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US Southern Command on Verge of Confrontation with Venezuela

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Diosdado Cabello Rondón, Speaker of the National Assembly of Venezuela, has his own weekly program on state TV called Hitting with the Sledge Hammer (Con el Mazo Dando). He often uses it as a podium to raise burning issues related to subversive activities of the US embassy in the country. His recent comments about Willard Tenney Smith, counselor for political affairs, sparked a major debate.

Diosdado Cabello said the man had a history of service in the US Defense intelligence Agency (DIA) before joining the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He has seen service in Mexico, Peru, Jordan and Guyana. Tenney Smith has been sent on a special mission to Venezuela. The statement attracted special attention as it was made public right after the US intelligence officer came to Caracas. «We'll be watching you, Mr Tenney Smith. If your activities will not be

incompatible with the status of diplomat, we'll make the revelations public, have no doubt about it!» This stern warning made no bones about it. It's easy to explain. At the time Tenney Smith came to Caracas, the Southern Command (a Unified Combatant Command responsible for providing contingency planning and operations in Central and South America and the Caribbean) intensified its activities in the vicinity of Venezuelan borders. The Defense Intelligence Agency station in the embassy, which conducts its activities under cover, was reinforced by a professional experienced in coordinating special operations. A team of seasoned specialists also came to take low profile «technical» positions in the embassy.

Washington appears to believe that Venezuela is heading for confrontation. The US administration is adamant in its desire to destabilize the ruling Bolivarian regime and topple incumbent President Nicolas Maduro. The nearest D-day is December 6, the date a parliamentary election is slated for. In Venezuela the elections are always accompanied by conflicts. This time the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Spanish: Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) confronts the Democratic Unity Roundtable (Spanish: Mesa de la Unidad Democrática, MUD). The political struggle has greatly escalated. The opposition is trying to use the drawn-out economic and financial crisis to its ends and influence the outcome to change the correlation of forces in the National Assembly in its favor.

The US propaganda brainwashing effort is on the rise. Some voters start to believe that the regime is doomed. Many Venezuelans got accustomed to live comfortably in the prosperous oil exporting country. They can find no explanation for growing deficit of consumer goods. The government spends a lot to buy foodstuffs, care products, household appliances, car parts and other spares. Masses of consumers seem to make it all disappear in thin air. The state coffers are not filled regularly as oil prices go down. The purchasing power of Bolívar, the national currency, falls. The official exchange rate is 6.3 Bolívar/US-Dollar and the black market rate is 845 to 1. The shady speculative market is thriving. Some goods subsidized by the government are smuggled to Colombia and Brazil despite the measures taken recently to strengthen border and customs controls. The fight against corruption does not always meet expectations. Many «Bolivarians», including power agencies officials, have had their careers finished unable to resist the temptation of rapid enrichment.

The United States special services use the whole range of true-and-tried methods to expedite the disintegration of «the regime». The subversive operations will reach peak activity in early December (the parliamentary election is scheduled on December 6). No matter what the outcome of election is, they will try to stir up mass unrest in big cities. The subversive efforts to cut off electricity have become routine. Venezuelan Minister for Electric Energy, Luis Motta Domínguez, denounced the recent attacks against the national electrical grid. According to him, 19 acts of sabotage have taken place in the recent 6 weeks.

This kind of activities are intended to disturb and disrupt the December 6 election. It's worth to note that the Venezuelan counterintelligence received the information that such plots were in works a few years ago, when it exposed a group of Colombian agents working for US military intelligence filming and taking pictures of electric grid infrastructure of cities and enterprises. US aircraft have recently violated the Venezuelan air space. Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino told about it at a press-conference held on November 8. According to him, the Dash-8 bombardier

aircraft flew out of Curacao, a Dutch island not far off Venezuela's Caribbean coast, to enter the Venezuelan airspace over the tiny archipelago of Los Monjes. Caracas insisted the Dash 8 was accompanied by a C-17 Globemaster, a large military transport aircraft used to carry airborne troops and hardware, as it was reported by Telesur. In other comments, the Minister also confirmed that another US intelligence plane, model RC-135 Combat Sent, had come «unusually» close to Venezuelan airspace after departing from a US Air Force base in Nebraska.

The aircraft is equipped with electronic systems enabling it to collect intelligence, intercept radio communications and monitor the activities of enemy's ground, sea and air forces. The pro-government media outlets described the flights as provocative actions.

The Venezuelan military leadership also paid attention on the movement of the USS George Washington aircraft carrier strike group. It plans to pass nearby Venezuela moving from San Diego, California, to Panama Canal on December 5–6 – around the same time as the Dec. 6 vote. The group will kick off exercises in the Pacific at the time tumultuous events are expected to occur in Venezuela. It is possible that the Southern Command is preparing to conduct an armed provocation. This fact is confirmed by increasingly frequent exposures and arrests of paramilitares – the Colombian paramilitary terrorist formations. Many of them have been used to fight the FARC (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerillas.

Small arms and ammunition caches are routinely discovered in the country. Grenades are more frequently used against policemen, especially in the areas near the Colombian border. Time and again Willard Tenney Smith meets the representatives of radical opposition and non-government organizations in the embassy. Off and on, such meetings take place in universities where people are recruited for taking part in street protests. It has become known that Rita Buck Rico of the political affairs section, the right hand of Tenney Smith, has recently held meetings with the opposition.

Recruitment activities are disguised as conferences, forums and discussion clubs. It sounds innocuous, even a bloodhound couldn't sniff it out. The agenda is «democracy, elections and fostering ties in Caracas», but in reality the veiled goal of these vibrant activities is to overthrow Nicolas Maduro.

Moscow is closely watching the pre-election campaign and the attempts undertaken to exert a negative impact on the situation. In late September, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov published a statement making precise the Moscow's stance on the upcoming election. It says, *«We hope that the upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled for December 6, 2015, will take place in a calm atmosphere and without foreign interference»*.

The document emphasizes that owing to complicated domestic situation in the country Russia expresses solidarity with the people of Venezuela, its President Nicolas Maduro and the government. The statement also notes that *«Venezuela is an important partner for the Russian Federation in Latin America and internationally. Our countries are united by the firm intention to combat methods of power-politics and sanction-based dictate in global affairs and a willingness to defend the principles of multi-polarity and the rule of international law for maintaining peace and stability»*.

