

## Washington beating war drums -

### Act now, defend the Venezuelan revolution!

On the eve of Condoleeza Rice's tour of Latin America, an extremely provocative article appeared on April 26 in *The New York Times*. Under the title of "U.S. Considers Toughening Stance Toward Venezuela" and signed by Juan Forero, the article quotes a number of unnamed "American officials" basically saying that "the Bush administration is weighing a tougher approach, including funnelling more money to foundations and business and political groups opposed to his leftist government".

Forero claims in his article that a "multiagency task force in Washington has been working on shaping a new approach, one that high-ranking American policy makers say would most likely veer toward a harder line". The article quotes another unnamed American official as saying: "The conclusion that is increasingly being drawn in Washington is that a realistic, pragmatic relationship, in which we can agree to disagree on some issues but make progress on others, does not seem to be in the cards (...) We offered them a more pragmatic relationship, but obviously if they do not want it, we can move to a more confrontational approach."

Another "high-ranking Republican aide on Capitol Hill who works on Latin America policy" (also unnamed) explains: "What's happening here is they realize this thing is deteriorating rapidly and it's going to require some more attention (...) The current look-the-other-way policy is not working."

The truth of the matter, however, is that the US administration has always had a "tough" stance towards Venezuela. High-ranking United States officials met with Venezuelan opposition leaders in the weeks and days before the military coup that ousted Chavez for 47 hours on April 11, 2002. There is now hard evidence that the CIA knew that the coup was being plotted, and Washington was the first capital in the world to recognise the illegitimate government of Pedro Carmona which was installed by the coup.

The Bush administration supplied funds to opposition groups that organised the coup in 2002. It also funded the sabotage of the oil industry in December 2002 and January 2003, which cost the country's economy some 10,000 million dollars. It financed the attempt to remove Chavez through a recall referendum. It is difficult to see how Washington's stance towards the democratically elected government of Venezuela could actually get "tougher" - short of direct military intervention.

Since the beginning of this year the barrage of accusations against the Venezuelan government by US officials has certainly increased in volume and intensity. The US has actively tried to stop the sale of weapons to Venezuela by Spain, Brazil and Russia (after the US itself refused to supply spare parts for Venezuela's ageing fleet of F16s), and has accused Venezuela of being a "negative force in the region" (Condoleeza Rice). The US administration and media have stepped up a belligerent campaign against Venezuela.

The democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez has been accused of everything from linking up with North Korea, supplying arms to the Colombian FARC guerrillas and funding the "subversive" MAS in Bolivia, to forming an axis of evil with Cuba's Castro, starting an arms race in Latin America, and harbouring Al-Qaeda terrorists. A recent article



in the *National Review* (which appeared on April 11, the day of the third anniversary of the coup in Venezuela), carried the title "Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez constitute an axis of evil". In this extremely belligerent article, Otto Reich, until recently Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, openly advocated a policy of "confronting" the "emerging axis of subversion".

There is no substance to any of these accusations, for which not the slightest shred of proof is offered. They are just meant to create an impression – the kind of impression that can be used to justify an act of aggression. As we learned long ago from Josef Goebbels, even the most blatant lie, if it is repeated often enough, is taken to be the truth. In the same way, the lie that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction was used as an excuse for the criminal invasion of Iraq. Everybody now knows that it was a lie, but at the time enough people believed it to permit a naked act of aggression to be presented as an act of national self-defence. Now history is being repeated.

When pressed for more details on the allegations about "Venezuelan shortcomings with respect to the counter narcotics issue", Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman for the US Department of State, on March 30th, could not think of anything coherent to say. He merely mumbled: "Not really. I'll look and see what we've said on the past, but off the top of my head I can't give you a detailed answer." On such flimsy "evidence" is the case for armed aggression against Venezuela being constructed in Washington.

There is no doubt that all these newspaper articles and statements do not appear just by chance. One has the feeling that they are part of an orchestrated propaganda campaign aimed not only at isolating Venezuela, but also at preparing US public opinion for more direct forms of intervention against the Bolivarian Revolution. The self-same methods were used in the past to justify US interventions against the Cuban Revolution, the Arbenz government in Guatemala, the government of Salvador Allende in Chile, and more recently in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Grenada and Haiti. The hired press pours out a stream of abuse and calumnies in order to soften up public opinion. Then the heavy squad moves in. In some circles, this is known as the "freedom of the press".

Otto Reich would know about this. In the 1980s he was at the head of the State Department's Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America and the Caribbean (OPD). This was nothing less than a propaganda outfit, which amongst other tasks coordinated the planting of editorial articles in newspapers openly backing the Contras and attacking those who criticised Washington's support for the murderous cut-throat gangs of thugs of the Contras in Nicaragua. The Iran-Contra investigation found that Reich, a Cuban exile, had carried out "prohibited, covert propaganda" on behalf of the

Contras (the full declassified record of Otto Reich while involved in the OPD can be found at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB40/>).

But let's go back to Juan Forero's article. The only "sources" he gives for this toughening of US policy towards Venezuela are all "unnamed officials". The day after the article was published in The New York Times, Washington issued a denial of its contents, but in fact it was a "denial" that denied nothing. He said "those are not reports that reflect any reality in terms of decisions by the United States to change its policy." So, in fact what he means is that there is no change in the US policy, which was already very confrontational before Forero was briefed by his famous "unnamed officials".

Forero's journalistic record in relation to Venezuela is at best shaky. On the day after the military coup in Venezuela he wrote an article for The New York Times which did not mention the word "coup" once and had the amazing headline "Venezuela Chief Forced to Resign; Civilian Installed". This sounds like a well-rehearsed pantomime and it works like this: Washington leaks some disinformation it would like published to a friendly journalist. The material is published but no sources are quoted. Once the "news" is already in the public domain and has been picked up by the major news agencies and outlets, then the State Department issues a "denial" which is not reported anywhere. The damage has already been done.

It is clear that the US administration is increasingly hostile towards the Bolivarian revolution, which is standing firm against US imperialism. George Bush is frustrated because all the attempts to smash it have failed. But the strategy of isolating Venezuela from other Latin American governments has also failed so far. Donald Rumsfeld's recent tour of the region was not at all successful in this respect. But these failures do not mean that Washington will abandon its aggressive stance towards Venezuela. On the contrary, it means that its aggression will be stepped up and acquire dangerous proportions if it is not halted by a massive movement of protest from below.

This renewed campaign against the Venezuelan revolution represents a serious threat, which the world labour movement will neglect at its peril. In all previous occasions in which this kind of language has been used, it has always been the preparation for military intervention. Such interventions do not necessarily take the form of an actual invasion. The fact that the US army is bogged down in an unwinnable war in Iraq makes this a problematical option at this stage. But the examples of Chile and Nicaragua indicate that there are other options: a dirty war of terrorism and subversion,



the assassination of President Chavez, provocations leading to war with Colombia, which the Pentagon has already turned into an armed camp. These and many other weapons are at the disposal of Bush, Rumsfeld and Rice.

All the warnings are present. The only force that can defeat the planned aggression against the Venezuelan Revolution is the international Labour Movement and the workers and the youth of the United States. It is time to sound the alarm! Venezuela is in danger! It is imperative that the workers, trade unionists, youth and students, intellectuals and artists, black and white, should unite to organize a protest movement so powerful that George Bush and the right wing gang in the White House are compelled to think again.

Let us not wait until it is too late. Let us act now to forestall this act of naked aggression of a powerful imperialist state against a South American country that is fighting for its most elementary rights: the right to national self-determination, the right to live its life in peace and to determine its own future without foreign interference, the right to build a society based on the principles of freedom, justice and equality.

This is the real reason why the most reactionary circles in the USA wish to destroy the Venezuelan Revolution: because it sets an example to the millions of poor and exploited people in the whole of Latin America. Furthermore, this is the path that the Venezuelan people have democratically chosen. Chavez and his policies have been ratified in more than 7 electoral contests and referenda since he was first elected in 1998. This example is dangerous, not to the ordinary citizens of the United States, the workers and the poor, but to Wall Street, to the banks, the big corporations and the oil barons who are the real constituents of George W. Bush.

This right wing administration, which is trying to depict Venezuela as a "danger to peace" because it is purchasing some rifles from Russia, is spending a staggering \$500,000 million on arms every year. It is spending at least \$6,000 million every month on the occupation of Iraq while slashing public expenditure on pensions and Medicare.

Let us act now! Reproduce this article, translate it and pass it on to as many people as possible. Pass resolutions of protest in your local trade union branch. Organize pickets, lobbies, rallies and demonstrations. The Hands Off Venezuela Campaign is preparing a major initiative for the First of May. Contact us now and join our fight against these criminal actions of the imperialists.

By Jorge Martin and Alan Woods -  
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