

Bushmen in 'shock' over Venezuelan revolt

by Gretchen Small

Deputy Treasury Secretary David Mulford admitted before a Heritage Foundation seminar on March 4 that, one month later, the Bush administration is still "in shock" over the Feb. 4 attempted coup d'état in Venezuela. "We are still digesting what happened," he said, and are trying to figure out what to do to reverse that situation and to avoid having "additional events as in Venezuela" occur elsewhere.

Mulford had just finished promoting the International Monetary Fund and Bush's Enterprise for the Americas Initiative as an unstoppable "Blueprint for Economic Expansion from Alaska to Antarctica," when a journalist asked him how all of this would be affected by the Venezuelan rebellion, which was directed against those very policies. Mulford, the Bush administration's "Mr. IMF," was uncharacteristically candid: The U.S. government realizes that "life by the International Monetary Fund alone is not enough," he muttered, suggesting that a "clever use of resources" is the way around the problem.

What Mulford and the Bush administration recognize, but haven't dared say, is that the Venezuelan revolt and its spread across Ibero-America have shaken the Anglo-American financial system to its roots. The leaders of the rebel Bolivarian Rebel Movement (MBR), which led the Feb. 4 revolt, are comparing this process—and rightly so—to the democratic revolutions which brought down communist tyranny in the East. As MBR leader Lt. Col. Francisco Arias Cárdenas told Venezuela's *El Nacional* on March 5: "Venezuela, after Feb. 4 and the population's response [to it], assumes a vanguard role. . . . We cannot remain behind. . . . at a moment when the fall of communist practices in eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union, and the fall of the Latin American dictators, are a fact."

"Digestive shock" is the very least of Washington's

problems at this point in time.

The U.S. and Venezuelan governments began high-level emergency consultations in early March, to try to put out the fire. The government of Carlos Andrés Pérez sent up a delegation which embodies the precise political-economic combination that provoked the February coup attempt: From the private sector side, Eugenio Mendoza came representing the oligarchic "families" which have run the country for decades, accompanied by Gustavo Cisneros and his banker buddy, Pedro Tinoco, two of the most powerful *nouveaux riches* whose sudden fabulous fortunes Venezuelans now demand be investigated. From the government proper, the new Central Bank head, Miguel Rodríguez (architect of Pérez's IMF program), Planning Minister Ricardo Haussman, and the vice president of Venezuela's state oil company, were joined by a representative each from the two parties which have run the country since 1958.

Old boys at it again

The mission started its urgent consultations—as always, when it comes to Venezuela—with David Rockefeller and his Council of the Americas in New York City. The propaganda front was covered through discussions with four top U.S. media (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.). Only *after* conferring with the elite of the New York establishment will the delegation travel to Washington to powwow with the establishment's errand-boys in government: Kissinger's stooges at the National Security Council, the State Department's Ibero-American man Bernard Aronson, the Commerce Department, and Congress.

The problem faced by Caracas and Washington is that the Feb. 4 attempted coup in Venezuela has kicked off a rebellion *throughout Ibero-America* which has long passed

the point where "clever uses of resources" within the confines of the IMF loan-sharking system will work.

For example, nationalist middle-level officers' organizations have surfaced in Bolivia and Honduras in the aftermath of Feb. 4, in the latter case announcing that they modeled themselves on the Venezuelan rebels, but noting that "we will not fail." The Colombian government evidenced its reading of the mood in the barracks by decreeing an unprecedented 45% pay increase for all middle-level officers at the beginning of March, ripping up the IMF's wage ceilings.

And in Argentina, the second issue of *Los Nacionales*, a new monthly newspaper of the civil-military movement led by Col. Mohamed Alí Seineldín, reported in detail the Venezuelan rebel program, accompanying it with Colonel Seineldín's dramatic statement comparing the common historic tasks of their two movements (see *EIR*, Feb. 21, 1992, p. 37). In its editorial, *Los Nacionales* argued that a "national revolution" is the only possible solution to the "terminal crisis" tearing Argentina apart. If economic dependence is to be overcome, a national movement which rejects both the "anti-national left," and IMF liberals, is required.

Chávez's courage, new standard of leadership

Inside Venezuela, as a nervous London *Financial Times* recognized on March 4, "the five lieutenant colonels who led the uprising are becoming national heroes, something the government wished to prevent at all costs." MRB leader Lt. Col. Jesús Urdaneta Hernández told *El Nacional*, "Venezuelans no longer believe in the dishonest politicians; they identify with us. . . . We, from here [prison], are optimistic."

The government has responded like panicked thugs: They have issued a steady stream of media propaganda, villifying the MBR as "Nazis," "power-hungry," "bloody dictators," and so on. And they cashiered the head of the military prison housing the rebels, because he had dared to permit press interviews with the jailed officers. They put in his place a loyal colonel who immediately cut off all visits to the prisoners—including from family and lawyers—banned all reading material, and reportedly began physically mistreating them, including serving only cold food at random hours.

The press interviews caused particular hysteria in the Pérez government, because the MBR leaders began to make their policies known to the population at large. As the reader can see in the documentation below, the rebels specifically targeted the three key tenets of the Pérez regime, which are also the backbone of current U.S. policy toward Ibero-America today:

- the murder of the population via IMF policies;
- the plot to destroy the militaries of the region by transforming them into weak police forces which cannot enforce sovereignty; and
- the imposition of a fraudulent, corrupt "democracy" as the only form of government allowed in the hemisphere.

But perhaps most significant is that the average Venezuelan is beginning to lose his fear to act. Demonstrations of that new-found courage occur, as usual under such police-state rule as Pérez oversees, at unexpected points. During Carnival celebrations, for example, children traditionally dress up in costumes of their favorite characters. This year, Batman, Superman, and other comic book characters took back seat to the most popular one: a Chávez "costume," consisting of a red beret and military camouflage uniform. Those wearing them were met with applause, and cries of "Long live Chávez" across Caracas.

Now the MRB has called upon the people to act in unison at 10 p.m. on March 10, by turning out their lights, going out on their balconies, banging pots and pans, and shouting 10 times over: "Today's the tenth; it's 10 p.m., get out of here, Carlos Andrés" (which rhymes in Spanish).

'Tremble, oligarchs; long live liberty!'

The Caracas daily *El Globo* reported that this phrase is the MBR's guiding slogan. And it appears that it is already beginning to be fulfilled.

Despite their success in quashing the February military revolt, Pérez and his backers now find themselves fighting for political survival. Pérez has been forced to make several television addresses, reiterating that he will not resign, after a growing number of prominent politicians and parties had called upon him to do so. Then rumors swept the country that the Armed Forces high command had delivered an ultimatum on March 1 to Pérez, to resign within 48 hours or else.

Washington jumped into the situation to at least secure one immediate objective: that Pérez remain in power. Between March 1 and 3, a number of top politicians previously clamoring for Pérez's resignation suddenly backed off, warning that if he did so the military might move into the subsequent "vacuum of power," and finish off democracy once and for all. The hand of Washington in this sudden shift was displayed publicly by Christian Democratic presidential candidate Eduardo Fernández (whose campaign is financed by Rockefeller's friend, Gustavo Cisneros), who warned that "the international community will not permit" another coup. "We would also experience problems selling our oil and we could encounter a desperate economic situation," he threatened.

Simultaneously, Cuba's leftist friends in Venezuela jumped in alongside Washington with dark warnings that the military was planning to act. The former secretary general of Venezuelan's Communist Party (who resigned only after the fall of communism in Moscow), Héctor Mujica, attacked those demanding Pérez's resignation, on the grounds that it "would create a power vacuum," while the *Causa R* party suddenly began demanding that Pérez stay until a constitutional referendum could be held—a clever means of putting off any changes for a year or two.

Documentation

The following interviews with several of the leaders of the Feb. 4 military insurrection in Venezuela were conducted from their cells at the San Carlos military jail in Caracas, and published in various Venezuelan publications.

Lt. Col. Hugo Rafael Chávez Frís

On Feb. 29, *El Globo* of Caracas interviewed Lt. Col. Hugo Rafael Chávez Frís, the main leader of the Feb. 4 insurrection:

Q: The defense minister has been respectful and considerate in the treatment he has given you. Nonetheless, in a press release he questioned you in the area of military ethics.

Chávez: The minister is playing a role within the government, and this could be part of the campaign to discredit us that has been designed. In truth, I would say to [Minister] Fernando Ochoa Antich that he hasn't the moral authority to say this to me or to any of the officers here with me. We stepped out front, breaking the fear in this country, and in general we have demonstrated our caliber, and everyone in the Army knows us. Thus it is said: "Turn a deaf ear to foolish words."

Q: When did you make the decision to surrender?

Chávez: Our objective, more than a military one, was eminently political. When we realized that the political objective could not be achieved, and that what was coming was a massacre of the civilian population and of military personnel, which would have been a fratricidal fight, we decided to put down our weapons and await better conditions.

Q: What was that political objective you didn't achieve?

Chávez: Conceptually, it was a taking of power. Concretely, it was the capture of the President of the Republic, to try him before the population. . . .

Q: The President spoke to the country and referred to you as criminals deserving the maximum penalties. What do you think your fate will be?

Chávez: Anything could happen here. . . . In our case, the proceedings could be manipulated and, in fact, there already exist some details suggesting that this is the intention. But this doesn't concern us, because we have decided to sacrifice even our lives for this people. We are confident in the Venezuelan people's capacity to fight . . . and we believe our action has awakened great expectations and has sown the seeds of freedom, which no one will be able to stop. . . .

Q: Who are the corrupt ones that you would have immediate-

ly seized and tried?

Chávez: [President] Carlos Andrés [Pérez] is the first. Everyone knows them: Jaime Lusinchi, Blanca Ibañez, Gardenia Martínez, Orlando García. But you know that the list is very long.

Q: Was this a civil-military coup or is it solely an internal reaction of the Armed Forces to the crisis in the country?

Chávez: The origin of the movement is eminently military, for many reasons that would have to be analyzed in depth, although the intention was to form a civil-military junta with the best in the country. . . .

Q: In military terminology, it is said that this was a *coup de main* and not a *coup d'état*.

Chávez: In a way one might say that it was a *coup de main*, but this was a national rebellion. We demonstrated to the country the military force that we had and that we continue to have.

Q: Is it true that you participated in the Night of the Tanks [reputedly, a 1989 coup attempt]?

Chávez: Absolutely false; it will be proven to the country. That night I was playing softball in Miraflores. I was inside when [the tanks] surrounded us. By the way, I made four hits, among them one home run, although we lost to the Seguros Nuevo Mundo team. . . .

Q: Venezuela plays a very important strategic role in the Americas. An invasion [by the United States] could have resulted.

Chávez: We believe that the United States would not have interfered in our plan, because it was not in open confrontation with its international policy. We simply call for protection for our national sovereignty, the right to organize our Armed Forces as Venezuela needs them, the right to organize our population as they demand, but there is no anti-imperialist or anti-Yankee sentiment which, like the rest, went out of style with the sixties.

Q: What would happen to the [austerity] "package"?

Chávez: We would like to tell the world that we would respect legitimately subscribed treaties with the international organizations. Of course, our first measures would be anti-"package," because although we respect legitimate commitments, we would first have to guarantee to the people the satisfaction of their basic needs, and the [International] Monetary Fund comes afterwards.

We are not extreme nationalists, nor are we chauvinists. We are progressive members of the military, who would rescue the right of the nation to be itself, and the right of its population to build on its own history. We are steeped in integrationist Bolivarian thought, of course looking first inward to put our own house in order, to be able thus to ally

with other countries in similar circumstances to our own.

We must understand the geopolitical design of these new times, of the new Venezuelan direction more identified with reality. We are a small country with great potential. That understood, we cannot compete with the great powers, we cannot irresponsibly tell the country, as Eduardo Fernández did in his alternative program, that we are going to belong to the First World.

Lt. Col. Javier Arias Cárdenas

Lt. Col. Javier Arias Cárdenas gave his first interview to the Venezuelan daily *El Globo* on Feb. 27, in which he was asked to comment on the reaction of Latin America's armed forces to U.S. efforts to interfere in national defense policies. He responded:

"There is interest in turning our armies into police forces, and some of our commanders acquiesce to this, not out of conviction but because they have to say yes in order to be promoted. . . . I think that the result of this action of ours is going to be, at least, that the high commands will feel obliged to revise this [acquiescence], to take a stand.

"As a Bolivarian army, we reject this approach of turning us into police, because it goes against our principles of independence and autonomy. We are not extreme militarists, but we know that we live in a world where relations of power and force hold sway. We are an army appropriate to our needs and to other defense needs. . . .

"Look, the Armed Forces has many values, people with a lot of dignity, and we know that within the command structure and among people who know us, independent of the witchhunt being carried out which is keeping them silent, there are a great many important elements of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the National Guard, who see our actions as a model. The best army combat units, the most powerful artillery units, the medium-caliber units, the parachute units, refused to go along with this nonsense."

Arias also revealed that the government had plans to raid the universities: "As of January, the preparations of plans to invade the universities have accelerated. My unit was involved in preparing *caballos de frisa* to contain the students and the demonstrations. *Caballos de frisa* are barbed-wire blockades, to prevent people from passing through, to keep them contained. The Army is being used not to meet the country's needs or to safeguard its territory, but as enemies of the people, and that is inconceivable. Any army that respects itself and whose anthem says 'our life is in the blood of the people,' cannot shed that blood, but must defend it."

Arias explained that they had become rebels because they refused to become silent accomplices of these plans: "The great majority of those of us who are here [in jail] would have been generals. We have a great number of major lieutenants, the next in line for promotion. Here, in San Carlos, are the officer ranks able to command an army, and which rebelled. Whether Mr. Carlos Andrés Pérez likes it or not, that is the

reality. We are not four nuts who rose up. It was a well-thought-out move, and a difficult one, believe me. I feel the pain of my officers' girlfriends, of their wives, of their mothers, that of my children who see me behind bars and cry, but who are happy to see their father the commander of a very important unit. All of this makes my soul ache, but there are also thousands starving to death in this country."

Strengthening national production

In a second *El Globo* interview on March 3, Lt. Col. Javier Arias Cárdenas asserted that one aspect of the insurrection he helped to lead was to break the barrier between the military and civil society from which it appears to be distanced. Writes *El Globo* of the rebels' plans, "The economic experts were going to be called upon to work toward strengthening national production for the common good, oriented toward the equitable distribution of wealth. The strategic orientation would be directed toward food production, science, and dignity."

Said Arias, "The misery in this country is impressive." *El Globo* paraphrases Arias: "Misery that contrasts with large bank accounts abroad, which would be frozen if their owners did not explain origin and purpose. Within this framework, the unauthorized transfer of foreign exchange, and of money in general, would be considered a serious offense by the appropriate authorities. Also, a tax reform was considered, 'according to the economic and social reality of the country, and the stimulation of those projects which would increase productivity from a social, and not speculative, definition of wealth, and which would contribute to controlling inflation.'

"In the area of investment, priority would be given to research, education, and health, reads the document that reveals the government structure designed by the rebels of the Bolivarian Military Movement. . . .

"Another of their resolutions was 'the reformulation of the Venezuelan educational process. It would be essential to guarantee absolute mastery over our language, interpretative reading, mathematical reasoning, the formation of our identity as a people, study of our history, and of our broad geography.

" 'This educational reform would be based on the premise that knowledge should be centered around the explanation of the why of things.' "

Venezuela is no democracy

The first U.S. correspondent permitted to interview Chávez in his jail cell, Ralph Schusler, published the results of that interview in the March 4 edition of *Economía Hoy*, a weekly magazine. Commenting on the expression of international support for Pérez following the Feb. 4 coup attempt, Chávez said, "The people of America and the rest of the world are fooling themselves if they think that the current government of Venezuela is democratic. What we have here is a dictatorship of parties and of groups with special inter-

ests, a kind of plutocracy lacking any popular representation.

“My message to President Bush, who I imagine should be a person with a democratic spirit, is that I cannot in any way share his statements describing Carlos Andrés Pérez as a representative of the people. He and his counterparts, including his predecessor, former President Jaime Lusinchi, have shamelessly robbed this country, and have left the people to manage as best they can in a lawless land.

“If Bush really wants to find out what I have to say, I invite him to come and hear the Venezuelan people and not the affronts of a man whose democratic profession is but a facade. . . . [Pérez] is a master in speaking out of both sides of his mouth, a very shrewd individual whose dual personality requires psychological analysis. He wants to present himself as the leader of the Third World involved in the most noble battles for the people, as a great Latin American patriot, but that is pure bombast. Venezuelans know that some day the entire world will also realize this.”

Referring to the so-called *Caracazo*, the anti-austerity riots in Caracas in 1989 which triggered a brutal military response, Chávez said that there are various divisions of the Armed Forces which have become “Praetorian Guards, protecting a government which serves the interest of a small group of persons and which acts against the interests of the people.” Chávez explained that the failure of the insurrection was in part due to logistical oversights, as well as the determination of the rebels not to cause casualties among the civilian population. “This was an uprising in favor of the people; we did not want to cause a shedding of civilian blood.”

Chávez justified the uprising on the basis of Article 250 of the Venezuelan Constitution, which addresses the problem of misappropriation of state funds: “In such an eventuality,” said Chávez, “every citizen—whether invested with authority or not—has the duty to collaborate in bringing the Constitution back into force.” Chávez’s assertions were reiterated by Maj. Francisco Javier Centeno, a fellow rebel, who declared, “We consider it our duty to ensure that the Constitution be respected and to rescue democracy from the clear violations committed by this government.”

Chávez added that all those charged with responsibility for such violations would be tried, and all or part of the goods with which they illegally enriched themselves confiscated. Major Centeno noted that “with what they have stolen from the country, we could pay the \$35 billion foreign debt!” On Pérez, Centeno said, “We only wanted to capture him together with his buddies, so that we could try them for theft and for voracious corruption.”

A government of national emergency

On March 2, *El Globo* published a summary of a programmatic document “for national recovery,” confiscated by the Venezuelan police from the Bolivarian Military Movement. The following are excerpts of that summary:

“A provisional government of national emergency would

be formed, as the expression of a national alliance for rescuing Venezuelan dignity, and for a moral, political, and economic recovery. . . . [Its] highest form of expression would be the National General Council, composed of nine citizens. For practical purposes of managing the state, a Council of State would function, made up of the President of the Republic or chief of state, the Minister of Government, and the eight cabinet ministers covering national policy matters.

“In the counties, public assemblies would elect the authorities, composed of: a civil chief, an administrator, a prosecutor, a representative of the organized communities, and a secretary. . . . For now, the current National Congress, Legislative Assemblies, and Municipal Councils will cease to operate. . . . Soon, a Constituent Assembly would dictate a new Constitution. The Supreme Court Magistrates would be relieved of their functions and the National General Council would name, subject to public approval, new magistrates with full powers to designate the members of the Judiciary Council. . . .

“The police would be immediately reorganized. . . . There would be a program so that the Armed Forces and civil society could break the barriers that reactionary policies imposed on their relationship. The Armed Forces would develop a consciousness of what is owed to Venezuelan society, and civil society would see the Armed Forces as their best bulwark in defense of freedom. . . .

“Continental integration, particularly with Colombia, would be a priority, but always within the Bolivarian doctrine. We would maintain security in supplying crude oil and its derivatives to the international markets, and signed agreements, legally contracted, would be kept in force—as long as we are not subjected to any kind of retaliation on the part of the foreign powers.”

PLV demands, ‘Enough is enough’

The following is the text of a full-page paid advertisement that was published by the Venezuelan Labor Party (PLV) in the newspaper El Nuevo País on Feb. 27.

From Mexico to Argentina, Ibero-America is living under the iron dictatorship of the International Monetary Fund. During the decade of the eighties alone, our countries paid \$480 billion in foreign debt, and the debt has nonetheless tripled. Sixty percent of the population is living in poverty, unemployed, or with miserable wages, without schools, water, housing, or hospitals; and nonetheless these puppet governments continue to punctually pay their foreign debt. Enough already!

In Venezuela, it is worse still. In 15 years we have received more than \$200 billion in oil income, but the country still lives in misery. And now that the United States is bankrupt, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) wants us to pay the debt through more hunger, more poverty, with our “privatized” resources—like CANTV and PDVSA [the former state telecommunications and petroleum companies, re-

spectively]—and even with our national territory. Pope John Paul II demanded that the foreign debt not be paid with the people's hunger. Enough is enough!

Humanity is experiencing a revolutionary period of its history. Scarcely two years ago, the entire population of eastern Europe went out into the streets in search of freedom and sovereignty; Moscow's puppets fell. Less than a year ago, the people took to the streets in the former Soviet Union to reject the dictatorship: the communist powerbrokers fell. It is now Latin America's turn.

Venezuelans, we invite you from today forward to wear some patriotic symbol (flag, coat-of-arms, tricolor armband) in show of support for the following:

- 1) the immediate resignation of Carlos Andrés Pérez; resignation of the Supreme Court of Justice; resignation of Congress; a new constitution, to do away with rule by the party elites;

- 2) formation of an emergency government, with civil and military participation;

- 3) suspension of payment of the foreign debt for a minimum of five years, strict exchange controls, and implementation of an emergency program to assure jobs, food, housing, clothing, health, education, and public services, such as water;

- 4) trial of the corrupt, especially of the economic groups which have been the front-men of foreign colonial interests and which are linked to the narco-economy;

- 5) respect for the human rights of Commander Chávez and the rest of the military men who participated in the events of Feb. 4;

- 6) Latin American integration, but not based on the "Enterprise for the Americas" initiative or Bush's "new order," which seek to loot and colonize us until we have become Wall Street's backyard; who want to turn us into drug-producing countries to guarantee the flow of narco-dollars to finance their immense deficit. Rather, we want a powerful and developed Latin America, united around great agricultural and industrial projects, works of transportation and infrastructure such as the continental railroad, and a Latin American common market.

Venezuela urgently needs a nationalist movement, one which is not dependent on any "International" [organization], which promotes a return to morality and to patriotism. Instead of a "class struggle," Venezuela needs a "harmony of interests" more in accordance with the concept of human dignity. The country needs to be politically reorganized, and the population assured of genuine participatory democracy—not by voting every five years, but through non-partisan forums and town, union, and business meetings, and where each and every individual can deliberate and decide, in accordance with the proposals of the encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*.

Venezuelans, the hour of struggle for our rights, for our families, and for our dignity has arrived.

U.S. prepares to hit Iraq again

by Joseph Brewda

The United Nations, under Anglo-American domination, is preparing to bomb Iraq again, possibly in April, as part of its general policy to spread war in that region, and also to attempt to restore the fortunes of George Bush's reelection campaign. On Feb. 28, the U.N. Security Council issued a statement which "deplored and condemned" Iraq for its alleged failure to implement various United Nations resolutions, and warned of unspecified "serious consequences" if that "failure" continues. The statement is purportedly based on the findings of a recent trip to Iraq by Swedish Ambassador to the U.N. Rolf Ekeus, who has been charged with destroying Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction." Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz will travel to New York in early March to respond to the latest U.N. charges.

Iraqi industry is the target

U.N. Resolution 687, passed last year, had demanded that Iraq destroy its weapons of mass destruction, purportedly to bring peace to the region. These weapons, according to U.N. definition, include the highly inaccurate Iraqi Scud missile. While Iraq has destroyed its Scuds, which the U.N. acknowledges, it has requested that plant and equipment used to make the Scuds be converted to civilian use rather than be destroyed. In November 1991, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry had requested that Iraq be allowed to convert this equipment to the "production of liquid fuel tanks, rubber separators for the oil industry, and for the production of civil explosives used in road construction, cement industries," and for building short-range missiles not proscribed by the U.N.

The Feb. 28 Security Council statement condemned this Iraqi request and related refusals to carry out the destruction of plant and equipment as a violation of U.N. resolutions. Only the U.N., it claimed, has the authority to judge what equipment will or will not be destroyed. The Iraqi request not to destroy industry constitutes a violation of its alleged responsibility to accept all U.N. demands "unconditionally," the statement read.

Following the release of the Security Council statement, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Thomas Pickering warned that Iraq "must be aware of the serious consequences of continuing breach of" U.N. orders. British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd elaborated, in remarks on British television,