

Venezuela: Possible policy scenarios

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HAVANA TIMES — What can we expect if Hugo Chavez leaves the Venezuelan political scenario in the near future? What will happen to the Bolivarian Revolution that he leads at home and in other ALBA countries and the region? These questions are addressed in a commentary by Roberto Lopez published on the Lagurura.net webpage from Maracaibo, Venezuela, which we are publishing here in full.

- 1) Chavez's leaving power seems to be a certainty in the short term (from a few months to a year), either through death or because his health will prevent him from returning to active office. If he returns and is sworn in on January 10 or at a later date, his precarious health condition will keep him almost permanently in Cuba and the real running of the country will fall on one or more other individuals.
- 2) This implies the beginning of a period of profound change in the political leadership of the Bolivarian Revolution. This period could last several months or even several years.
- 3) The recent and resounding electoral defeats suffered by the opposition in October and December place the post-Chavez political dispute within Chavismo itself. This will continue for at least several months and perhaps a year or two. Currently, the right wing is not in a political position to act offensively to regain power within the country, but obviously that weakness can change as time goes on.
- 4) We can infer that the present pro-Chavez leadership headed by Maduro and Cabello will deteriorate as time passes. Causes: none of them have the leadership qualities of Chavez and therefore none of them are able to generate the consensus that existed when Chavez was in office. The deterioration of consensus implies a deterioration of governance over national, regional and local institutions. Generally, one can say that the long-term continuation of the Bolivarian Revolution is not assured with the current leadership, which has constituted Chavez's inner circle and his immediate environment for the past 14 years. We will witness an on-going crisis of governance that will result in constant rearrangements whose actors and trends cannot be accurately predicted.
- 5) Several processes will occur simultaneously:
 - a) An internal struggle for a new distribution of power within chavismo (redistribution of control over state institutions and over effective control of the national budget). Although formally they might manage to reach agreements for slicing up the bureaucratic pie, strong shocks will in fact begin to be produced because the country is not a sum of its parts but an organic whole. Those clashes will be concealed initially, but will progressively become more public. This could even lead to violent scenarios, such as attacks against certain leaders of the various pro-Chavez fractions.
 - b) The deterioration of this leadership for Venezuelans who support the process. This may occur due to the government's inability to address popular demands around critical issues; for example, labor disputes and collective negotiations involving significant sections of the state (teachers, academics, Guyanese industries, etc.). Chavez will no longer be there to appease people's emotions with the refrain of "the president didn't know" or "they're not complying with the president's directives." The

errors of the bureaucracy will not be forgiven by the people, as occurred when Chavez firmly held the nation's leadership.

c) A widespread conspiracy by the "empire" [the US primarily] to penetrate the various civilian and military pro-Chavez leadership circles to promote the reversal of the revolutionary process. This could be supplemented with future scenarios in which pro-Chavez forces and opposition forces unite to achieve the goal of ending the revolution. At the moment, however, those scenarios are not yet possible (thankfully), but they could be created in the short term.

d) In the internal struggle within Chavismo, imperialist forces and their local allies will constantly seek to exert their influence. The empire is likely to attempt to carry out various actions on its own, even violent ones, which could then be blamed on the intra-Chavista struggle. The goal of this would be to add more fuel to the fire and encourage the strengthening of internal tendencies that are more likely to compromise with imperialism.

6) The imperial forces will seek the right moment to end the Bolivarian Revolution. In promoting their initiatives, they will not rule out Libyan or Syrian-type scenarios (i.e., fostering a civil war) to overthrow the Bolivarian government and restore imperial rule over Venezuela.

In conclusion, the removal of Chavez from power opens up a scenario of uncertainty and political crisis in Venezuela, which seriously threatens the continuity of the revolutionary process and opens the door for the international bourgeoisie and their allies to attempt to regain domestic political power.

Given this reality, it is essential that revolutionaries strengthen their organizational activities and joint actions based on broad and democratic debate over the political agenda being raised by popular organizations.

Ensuring the continuation of the revolutionary process will depend on the emergence of new forms of popular collective leadership, which will be born in the heat of the difficult political confrontation that will characterize the months and years ahead.

If this strengthening of alternative revolutionary leadership does not occur, it is likely that reformist trends will end up predominating within the Chavista bureaucracy, pushing for a general agreement with the local bourgeoisie and US imperialism as a way to "save and sustain" the Bolivarian process.

If this latter trend prevails, the re-taking of power by imperialism would progressively occur and the reformist leaders and facilitators of Chavismo would gradually be displaced by more reliable traditional bourgeois leaders. That process could take several years, possibly the entire current presidential term (2013-2019).

The means of avoiding this will always be through the strength of the popular movement led by a truly revolutionary program. This cannot rely on small and tiny groups or tendencies that exist within or outside the PSUV. It will depend on a massive confluence of revolutionary activists (including the military) and social organizations to confront the imperialist conspiracy and reformist reconciliation.

In this strategy — which I believe is the only alternative that exists to save the revolution — we must try out all means for exercising democracy and achieving the broadest possible consensus for allowing unity of action throughout the country.

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P.S.

* Havana Times translation.