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Venezuela

An anti-imperialist policy

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For a country historically linked to the United States, the foreign policy of Hugo Chavez constitutes a significant rupture. In the name of the struggle against a unipolar world Venezuelan diplomacy has developed a range of policies on Latin American integration, the strengthening of links with OPEC and the development of economic relations with China and Russia.

From its arrival in power, the government demanded that US military forces leave the country. It introduced a clause in the Constitution banning foreign troops from the national territory. At the same time, the government banned US planes headed for Colombia in the framework of Plan Colombia from flying over Venezuela. The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project has been rejected by Chavez, who prefers a Latin American political integration. At the Quebec summit, Venezuela was the only country to express reservations on the implementation of the agreement.

On Colombia, Chavez refuses to characterize the FARC as a terrorist organization, contenting himself with condemning the terrorist actions carried out by the guerrillas.

During his electoral campaign and to this day, Chavez made solidarity with Cuba an axis of his foreign policy. In the area of oil the two countries have signed an agreement which has given Cuba favourable credit conditions indexed on the international price of a barrel of oil; the higher the price, the lower the part of the bill paid in cash and the higher the part paid in credit. Cuba provides contingents of doctors and sports instructors in return; also, it has cared for 5,000 Venezuelan patients in Cuban hospitals and welcomed hundreds of students to its medical schools. Venezuela is the only Latin American country not to have voted for the recent resolution of the UN Human Rights Commission against Cuba and Fidel Castro is regularly hailed in Chavez's public appearances.

Venezuela has signed an oil agreement with a dozen other Caribbean and Central American countries, with similar credit conditions (if slightly less advantageous than the Cuban deal) which help reduce the oil bill for small economies.

Chavez welcomed the decision of the OPEC Summit in 2000 to respect scrupulously production quotas. The immediate consequence was a rise in the price per barrel which went from less than US\$10 to more than US\$20 in a few weeks. Venezuela has sought a rapprochement with the big exporter countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Iraq.

Chavez has visited Saddam Hussein, becoming the sole head of state to break the embargo decided on in 1991 by the UN Security Council. Venezuela opposed both the war in Afghanistan and the recent war in Iraq.

Recently Chavez attacked the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, as agencies that oppress the peoples more than they help them. Despite all, trade relations with the US have not been modified. Venezuela remains the main American supplier of oil to the US. The latter, which desires the fall of Chavez and participated actively in the attempted coup of April 2002 and recognized the transitional government of the employers' leader Carmona, is isolated at the continental level because of the Chavez government's strict respect for constitutional legality. The Organization of American States had condemned the coup. Yet, outside of Fidel Castro, Chavez has no strategic allies in America.