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US Aggression Against Venezuela Fact not Fiction

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Recently, several different spokespersons for the Obama administration have firmly claimed the United States government is not intervening in Venezuelan affairs. Department of State spokeswoman Jen Psaki went so far as to declare, “The allegations made by the Venezuelan government that the United States is involved in coup plotting and destabilization are baseless and false.” Psaki then reiterated a bizarrely erroneous statement she had made during a daily press briefing just a day before: “The United States does not support political transitions by non-constitutional means”.

Anyone with minimal knowledge of Latin America and world history knows Psaki’s claim is false, and calls into question the veracity of any of her prior statements. The U.S. government has backed, encouraged and supported coup d’états in Latin America and around the world for over a century. Some of the more notorious ones that have been openly acknowledged by former U.S. presidents and high level officials include coup d’états against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran in 1953, Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo in 1960, Joao Goulart of Brazil in 1964 and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. More recently, in the twenty-first century, the U.S. government openly supported the coups against President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002, Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti in 2004 and Jose Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009. Ample evidence of CIA and other U.S. agency involvement in all of these

unconstitutional overthrows of democratically-elected governments abounds. What all of the overthrown leaders had in common was their unwillingness to bow to U.S. interests.

Despite bogus U.S. government claims, after Hugo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela by an overwhelming majority in 1998, and subsequently refused to take orders from Washington, he became a fast target of U.S. aggression. Though a U.S.-supported coup d'état briefly overthrew Chavez in 2002, his subsequent rescue by millions of Venezuelans and loyal armed forces, and his return to power, only increased U.S. hostility towards the oil-rich nation. After Chavez's death in 2013 from cancer, his democratically-elected successor, Nicolas Maduro, became the brunt of these attacks.

What follows is a brief summary and selection of U.S. aggression towards Venezuela that clearly shows a one-sided war. Venezuela has never threatened or taken any kind of action to harm the United States or its interests. Nonetheless, Venezuela, under both Chavez and Maduro – two presidents who have exerted Venezuela's sovereignty and right to self-determination – has been the ongoing victim of continuous, hostile and increasingly unfriendly actions from Washington.

2002-2004

A coup d'état against Chávez was carried out on April 11, 2002. Documents obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) evidence a clear role of the U.S. government in the coup, as well as financial and political support for those Venezuelans involved.[1]

A “lockout” and economic sabotage of Venezuela's oil industry was imposed from December 2002 to February 2003. After the defeat of the coup against Chavez, the U.S. State Department issued a special fund via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to help the opposition continue efforts to overthrow Chavez. USAID set up an Office for Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Caracas, subcontracting U.S. defense contractor Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) to oversee Venezuela operations and distribute millions of dollars to anti-government groups. The result was the “national strike” launched in December 2002 that brought the oil industry to the ground and devastated the economy. It lasted 64 days and caused more than \$20 billion in damages. Nonetheless, the efforts failed to destabilize the Chavez government.

The “guarimbas” of 2004: On February 27, 2004, extremist anti-government groups initiated violent protests in Caracas aimed at overthrowing Chavez. They lasted 4 days and caused multiple deaths. The leaders of these protests had received training from the U.S. Albert Einstein Institute (AEI), which specializes in regime change tactics and strategies.

The Recall Referendum of 2004: Both NED and USAID channeled millions of dollars into a campaign to recall President Chavez through a national recall referendum. With the funds, the group Sumate, led by multi-millionaire Maria Corina Machado, was formed to oversee the efforts. Chavez won the referendum in a landslide 60-40 victory.

2005

After the victory of President Chavez in the recall referendum of 2004, the US toughened its position towards Venezuela and increased its public hostility and aggression against the Venezuelan government. Here are a selection of statements made about Venezuela by U.S. officials:

January 2005: “Hugo Chavez is a negative force in the region.” -Condoleezza Rice.

March 2005: “Venezuela is one of the most unstable and dangerous ‘hot spots’ in Latin America.” -Porter Goss, ex-Director of the CIA.

“Venezuela is starting a dangerous arms race that threatens regional security.” -Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

“I am concerned about Venezuela’s influence in the area of responsibility...SOUTHCOM supports the position of the Joint Chiefs to maintain ‘military to military’ contact with the Venezuelan military...we need an inter-agency focus to deal with Venezuela.” -General Bantz Craddock, ex-Commander of SOUTHCOM.

July 2005: “Cuba and Venezuela are promoting instability in Latin America...There is no doubt that President Chavez is funding radical forces in Bolivia.” -Rogelio Pardo-Maurer, Assistant Sub-Secretary of Defense for the Western Hemisphere.

“Venezuela and Cuba are promoting radicalism in the region...Venezuela is trying to undermine the democratic governments in the region to impede CAFTA.” -Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

August 2005: “Venezuelan territory is a safe haven for Colombian terrorists.” -Tom Casey, State Department spokesman.

September 2005: “The problem of working with President Chavez is serious and continuous, as it is in other parts of the relationship.” -John Walters, Director of the National Policy Office for Drug Control.

November 2005: “The assault on democratic institutions in Venezuela continues and the system is in serious danger.” -Thomas Shannon, Sub-secretary of State.

2006

February 2006: “President Chavez continues to use his control to repress the opposition, reduce freedom of the press and restrict democracy....it’s a threat.” -John Negroponte, ex-Director of National Intelligence.

“We have Chavez in Venezuela with a lot of money from oil. He is a person who was elected legally, just like Adolf Hitler...” – Donald Rumsfeld, ex-Secretary of Defense.

March 2006: “In Venezuela, a demagogue full of oil money is undermining democracy and trying to destabilize the region.” -George W. Bush.

U.S. officials try to link Venezuela to *Terrorism*:

June 2006: “Venezuela’s cooperation in the international campaign against terrorism continues to be insignificant...It’s not clear to what point the Venezuelan government offered material support to Colombian terrorists.” – Annual Report on Terrorism, Department of State.

June 2006: The U.S. government through the Commerce Department and U.S. Treasury imposes sanctions against Venezuela for its alleged role in terrorism and prohibits the sale of military equipment to the country.

July 2006: “Venezuela, under President Hugo Chavez, has tolerated terrorists in its territory...” - Subcommittee on International Terrorism, House of Representatives.

U.S. increases its *Military Presence* in Latin America:

March-July 2006: The US military engages in four major exercises off the coast of Venezuela in the Caribbean Sea, with support from NATO, and based at the US air force base in Curaçao. A permanent military presence is established in the Dominican Republic and the bases in Curaçao and Aruba are reinforced.

The US Embassy in Caracas establishes the “American Corners” in 5 Venezuelan States (Lara, Monagas, Bolívar, Anzoátegui, Nueva Esparta), to act as centers of propaganda, subversion, espionage and infiltration.

U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield intensifies his public hostility towards the Venezuelan government, making frequent sarcastic and unfriendly comments in opposition-controlled media.

NED and USAID increase funding to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

2007

At the beginning of 2007, Venezuela is severely attacked in the international media & by U.S. government spokespersons for its decision to nationalize Cantv (the only national telephone company), the Electricity of Caracas and the Faja Orinoco oil fields.

In May 2007 the attack intensifies when the government decides not to renew the public broadcasting concession to popular opposition television station, RCTV.

A powerful international media campaign is initiated against Venezuela and President Chavez, referring to him as a dictator.

Private distributors and companies begin hoarding food and other essential consumer products in order to create shortages and panic amongst the population.

USAID, NED and the State Department via the Embassy in Caracas foment, fund and encourage the emergence of a right-wing youth movement and help to project its favorable image to the international community in order to distort the perception of President Chavez's popularity amongst youth.

Groups such as Human Rights Watch, Inter-American Press Association and Reporters without Borders accuse Venezuela of violating human rights and freedom of expression.

September 2007: President George W. Bush classifies Venezuela as a nation "not cooperating" with the war against drug trafficking, for the third year in a row, imposing additional economic sanctions.

September 2007: Condoleezza Rice declares the U.S. is "*concerned about the destructive populism*" of Chavez.

2008

January 2008: Admiral Mike Mullen, Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. Armed Forces meets with Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, then Minister of Defense Juan Manuel Santos, U.S. Ambassador William Brownfield and the Commander General of the Colombian Armed Forces Freddy Padilla de Leon and declares during a press conference that he is "concerned about the arms purchases made by Chavez" and expresses that this could "destabilize the region."

John Walters, the U.S. Anti-Drug Czar meets with Uribe in Colombia, together with 5 U.S. congresspersons and Ambassador Brownfield, and declares Venezuela a nation "complicit with drug trafficking" that presents "a threat to the US and the region". He also expresses his wish that the Free Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Colombia be ratified by Congress soon.

Condoleezza Rice visits Colombia, together with Sub-Secretary of State Thomas Shannon and 10 congress members from the democratic party to push the FTA and back Colombia in its conflict with Venezuela.

President George W. Bush in his State of the Union address emphasizes the importance of the FTA with Colombia alerts to the threat of "populist" and "undemocratic" governments in the region.

February 2008: SOUTHCOM sends the Navy's "4th fleet" to the Caribbean Sea (a group of war ships, submarines and aircraft carriers that haven't been in those waters since the Cold War).

The Director of National Intelligence, General Mike McConnell, publishes the Annual Threat Report, which classifies Venezuela as the "principal threat against the US in the hemisphere".

Exxon-Mobil tries to "freeze" \$12 billion of Venezuelan assets in London, Holland and the Dutch Antilles.

A Report on Present Threats to National Security of the Defense Intelligence Agency classifies Venezuela as a “national security threat” to the U.S.

A Department of State report accuses Venezuela of being a country that permits “the transit of illegal drugs”, “money laundering” and being “complicit with drug trafficking.”

The U.S. Department of Treasury classifies three high level Venezuelan officials as “drug kingpins”, presenting no formal evidence. The head of Venezuela’s military intelligence, General Hugo Carvajal, the head of Venezuela’s civil intelligence force, General Henry Rangel Silva, and former Minister of Interior and Justice, Ramon Rodriguez Chacin are sanctioned by the U.S. government and placed on a terrorist list.

Rear Admiral Joseph Nimmich, Director of the US Joint Interagency Task Force, meets in Bogota with the Commander General of the Colombian Armed Forces.

March 2008: The Colombian army invades Ecuadorian territory and assassinates Raul Reyes and a dozen others, including 4 Mexicans, at a FARC camp in the jungle near the border.

General Jorge Naranjo, Commander of Colombia’s National Police, declares that laptop computers rescued from the scene of the bombing that killed Reyes and others evidence that President Chavez gave more than \$300 million to the FARC along with a quantity of uranium and weapons. No other evidence is produced or shown to the public. Ecuador is also accused of supporting the FARC.

Venezuela mobilizes troops to the border with Colombia.

The US Navy sends the Aircraft Carrier “Harry Truman” to the Caribbean Sea to engage in military exercises to prevent potential terrorist attacks and eventual conflicts in the region. President Bush states the U.S. will defend Colombia against the “provocations” from Venezuela.

Uribe announces he will bring a claim before the International Criminal Court against President Chavez for “sponsoring genocide and terrorism”.

March: President Bush requests his team of lawyers and advisors review the possibility of placing Venezuela on the list of “*STATE SPONSORS OF TERRORISM*” together with Cuba, Iran, Syria and North Korea.

2009

May: A document from the U.S. Air Force shows the construction of a U.S. military base in Palanquero, Colombia, to combat the “anti-American” governments in the region. The Palanquero base is part of the 7 military bases that the U.S. planned to build in Colombia under an agreement with the Colombian government for a ten-year period.

2010

February: The U.S. Director of National Intelligence declares Venezuela the “anti-American leader” in the region in its annual report on worldwide threats.

February: The State Department authorizes more than \$15 million via NED and USAID to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

June: A report from the FRIDE Institute in Spain, funded by NED, evidences that international agencies channel between \$40-50 million a year to anti-government groups in Venezuela.

September: Washington ratifies sanctions against Venezuela for allegedly not cooperating with counter-narcotics efforts or the war on terror.

2011-2015

President Obama authorizes a special fund of \$5 million in his annual budget to support anti-government groups in Venezuela. In 2015, Obama increases this amount to \$5.5 million.

NED continues to fund anti-government groups in Venezuela with about \$2 million annually.

Each year, the US government includes Venezuela on a list of countries that do not cooperate with counter-narcotics efforts or the war on terror. Also in its annual human rights report, the State Department classifies Venezuela as a “violation” of human rights.

Subsequent to President Chavez’s death from cancer on March 5, 2013, new elections are held and Nicolas Maduro wins the presidency. Opposition leaders hold violent demonstrations that result in the deaths of more than a dozen people.

In February 2014, the violent protests resume, led by Leopoldo Lopez and Maria Corina Machado, who openly call for the overthrow of President Maduro, and over 40 people are killed. Lopez turns himself in to authorities and faces charges for his role in the violence. The U.S. government calls for his immediate release.

In December 2014, President Obama imposed sanctions on more than 50 Venezuelan officials and their relatives, accusing them of violating human rights and engaging in corruption. No evidence has been presented to date to support these serious allegations. The Commerce Department also expanded sanctions against Venezuela, prohibiting the sale of “any products” that could be destined for “military use” due to alleged human rights violations committed by the Venezuelan Armed Forces.

January 2015: Vice President Joe Biden warns Caribbean countries that the government of President Nicolas Maduro will soon be “defeated” and therefore they should abandon their discounted oil program with Venezuela, PetroCaribe.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki condemns the alleged “criminalization of political dissent” in Venezuela.

February 2015: President Obama unveils his new National Security Strategy and names Venezuela as a threat and stresses support for Venezuelan “citizens” living in a country where “democracy is at risk.”

Anti-government leaders circulate a document for a “transitional government agreement” which warns President Maduro’s government is in its “final stage” and pledges to overhaul the entire government and socialist system in place, replacing it with a neoliberal, pro-business model. The document is signed by Maria Corina Machado, jailed opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez and Antonio Ledezma, mayor of Metropolitan Caracas.

Days later, a coup plot against President Nicolas Maduro is thwarted and 10 active Venezuelan military officers are detained. Antonio Ledezma is arrested and charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government and the U.S. State Department issues a harsh condemnation of his detention, calling on regional governments to take action against the Maduro administration.

White House spokesman Josh Earnest denies any U.S. government role in the coup attempt against Maduro, calling such allegations “ludicrous”, but further reveals, “The Treasury Department and the State Department are considering tools that may be available that could better steer the Venezuelan government in the direction that we believe they should be headed”.