

International Intelligence

Violence as Chávez Battles Recall Mobe

The Dec. 1 launching of a second nationwide recall by the anti-Chávez forces in Venezuela proved highly successful, with Venezuelans massing at the recall booths and turning the mobilization into an anti-Chávez festival in various parts of the country. When its booths closed Dec. 1, the opposition Democratic Coordinator claimed to have 3.6 million signatures, 30% more than the 2.4 million required by law. The National Election Council—which has a 3-to-2 majority in favor of President Hugo Chávez—now has 30 days, according to the Constitution, to validate the signatures; and then up to three months to convoke the recall referendum. The Coordinator is searching for legal ways to accelerate that timeline. The next scheduled Presidential elections are in 2006.

While some media are reporting on the popularity of the recall and on the probability that Chávez will lose the referendum, the Chavistas are gearing up for battle, as Chávez has no intention of stepping down. First, they have charged that the opposition committed a “mega-fraud” in collecting the recall signatures, and that they really only have 1.9 million in hand. When OAS Secretary-General César Gaviria defended the petitions as successful and relatively free of fraud, Chávez publicly denounced Gaviria for “overstepping the mark.” Secondly, the President’s forces have launched a recall vote of their own, targetting 37 leading opposition congressmen, and exaggerating the number of signatures they’ve collected.

On Dec. 3, violence broke out in the streets of Caracas as Venezuelan police and national guard troops battled rioting “street vendors” who were shouting pro-Chávez slogans, firing weapons, and throwing rocks.

Geneva Accord Gets On ‘Road Map’ Agenda

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan announced on Dec. 5 that the “Geneva Accord” peace initiative would be on the agenda of the next meeting of the “Quartet”—UN,

U.S., EU, Russia—which designed the Middle East Road Map for peace. The meeting will be in early 2004.

This follows the statement by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, after a longer-than-expected two-hour meeting with the Geneva Accord’s negotiators, that the United States would maintain a “channel of communication” with Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, its leading organizers. Rabbo, after the meetings with Powell and Annan, said that the Geneva Accord was “complementary” to the Road Map, and that the Road Map was the “mother of all initiatives.”

From the side of the government of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Israel’s Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert called the Powell meeting with the Geneva organizers “an incorrect step by a senior representative of the American Administration.” But the Likudnik complaints have not slowed the process as yet.

Al-Qaeda Now Moving To Iraq?

According to *Newsweek’s* Dec. 15 issue, the magazine’s Taliban contact, Sharafullah, during his weekly meeting with *Newsweek* reporters at Qissa Khwani Ka Bazaar (it literally means “the story of dreams”) in Peshawar, Pakistan, said that Osama bin Laden’s three representatives had met with the Taliban supremo Mullah Mohammad Omar’s representatives the week before, along the Pakistan borders in Khost. At the meeting, bin Laden’s people supposedly said that al-Qaeda would be shifting some of its fighters over to Iraq, and reducing by half its \$3 million monthly contribution to Afghan *jihadi* outfits.

The reason? “The spilling of American blood is easy in Iraq. The Americans are drowning in deep, rising water. . . I’m giving men who are thirsty a chance to drink deeply.”

Sharafullah, whose reliability has been strongly defended by the *Newsweek* reporters, said that bin Laden’s men pointed out that raising and distributing funds have been complicated by the U.S. crackdown on *ji-*

hadi charitable foundations, bank accounts of terror-related organizations, and money transfers. Bin Laden, however, had sent the message that he would not cut further the \$1.5 million monthly help to the Taliban: “We will never leave you alone,” the terror chief allegedly told the Taliban supremo’s representatives.

LaRouche Again All Over Arabic Press

A new round of intensive press coverage emerged in the Arab world in early December. This time the themes are Lyndon LaRouche’s visit to France, *EIR’s* analysis of “Cheney-gate,” and the reaction by Cheney and the neo-cons to LaRouche’s successful campaign.

In Dec. 7, Egyptian press, both official and opposition, carried a wire from the official Middle East News Agency (MENA) correspondent in Paris. The wire was titled “An American Presidential Candidate Supports Egyptian Media Opposition to Sharon” to maximize the attention. Most importantly, the story appeared in the official *Al-Ahram* daily. It stated: “Lyndon LaRouche, one of the candidates for the Democratic nomination for the 2004 presidential elections . . . stressed that ‘the Egyptian press’ opposition to the neo-con policies is actually in the interest of the United States itself, whose security currently relies on getting rid of the neo-cons.” The significance of this is, that the Egyptian media is in an open, furious battle with U.S. Ambassador to Cairo David Welsh, who has imposed himself as imperial viceroy of Cairo to dictate to the Egyptian press what to write and what to censor.

The MENA wire concluded: “LaRouche expressed his strong rejection of the idea of imposing democracy on the nations of the Middle East by force. He demanded that democracy should come from within the peoples of the region. He accused the neo-cons of abusing the question of democracy as a pretext to carry out their strategy.”

Meanwhile, the Arabic translation of two *EIR* articles by Jeffrey Steinberg, “Plumbers Are Under Investigation in

ZIMBABWE formally pulled out of the British Commonwealth, according to its government newspaper, the *Herald*, on Dec. 8, "over its continued unfair treatment by the group of mostly former British colonies. President Mugabe told the leaders of Nigeria, South Africa, and Jamaica that Zimbabwe had quit the 54-nation club." The *Herald* reports that the three leaders tried to persuade Mugabe not to take the step. Nigeria is the new chairman of the Commonwealth Heads of Government.

SOUTH KOREAN engineers working on Iraq's electricity grid are getting out. After the killing of two of their associates in early December, the remaining 60 engineers held several meetings with their managers, protesting the lack of security. They said that information concerning the security danger had been withheld, they were not given the necessary protective equipment, were deployed without security guards, and were even forced to work at night in war zones. It is the largest exodus of reconstruction workers since the war ended.

GERMAN senior Foreign Ministry official Michael Gerdts said on Dec. 4 that he considered Iran a model for developing democracy in the Middle East. "We, in Germany, regard Iran as a 'key country' for the future of the Near and Middle East," Gerdts stated. "Iran's democratic structures and its civil society are more developed than other countries in the Middle East."

DRUG company majors on Dec. 10 accepted a 5% ceiling on royalties they will charge South African generic manufacturers of their patented AIDS drugs. GlaxoSmithKline and Boehringer Ingelheim have reached the deal with AIDS activist groups, thus sparing the companies prosecution by South Africa's Competition Tribunal, *Business Day* reported Dec. 10.

Cheney-Gate" and "Neo-Cons Geek at LaRouche's Campaign," were published in several Arabic newspapers in Dubai, Oman, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and in London's *Al-Arab International*. In addition, they have been circulating on Arabic Internet websites.

Discussion Proceeds On Iran-India Pipeline

Iranian Deputy Minister of Oil and chairman of the National Petrochemical Company Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh said on Dec. 3 that a proposed India-Iran gas pipeline would cut down the cost of gas in the Indian market. According to a press release of India's Confederation of Indian Industries, a copy of which was received by IRNA, Nematzadeh said that the India-Iran gas pipeline would to a great extent mitigate the shortages, at a price which would prove to be beneficial in the long run.

Earlier, welcoming the Iranian minister and his delegation, Surajit Chaliha, chairman of Ogexpd and President (oil and gas) of Jubilant Enpro Ltd, said that India is deficient in oil and gas and that existing oil reserves will not meet future requirements. Chaliha said that India would require 3.2 million barrels a day by 2010, and her only hope lies offshore. Chaliha added that the India-Iran pipeline could be a dream project as far as India was concerned. He said that India-Iran bilateral trade had increased encouragingly since 1998 and stood at \$2.2 billion in 2002.

Japan Mission to Mars Fails on Way

Japan's space agency, JAXA, announced on Dec. 10 that it had officially given up on inserting its *Nozomi* (Hope) spacecraft into orbit around Mars. It was Japan's first interplanetary mission, and has suffered a number of failures during its five-year journey. Japan is not alone—more than half of the U.S. and Soviet/Russian missions to Mars have failed. It is quite impressive that the Japanese spacecraft survived as long as

it did.

Nozomi was launched in July 1998, and was supposed to reach Mars in October 1999. But a thruster problem during its December 1998 swing-by of Earth, in a gravity assist for its long journey to Mars, left *Nozomi* low on fuel. Engineers reconfigured its trajectory, and shot the spacecraft around the Earth twice more, in December 2002 and June 2003, for a velocity boost, still hoping to get it to Mars. But these exposed it to the effects of a massive solar flare, which damaged its electrical system.

Now, as the spacecraft is closing in on Mars, ground controllers cannot slow it down to be captured into orbit around Mars by firing its engines, because they are low on fuel. So, after its long journey, on Dec. 14 *Nozomi* will whiz by Mars, and go into orbit around the Sun.

On Christmas Day, Europe's *Beagle* lander, carried on its Mars Express spacecraft, is to land on Mars, followed by two U.S. rovers in early January.

OPEC Discusses Trading Oil in Euros

At early December's meeting of the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries in Vienna, there were calls, in particular from Saudi Arabia, to cut OPEC's oil production due to the rapid decline of the dollar. So far, OPEC has set a preferred target range for the average oil price between \$22 and \$28. But, as the value of the dollar is shrinking, this target is no longer enough.

On Dec. 8, OPEC Secretary General Alvaro Silva, still in Vienna, gave an interview to the Venezuelan state news agency Venpres, saying: "The band is not set in stone, and if there is a decision to change its levels, they would be changed above all because of currency circumstances."

Other potential moves by OPEC to deal with the declining dollar are being discussed as well, Silva said. He noted: "There is talk of trading in euros. It's one of the alternatives . . . either that or a basket of currencies. It is possible that the organization will discuss this and take a decision at a given time."