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UNDERSTANDING THE SILENCE OF VENEZUELA

In December 4th, 2005 National Parliamentary elections were held in Venezuela with the following results:

1. The Governmental party MVR won all the seats of the National Assembly in an election with 25% turnout. However, according to SUMATE, a non-partisan election watchdog, 30% of such voters showed to vote after an illegal extension of the voting process and, after announcements by high ranking members of the government that all government employees had to vote or they would be fired.
2. The opposition retired from the electoral process five days before Sunday 4th. The National Electoral Board (CNE) showed no independence. Explicitly the opposition had demanded, after the massive electronic fraud that took place in the national recall referendum against President Hugo Chavez, four basic conditions:
 - a. Appointment of a non partisan, independent CNE
 - b. Audit of the National Voters Registry. The Registry is absolutely corrupted since before the national recall referendum –

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more than 2 million registered voters have no address to verify their existence.

Astonishing evidence was the fact that Colombian Guerrilla Leader Rodrigo Granda, a terrorist requested by Colombian and American Authorities was hidden in Venezuela, protected by the government and registered to vote.

- c. Audit of the software, processes and electoral results before and after each election. Evidence statistically supported by researchers from

Harvard and MIT suggest that the electoral results provided by the CNE for the Recall Referendum held in 2004 were mostly improbable. Further evidence collected by SUMATE indicates possible manipulation of the communication process and intervention of the communication processes when sending data from the Voting Centers to the CNE.

- d. Tight control over the abusive use of government power and public resources to promote the government electoral platform

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and intimidate
dissent.

Given the fact that such claims have not been satisfied, more than 6 million Venezuelans whose vote against Hugo Chavez in the National Recall Referendum of 2004 was stolen had demobilized and will not vote until fair conditions are met. Therefore, opposition parties have to face an additional constraint, the mandate from their constituencies not to participate in elections, a decision that provides Chavez fraudulent machinery greater possibilities of control of the institutions essential to democracy, such as parliament.

A presidential election shall take place December 2.006. If no substantial changes take place -a very probable scenario- Hugo Chavez will

assure a reelection for 6 more years (13 in total with the time he has hold the office); and its instrumental new National Assembly has already announced a constitutional reform to, among other things, proclaim Venezuela a "Socialist" Republic and allow presidential reelection with no term limits.

But let's look into the optimistic scenario. Assuming a change in conditions and if Chavez is defeated in an election next December 2006. Can a new government rule in Venezuela with a 100% Chavista Assembly for the following 4 years? Can such administration survive the harassment of a Judiciary absolutely controlled by the MVR?

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ILLEGITIMATE BUT...THE
REALPOLITIK IS MORE
CONTROL FOR CHAVEZ

The International Observers (OAS, European Union) have expressed concerns about what happened, moreover, the EU went precisely to recommend the need for a new CNE. Immediately President Chavez had reacted by accusing the European Union, together with the OAS, to be part of a plot with the Bush Administration to destabilize the country. However, their reports neither embrace nor validate all opposition claims, giving to the government margin to maneuver internationally despite the fact that a sole party parliament elected with record-low turn-out figures is a result that in itself poses a great doubt on its legitimacy.

The “realpolitik” is simple. Chavez has further control and will exercise its typical winner takes all approach to politics, regardless of the right of an important dissent in the country. He will continue to undermine opposition to his revolution through the Court System. Millions of Petrodollars mismanaged help him greatly in such effort. On the other hand, persecution to key factors of the opposition and civil society movements will continue to spread fear among the population not aligned with its message or populist programs. Even more, should the government follow the EU recommendation for appointment of a new CNE, such appointment is constitutionally attributed to the National Assembly, now totally controlled by Chavez. Can Venezuelans regain confidence

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to vote from a CNE coming from such parliament?

INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE OF CHAVEZ

Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador are the immediate targets of Chavez in the Andean Region: Indeed, Uribe's possible reelection would maintain the only contention to his influence over the Andean Countries, but Chavez will continue to create several obstacles to the plans set forth by the Uribe Administration regarding the fight against narco-guerrillas.

In the Caribbean and Central America his administration has gain influence through Oil Deals. In the MERCOSUR countries Chavez influence in local politics is important. Presidents Lula and Kirchner have to play an intelligent game

with a government that gives money regardless of the cost just to gain, at least, their neutrality in developments at the OAS.

On the other hand, Chavez loud and systematic confrontation with the US and the Bush Administration is strategic for Brazil and Argentina, Both play the mediation role and gain leverage when dealing in strategic issues about trade, financial support and geopolitics in front of the USA. Indeed, Brazil ended in a special bilateral meeting with the US after the Summit in Argentina last November.

Chavez probable influence over the electoral outcomes of Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador is a great concern. The Andes Countries are key for the fight against Drugs and the

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Colombian Guerrillas, both key issues of strategic interest for the USA and the Inter-American System. The exportation of a new revolutionary process, tinted of anti-Americanism and anti-capitalist are grave threats to democracy and stability in The Americas. Its message is packed with a “code” with important communicative power. It is packed with traditional populism and mask as a manipulative Bolivarian Alternative for the South to confront the power of the US over the Americas, with the idea of building new participatory popular democracies with a revolutionary civil-military alliance.

On the other hand, Mr. Chavez has been an enthusiastic critic of the Anti - Terrorist approach followed by the Bush

Administration and has many times showed “understanding” for what he considers “a consequence of US politics in the world”.

CONCLUSSION

The Venezuelan democracy is in grave peril. However the International community has its hands tight, particularly the Inter-American System. The undermining of institutions and dissent may continue with the abusive control of the judiciary by Chavez and its supporters. Intimidation and persecution, self-censorship in the media and further spread of his militaristic, left-wing populist system will continue as Constitutional changes are introduced by an illegitimate National Assembly and fraudulent referenda in order to assure Chavez' reelection and

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radicalization of the revolution in all fronts after his probable reelection in 2.006.

Abundant and uncontrolled mismanagement of oil income will help the regime while 60% to 70% of the population is totally demobilized to vote for their absolute distrust to the National Electoral Board.

The OAS system has been neutralized to act and to some extent the current system is weak to defend democracy from situation in which democratic institutions are abused to produce arbitrary, exclusionist and populist governments that use democracy against democracy.

The need for a Democracy Monitoring System that guarantees separation and independence of all branches of power, under OAS

intervention is absolutely necessary at this time. The resources available to the Inter-American System to protect democracy and the fundamental rights of citizens of the member States of the OAS under the Inter-American Convention are today limited.

This shall become more necessary as the influence of Chavez in the Andean Countries is a possible outcome of the current events.

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