosaurs' of the Venezuelan right-wing". Last week, several opposition parties, joined together in the Democratic Unity coalition, held primary elections in twenty-two circuits throughout the country. The remainder of candidates for the 165 seats in the National Assembly were imposed by party leaders or chosen through "consensus" by the political and economic elite that backs the opposition. High profile student and youth leaders, such as Yon Goicochea and Ricardo Sanchez, were told to step down from proposing their candidacies, to allow for older, more traditional political leaders to position themselves for the upcoming September elections.

Julio Chavez, a mayor renowned for promoting and helping to build a participatory Municipal Constituent Assembly in the city of Carora in Lara, was also elected, while Mario Silva, well known host of the nightly television show La Hojilla (The Razorblade) was not. In his place, economist and television commentator Jesus Farias, took the candidacy by popular vote. "There is a large presence of young people, community activists, farmers and land rights activists, as well as party leaders amongst the winners", exclaimed Jorge Rodriguez, Organizational Coordinator of PSUV. Rodriguez also believes that the amount of youth represented in almost all of the voting circuits nationwide is "comforting". His analysis of the overall results is positive. "I believe these 110 brothers and sisters, along with the 110 brothers and sisters who will be their supplements, are going to form a working team with the great red machine that will bring Chavez another grand victory on September 26th", during the legislative elections.

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DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

The Socialist Party is "from its creation, a champion of participatory democracy", affirmed Jorge Rodriguez. "There is no political movement in Venezuela's history that has consulted its members in the same quantity and quality as the PSUV has", he added, referring to the methods for which the National Bureau was selected, the delegates to the Extraordinary Congress chosen, and the candidates for public positions, such as during the 2008 mayor and governmental races, and the most recent primary process for the National Assembly, elected.

"Never before in Venezuela has anyone been able to nominate themselves as a candidate, without funding or support from party leaders. More than 3,500 candidates were involved in these primary elections and a majority were faces new to politics". Unlike opposition parties, which charged candidates a minimum of 40,000 bolivares (about \$9,000 USD) to enter their primary race, the PSUV placed no restrictions on access to the electoral process.

In fact, as leader of the PSUV, president Chavez implored all candidates to conduct modest campaigns and not to "abuse positions of power or resources". Some, of course, failed to abide by his request and conducted unfair campaigns. But overall, the process was widely viewed as positive, participatory and democratic, and as a true breakthrough for Venezuela's political party model that traditionally has sought to maintain power in the hands of few.

T/ Eva Golinger
P/ CO File

Venezuelans marched on Saturday to celebrate the International Day of Workers. President Hugo Chavez also implemented a 15% wage increase, and the government broadened social security entitlements

The main national march was in the capital Caracas, where people chanted, danced, waved placards and banners and played music as they marched towards the presidential palace Miraflores.

While there were no official or police estimates, various participants in the march estimated that "hundreds of thousands" of people turned out, celebrating the achievements of the Bolivarian revolution and its promotion of wage increases, better working conditions and better life conditions for the poor majority.

A range of union and worker representatives addressed the crowd from the main stage and 7,000 police and guards looked after the march.

There were also smaller rallies and various cultural events and public meetings around the country. Radio Nacional de Venezuela (RNV) reported that "hundreds of workers" mobilized in the municipality of San Francisco in Zulia state, and Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias (ABN) reported on a large march in the city of Merida, where the governor of the state of Merida and the state leader of UNETE, Venezuela's main umbrella trade union organization, addressed the crowd. In the state of Carabobo, ABN reported a small "caminata" (short march) that marked the day.

THE OPPOSITION ON MAY DAY

The opposition, through the CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan Workers) also organized a protest on May Day. By noon, however, only around 200 people had turned up. They held placards with slogans against "importing communism from Cuba" and saying "We don't want a military dictatorship".

The secretary general of the CTV, Manuel Cova, demanded a general 40% increase in salaries.

The CTV was Venezuela's oldest trade union umbrella organization, or labor federation, but when it participated in the 2002 coup against Chavez, and the subsequent oil industry shutdown in 2002-3, it lost mass worker support. Workers and



unionists supporting the Bolivarian Revolution later formed the National Union of Workers, now called UNETE, which now has around 80% of Venezuela's trade unions affiliated.

Opposition media in Venezuela boycotted or minimized any coverage of the large Caracas demonstration. El Universal, one of the country's largest daily newspapers, attempted to create a sense of chaos in the capital, headlining "Closure of Avenues Urdaneta and Libertador collapse the city", although everyone knew on May Day, marches take place throughout the nation, and it was a Saturday. In general, opposition press gave ample coverage to the small CTV protest and just barely brief coverage to the large pro-government concentration.

El Nacional's, (the other major national newspaper), article on the pro-government mobilization was half the size of its article on the CTV and headlined, "Chavez didn't attend government mobilization on May 1st".

WAGE INCREASES

During a ceremony on Friday in Caracas where Chavez handed out

266 "Orders of Merit" to electricity, rural, social service and construction workers, he also announced that the government would advance a previously declared wage increase of 15% that was due to come into effect on September 1st. The increase would now be implemented as of May 1st.

On February 23rd, the government increased the minimum wage by 25%, which was to be made in two parts, 10% on March 1st, and the remaining 15% as of September 1st. With the 15% moved forward to May 1st, the minimum wage is now BsF 1,223.89 (US\$ 284.62).

The minimum wage is also used to calculate other salaries, for example some teachers receive three times the minimum wage, as the amount received by pensioners.

Chavez said the wage increase overall means an additional BsF 10 billion (\$2.3 billion USD) in spending for the government. Further, he announced a 40% wage increase for doctors of the Venezuelan Institute of Social Security (IVSS), the same amount he announced on March 10th for doctors working for the Ministry of Health

and which also came into effect on May 1st.

More people will also be eligible for social security. Previously, widows received a 40% pension, but with the recent modification of the social security law, as of May 1st, they will be entitled to a full pension, or when there are multiple "survivors" of the deceased, such as wives and ex wives with children, the pension will be divided amongst them.

According to Radiomundial, 1.45 million people are currently receiving pensions from IVSS, an increase of 300% from 1998, before the Chavez government. The IVSS will also now provide special pensions to over 20,000 retired rural workers and fishers.

"The [rural workers and fishers] work their whole life and in many cases they are exploited, and no one ever thought about them when they arrived at old age", Chavez said.

Chavez concluded by calling on the Venezuelan working class to take on a broader vision and struggle not just for basic workplace demands, but also for the development of a new society. "Congratulations on your day..

Participation of the working class

During the May 1st celebrations commemorating the struggles of workers around the world, Venezuelan laborers ratified their commitment to continue strengthening the force of the working class within the context of the new socialist model. Spokesperson for the Workers Front of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), Rafael Chacon, explained that one of the most relevant and important achievements in the socialist process underway in Venezuela has been the active participation of the working class.

"Now the collective contracts are discussed and debated with workers", indicated Chacon. "And one example was the discussion that took place with workers in the electrical and oil industries, as well as the current process of debate regarding Plan Socialist Guayana, which contemplates worker participation in the management of companies and factories to transform them from a capitalist production model to a socialist one", he added. Chacon also pointed out that in Venezuela, employment stability is guaranteed by law.

Ricardo Menendez, Minister of Science, Technology and Intermediary Industries emphasized that with the arrival of President Chavez, the gaps and labor asymmetries have ended. "There has been a profound revindication of the Venezuelan working class as had never occurred before, in part because the power of workers has increased under the new system of laws. Today there is direct participation of workers in factories and industries, and they are empowered and aware of their rights".

this century is your day, the century of revolution, of socialism, with class-consciousness and commitment to the struggle against capitalism", he exclaimed.

T/ Tamara Pearson
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Bolivia and Venezuela: Food and energy a priority

During Bolivian president Evo Morales's first official visit to Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez's home state of Barinas last Thursday, the two socialist allies agreed to continue increasing bi-national cooperation in the areas of food and energy production

The presidents signed agreements to create six joint companies to increase exploration of natural gas, oil refining and exploitation, and the production of food, particularly potatoes and corn.

Venezuela also agreed to export asphalt to Bolivia in exchange for soybean oil, and to construct a petrochemical plant for the production of Urea, an agricultural fertilizer, in Bolivia.

Venezuela's state oil company, PDVSA, already began exploring for gas and oil in Bolivia and exporting 300,000 barrels of oil per day to its South American neighbor as part of a 2007 energy accord.

The official visit took place in Chavez's home state of Barinas, in which the Andean Mountains descend into the Caribbean country's vast, hot, fertile plains.

Shirts soaked and faces covered with beads of sweat, Morales and Chavez toured Chavez's humble childhood home, while the leader of Venezuela's "Bolivarian Revolution" told stories about the political history of the region.

"This was a guerrilla warfare zone in the 60's", Chavez recounted, referring to armed groups who fought against persecution by the US-backed, neo-liberal governments preceding Chavez. "I was 6 years old and here there were people in these and other towns who went to join the guerrillas, and because of that, the empire put an anti-guerrilla post in the Marquesaña".

The Marquesaña used to be an 8,490-hectare (21,000 acres) estate owned by a wealthy Venezuelan family. In 2005, the Chavez government purchased a large portion of the estate under provisions of the 2001 Land Law that allows the government to re-distribute private lands that are found to be idle.



the future because someday our entire national territory will be socialist territory", Chavez said.

NEW SCHOOL FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The two presidents also attended the inauguration of a public special education school named after the Venezuelan writer, lawyer, and educator Cecilio Acosta.

The three-room school, based in Chavez's hometown of Sabaneta, will be attended by 28 children and 19 adults with disabilities. It includes therapy and treatment facilities managed by the national public health care program, Barrio Adentro, which provides free, universal health care services.

During the visit, Chavez and Morales thanked each other. "Thank you for taking care of our friend, Chavez, who has become a commander of the liberation forces not only of America but of the whole world", Morales told the local population.

"He is the world leader of the defense of the environment. A short while ago we went to Cochabamba, and people from all over the world came. Evo said it there, and here we say it on this land, which is our soil where we were born: Pachamama or death, we must save the Earth", said Chavez.

The Venezuelan president was referring to last week's World Peoples' Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where Morales, Chavez, and tens of thousands of climate justice activists and world leaders called for the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol and a transition from capitalism to socialism in order to stop global warming.

Thursday's official meeting in Venezuela was part of the two countries' agreement to meet three times per year to strengthen bi-national ties and defend their governments' socialist projects from attacks by the United States and its allies in Latin America's wealthy elite class.

Chavez also holds meetings every three or four months with the presidents of Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, and Nicaragua, among others, in order to strengthen regional integration.

T/James Suggett
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P/Presidential Press

Strengthening ALBA

During the recent visit made by president Evo Morales of Bolivia to Venezuela, both nations signed a Cooperation Agreement in Tourism and a Program of University Scholarships offered to Bolivian students from varying academic levels. As part of the Bolivarian Alliance of the Americas (ALBA), Bolivia and Venezuela are fortifying relations on all levels and encouraging new industries and projects in order to mutually benefit each nation.

Presidents Morales and Chavez proposed the creation of a new social program for all ALBA nations, Mission Mother Earth, in order to further social protection and conservation projects and policies in member nations. Recently, Bolivia hosted the People's Summit on the Rights of Mother Earth with the objective of creating a mass dialogue between social movements and governments

The government used the land to found the Florentino Technical Center for Socialist Production, which Morales and Chavez visited on Thursday. The state-funded center demonstrated the results of its four-year project to improve cattle



in order to find solutions to the ongoing destruction of the planet, caused by the capitalist-consumerist model.

Through ALBA, cooperation between indigenous communities in Venezuela and Bolivia was also consolidated, based on principles of equality, sovereignty, mutual respect and a communal-oriented vision that seeks to recognize the

production through crossbreeding and artificial insemination.

The center is part of a food security and production network formed by the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA), a regional trade bloc based on the

cultural identity of the original peoples of both nations.

The agreements solidified between Bolivia and Venezuela during president Morales' visit to the Andean-Caribbean nation were all based on values of cooperation, integration, mutual benefits and solidarity, which are the founding ideals of ALBA.

values of solidarity and cooperation, of which Bolivia and Venezuela are members.

Sitting beside Morales, Chavez described the Florentino Center as "a socialist territory". Visiting the center "was like a journey to

Venezuela's Super-8 in Shanghai

The Venezuelan Government, and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is participating in Expo Shanghai 2010, along with 230 countries, with a spectacular pavillion that aims to present Venezuela's vast and diverse political, cultural and social treasures to the world.

The pavillion is a museum full of novelties, ideas and revolutionary proposals for the twenty-first century. The extraordinary exhibit, exclusively designed for Expo Shanghai 2010, reveals the major transformations Venezuela has experienced through its Bolivarian Revolution during the last 11 years.

Venezuela is one of only five Latin American countries with a pavillion of its own at Expo Shanghai 2010, along with Mexico, Brazil, Cuba and Chile, and it's the first year that Venezuela has created a permanent exhibit that goes beyond just its outer structure. Expo Shanghai 2010 is an event of great international importance for the promotion of cultures, sustainable development and environmental protection, where more than 70 million visitors are expected throughout the six-month long spectacle, from May 1 to October 31, 2010.

BETTER LIFE, BETTER CITY

The motto selected by the organizers for Expo Shanghai 2010, "Better city, Better life", emphasizes the importance of proposals and urban solutions that can guarantee a future for the planet's major cities. Venezuela, nonetheless, chose to illustrate its perspective of an alternative to the eco-predatory capitalist development system -in the midst of an era of climate change-through a different concept. The Venezuelan pavillion at Expo Shanghai 2010 is a museological endeavor that arises from the idea that cities can only remain alive and sustainable in the twenty-first century by addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty. The factors that originate exclusion, deprivation and violence - all problems faced by today's societies, must be changed in order to guarantee survival of our planet and species.

As a result of this innovative concept, Venezuela reversed the motto of Expo-Shanghai 2010 to "Better life, Better city". In Venezuela, the Revolution underway is based on a belief of the collective, the need to look after everybody's lives, the implementation of policies of inclusion and social justice. The Venezuelan Government, led by president Hugo Chavez, firmly believes that if equality is not established, there will be no sustainable cities in the XXI century. Venezuela is certain that the right to life, which entails the rights to health, education and food, are the cornerstones necessary to build a better city, without exclusion - a city that is built and grows from the happiness of its people. That is the Socialism of the twenty-first century promoted by Venezuela.



Venezuela and China, a lasting partnership

Thirty-six years ago, on June 28, 1974, Venezuela and China established diplomatic relations for the first time. Since then, the two countries have been progressively building a bond founded on friendship and mutual respect, strengthening more and more each day.

It is no coincidence that relations with China are advancing during the government of president Chavez. Venezuela's current foreign policy is based on principles similar to those that guide China's foreign policy. Actions in the international arena are determined by respecting the principles of non-intervention in internal affairs, sovereignty and the equality between States. Both countries believe in the defense of world peace as a supreme value; they promote the pacific resolution of disputes and foster multipolarity as a way towards balance and constructive stability for the development of all peoples.

Since 1999, Venezuela and China have intensified dialogue and political agree-

ments, with the exchange of numerous visits by high-ranking officials, including six visits by president Chavez to the China (1999, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2009) and the visits to Venezuela in 2001 by China's president Jiang Zemin; vice-president Zeng Qinghong in 2005; member of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China's permanent committee, Li Changchun, in 2007; Vice Premier Hui Liangyu in May 2008; and the recent visit of vice-president Xi Jinping in February 2009.

This fluent and permanent dialogue has generated extraordinary and concrete results. Trade exchange has experienced an unprecedented increase, and cooperation between the two countries currently amounts to more than 300 bilateral agreements, most of them signed during the government of president Hugo Chavez. As a result of these agreements, 69 projects are underway that cover all fields of cooperation possible between two countries.

A WAY OF LIFE

"Venezuela is not selling a country of tourist attractions at Expo Shanghai 2010, or one of technological innovations, as many do at these events", explained Venezuelan Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs,

importance of our cultural diversity, the role of the People's Power, and how public space is incorporated into the construction of a more humanist and socialist urban model", said Porras.

The Venezuelan pavillion at Expo Shanghai 2010 was built in the shape of a figure "8", symbolizing the eight stars on the Venezuelan flag and the number of luck in China. The space contains a main plaza, with a statue of Venezuelan independence hero and liberator, Simon Bolivar, an auditorium and a restaurant featuring typical Venezuelan foods and delicacies, including some of the best coffee, chocolate and rum in the world.

The interior of the pavillion houses several photographic and video art exhibits, and an installation of a "shapono", a typical indigenous communal home. The auditorium will be used for concerts, lectures and other events, including a spectacular Independence Day celebration with a concert from world-renowned Venezuelan composer, Gustavo Dudamel, and the National Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra, on July 5, 2010.

The figure "8" pavillion extends more than 3,000 square meters and cost approximately \$15 million USD to build. Venezuela plans to maintain the pavillion permanently in Shanghai as a museum and cultural space to bridge ties between both nations.

Temir Porras. "Venezuela is projecting a model of life, an integral collection of values, a political alternative oriented towards the socialization and the democratization of city, habitat and living", he added.

"The pavillion emphasizes the particular

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OPINION

Have a nice world war, folks

Here is news of the Third World War. The United States has invaded Africa. US troops have entered Somalia, extending their war front from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Yemen and now the Horn of Africa. In preparation for an attack on Iran, American missiles have been placed in four Persian Gulf states, and "bunker-buster" bombs are said to be arriving at the US base on the British island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

In Gaza, the sick and abandoned population, mostly children, is being entombed behind underground American-supplied walls in order to reinforce a criminal siege. In Latin America, the Obama administration has secured seven bases in Colombia, from which to wage a war of attrition against the popular democracies in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Paraguay. Meanwhile, the Secretary of "Defense" Robert Gates complains that "the general [European] public and the political class" are so opposed to war they are an "impediment" to peace.

According to an American general, the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan is not so much a real war as a "war of perception". Thus, the recent "liberation of the city of Marja" from the Taliban's "command and control structure" was pure Hollywood. Marja is not a city; there was no Taliban command and control. The heroic liberators killed the usual civilians, poorest of the poor. Otherwise, it was fake. A war of perception is meant to provide fake news for the folks back home, to make a failed colonial adventure seem worthwhile and patriotic, as if The Hurt Locker were real and parades of flag-wrapped coffins through the Wiltshire town of Wooten Bassett were not a cynical propaganda exercise.

"War is fun", the helmets in Vietnam used to say with bleakest irony, meaning that if a war is revealed as having no purpose other than to justify voracious power in the cause of lucrative fanaticisms such as the weapons industry, the



danger of truth beckons. This danger can be illustrated by the liberal perception of Tony Blair in 1997 as one "who wants to create a world [where] ideology has surrendered entirely to values" (Hugo Young, the Guardian) compared with today's public reckoning of a liar and war criminal.

Western war-states such as the US and Britain are not threatened by the Taliban or any other introverted tribesmen in faraway places, but by the anti-war instincts of their own citizens. Consider the draconian sentences handed down in London to scores of young people who protested Israel's assault on Gaza in January last year. Following demonstrations in which paramilitary police "kettled" (corralled) thousands,

first-offenders have received two and a half years in prison for minor offences that would not normally carry custodial sentences. On both sides of the Atlantic, serious dissent exposing illegal war has become a serious crime.

Silence in other high places allows this moral travesty. Across the arts, literature, journalism and the law, liberal elites, having hurried away from the debris of Blair and now Obama, continue to fudge their indifference to the barbarism and aims of western state crimes by promoting retrospectively the evils of their convenient demons, like Saddam Hussein. With Harold Pinter gone, try compiling a list of famous writers, artists and advocates whose principles are not consumed by the "market" or

neutered by their celebrity. Who among them have spoken out about the holocaust in Iraq during almost 20 years of lethal blockade and assault? And all of it has been deliberate. On 22 January 1991, the US Defence Intelligence Agency predicted in impressive detail how a blockade would systematically destroy Iraq's clean water system and lead to "increased incidences, if not epidemics of disease". So the US set about eliminating clean water for the Iraqi population: one of the causes, noted Unicef, of the deaths of half a million Iraqi infants under the age of five. But this extremism apparently has no name.

Norman Mailer once said he believed the United States, in its endless pursuit of war and domina-

tion, had entered a "pre-fascist era". Mailer seemed tentative, as if trying to warn about something even he could not quite define. "Fascism" is not right, for it invokes lazy historical precedents, conjuring yet again the iconography of German and Italian repression. On the other hand, American authoritarianism, as the cultural critic Henry Giroux pointed out recently, is "more nuance, less theatrical, more cunning, less concerned with repressive modes of control than with manipulative modes of consent."

This is Americanism, the only predatory ideology to deny that it is an ideology. The rise of tentacular corporations that are dictatorships in their own right and of a military that is now a state with the state, set behind the façade of the best democracy 35,000 Washington lobbyists can buy, and a popular culture programmed to divert and stultify, is without precedent. More nuanced perhaps, but the results are both unambiguous and familiar. Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, the senior United Nations officials in Iraq during the American and British-led blockade, are in no doubt they witnessed genocide. They saw no gas chambers. Insidious, undeclared, even presented wittily as enlightenment on the march, the Third World War and its genocide proceeded, human being by human being.

In the coming election campaign in Britain, the candidates will refer to this war only to laud "our boys". The candidates are almost identical political mummies shrouded in the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. As Blair demonstrated a mite too eagerly, the British elite loves America because America allows it to barrack and bomb the natives and call itself a "partner". We should interrupt their fun.

John Pilger

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