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The Murder of Chávez. The CIA and DEA Cover Their Tracks

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The journalist Eva Golinger (US – Venezuela) has repeatedly questioned the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. The website *aporrea.org* quotes her statement: «Everything that Washington was trying to achieve during the administration of Hugo Chávez is today being realized in his absence. The cancerous illness from which Chávez suffered was unusually aggressive and suspicious, and every day turns up more evidence that it is possible Chávez was murdered».

The first signs of cancer were found in Chávez in May 2011. In June he underwent two surgeries at a specialized center in Havana. His Cuban surgeons found and removed a malignant tumor that had metastasized with sinister persistence, despite all preventive measures. New operations were needed. This athletic man, who was full of strength and physically robust, passed away on March 5, 2013 at the age of 58.

Expanding on this topic, Eva Golinger writes, «It is enough to know that one man who had for several years been one of his closest aides, who was often alone with him and brought him his food, coffee, and water, is now a protected witness in the United States. Soon Leamsy Salazar's

covert actions and close collaboration with intelligence agencies in Washington will be revealed».

The name of Hugo Chávez's chief bodyguard was rarely mentioned in the media while the president was alive. Due to the nature of his work Leamsy Villafañá Salazar shunned publicity, did not like to be photographed, and tried to stay in the shadows. Chávez considered him to be a reliable, incorruptible, and professionally trained Bolivarian officer. This was precisely how the president described him on a TV broadcast about the attempted pro-American coup in April 2002. Conspirators managed to depose Chávez for three days, but with the support of the people and army, he triumphantly returned to the presidential Miraflores palace. From the roof of his palace he was welcomed by the military, among whom Salazar was readily visible, victoriously waving the Venezuelan flag. That image became the symbol of the victory over the counter-revolution.

Oddly enough, little is known about Salazar, and mostly from tight-lipped American sources. He was born in 1974 to a large family living in Petare, a slum district in the Venezuelan capital. After high school he entered the naval academy, graduating in 1998. He was a middling student, finishing 27th out of his class of 55. Nonetheless, in 1999 Salazar was tapped to be a presidential honor guard. Tito Rincón Bravo, Venezuela's minister of defense and father of Leamsy's first wife, played an important role in this appointment. Salazar became a personal assistant to Chávez. That job came with a very intense workload, due to the frantic pace of the president's life.

After the events of 2002, Salazar was unexpectedly posted to a naval base in the provinces – in Punto Fijo (in Falcón State), but in 2006 Chávez ordered Salazar's return to his former duties in the security detail.

Following Chávez's death, Salazar provided security for the president of the National Assembly, Diosdado Cabello. But oddities in Salazar's behavior made Cabello uneasy. At that time debate was still raging about the causes of Chávez's death and the people who could have been involved, and so Cabello eventually asked the minister of defense to transfer Salazar to another post. At some point during this period Salazar married once again. His new wife was Anabel Linares Leal, a graduate of the military academy who had been presented with her officer's sword from Chávez's own hands. For a while Anabel worked with the financial accounts of the Venezuelan armed forces at Banco Bicentenario, which means that she had access to secret information about arms purchases abroad. The newlyweds applied for permission to travel to the Dominican Republic for their honeymoon. That permission was granted, and soon the couple was in Santo Domingo, but from there flew on to Spain. A special plane belonging to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) flew Salazar and his family from Spain to the US.

This is how Emili J. Blasco, a Washington correspondent for the Spanish newspaper ABC who has often served as a mouthpiece for propaganda from US intelligence services, described Salazar's escape. He claimed that in Spain the Americans had subjected the Salazars to lengthy interrogations in order to determine the «true objectives of their break with the regime».

The stories about Salazar in the international media, which were similar in tone and had obviously come from the same source, emphasize that while Chávez was alive, Salazar had been a «committed Bolivarian», but that after his death Salazar had decided to break with the regime. Therefore, Salazar had held secret negotiations with the DEA for 13 months, not only to arrange his escape, but also to obtain certain promises regarding his own safety, as well as that of his wife and children. But the CIA is not mentioned, only the DEA. The reason for that is clear – the CIA is a spy agency, and any indicator of possible long-standing secret ties with this «bureau of hit men» was something Salazar’s protectors tried to avoid, knowing that Venezuela’s SEBIN (Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional) counterintelligence agency would investigate the story of his involvement in Chávez’s murder.

Now the couple is in the US, living under federal protection, and they give testimony on a wide range of issues, but primarily on the «involvement» of various figures in the Bolivarian regime in drug trafficking, including military leaders. It should be kept in mind that long before Salazar made his escape, US intelligence agencies had begun to plant false information in the media about the existence of a so-called «Cartel of the Suns» (Cartel de los Soles), which was allegedly led by Diosdado Cabello and a group of Venezuelan generals with ties to him. Cabello was compromised as a preemptive measure, because US intelligence agencies saw him as the most likely successor to Chávez, but holding more radical anti-American views. Immediately after his escape, Salazar was recruited into this smear campaign against Cabello. Some of the information obtained from Salazar (or rather from his handlers in the CIA and DEA) was used by Emili J. Blasco in his book *Bumerán Chávez*, which was published simultaneously in Washington and Madrid in April 2015.

In particular, Salazar recounted how he had accompanied Diosdado Cabello on an excursion during which he had witnessed that leader of parliament’s (!) «direct involvement» in the late-night dispatch of drug-laden speedboats from the Paraguaná peninsula in Falcón State. For whom these drugs were intended and why this was done so close to the islands of Aruba and Curaçao, where there are surveillance outposts for the Pentagon, as well as CIA stations and DEA offices, Salazar did not explain. Based on Blasco’s commentary, one can conclude that the boats were headed for Cuba! What’s more, Salazar claimed that while accompanying Cabello he also had the opportunity to see his «secret armored vaults filled with US currency», with «mountains upon mountains of wrapped bills from floor to ceiling». That’s what a drug lord’s stash looks like in a Hollywood movie. According to Salazar’s account – or rather, the cover story that US intelligence services dreamed up for him – the troubles experienced by one of the guards who refused to take part in the drug deals were the last straw, prompting Salazar’s decision to flee: «They threatened to physically exterminate the man».

The pro-American media does its utmost to gloss over the questions that inevitably arise about Salazar’s participation in the preparations for Chávez’s murder. They claim that there can be no doubts about Salazar: he honorably served the regime and idolized Chávez until he realized that those immediately above him were mixed up in drug trafficking. However, the investigation conducted by SEBIN raises doubts about Salazar’s «spotless rectitude». Even his mother has admitted that Leamsy’s work in the presidential guard weighed heavily on him. But he was in no

rush to distance himself from Chávez, because Salazar's primary employer was someone else, and those people insisted that he strictly discharge his duties.

Recent media revelations about ties between Venezuela's Cartel of the Suns and the Sinaloa Cartel have demonstrated the imagination and verve with which US intelligence agencies are fabricating «deals», with the intention of compromising their enemy. Allegedly «Chapo» Guzmán himself was in Venezuela in August and September of 2015 in order to discuss some joint projects. Passing mention has been made of his «business» trips to the country in 2009 and 2010 and of the warm nature of his relations with General Hugo Carvajal, a close associate of Diosdado Cabello. This is the same Carvajal whom the DEA tried to kidnap from the island of Aruba in the summer of 2014 – despite his diplomatic passport – and ship off to the US as a drug trafficker. Officials on the island prevented this from happening, and the general returned to Venezuela where he was greeted by President Maduro, Diosdado Cabello, and other Bolivarian leaders as a hero. It would be naïve to think the DEA's hunt for Carvajal was over. He is still on their «wanted list» because of evidence fabricated by US agents. That list also includes the names of others whom the DEA has identified as the ringleaders of the Cartel of the Suns.

Salazar's statements are sharply at odds with the image of the honorable patriot he had previously cultivated. Quite revealing are Salazar's allegations that Chávez died not in March 2013 but in December of 2012. Supposedly all of Chávez's relatives took part in this ruse, as well as the members of the Bolivarian government, the leaders of Cuba, and Cuban counterintelligence. This was done in order to preserve the continuity of government authority serving the interests of «Maduro's factions». Thus, every decree and resolution signed by the president after December can be declared fraudulent, and the Maduro government – illegal.

Meanwhile, the buzz of reporting on the Venezuelan leaders' «drug deals» is getting louder. The plan devised by US intelligence is clearly evident: to distract the global public from the fact that Salazar is the most likely candidate to have killed Chávez. The Bolivarian media calls Salazar «Judas». Official (and unofficial) agencies in Venezuela are collecting evidence of his criminal activities, his clandestine meetings with representatives from the CIA and DEA, and the possibility that he gave the Americans information about the president's travel itineraries and individuals with whom he had planned to meet, as well as biological material that belonged to Chávez.

The Americans are doing their best to impede this work. In Madrid, for example, the CIA station has manufactured a crisis surrounding the Venezuelan Defense Attaché Office staff, accusing them of spying on members of the opposition. But of course the real issue is quite different – the threat of lurid revelations about Chávez's murder. Right now it is difficult to say who exactly will reveal the whole truth. That could end up being an idealist like Snowden – someone who considers lynching a politician like this to be unacceptable. There is some hope that a material incentive might prove effective: Venezuela's leaders have decided to offer a financial reward for any specific information about the individuals who coordinated and carried out the murder of Hugo Chávez.