

VENEZUELA: A Case for Second Track/Citizens Diplomacy

A Model for the Proposed Implementation of the Second Track method of Citizens Diplomacy in the Escalating Crisis between the Chavez Government and the 'Oposicion'

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Social and political polarization is nothing new to Venezuela. Like most Latin American countries there exists an unprecedented concentration of wealth and resources, which often parallels the stark racial and cultural stratification that exist within the societies of the region.

Throughout the second half of the 20th Century, these inequities and divisions were a significant factor in generating political conflict and upheaval in the form of armed civil wars, military coups and dictatorships. And although Venezuela has by no means been immune to these violent social and political realities, it is frequently cited as one of Latin America's most "stable democracies." ¹

The theories explaining the reasons for why this stability has occurred in Venezuela are of course diverse and varied. One undeniable factor was the two-party democratic *Punto Fijo* political system that existed between the ruling parties of *Accion Democratica* (AD) and the *Partido Social Cristiano* (COPEI), the armed forces, the Catholic church, *Fedecamaras*, and the United States that's was agreed upon in 1958 and that rotated power between the parties for the better part of 40 years. ALTHOUGH THIRD PARTIES EXISTED AND OFTEN HAD REPRESENTATION IN CONGRESS

In 1998 however, this traditional bi-party system and stability would be challenged by a convincing democratic electoral victory of Hugo Chavez Frias and his *Movimiento V Republica* (MVR) that broke away from this established legacy. The fiercely fought election between Chavez and the traditional ruling elite tapped into deteriorating economic conditions experienced throughout the Washington Consensus led 90's, and the resulting social and political polarization that was beginning to emerge within Venezuela. This division would soon grow into an irreconcilable dichotomy between so called "*Chavistas*" and "*Anti-Chavistas*." These terms are now not only identifiable by political tendencies, but the political discourse that has increasingly played off of the profound social and cultural divisions within society.

¹ Michael Shifter, "In Search of Hugo Chavez." *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, (May/June 2006)

During the past 8 years since Chavez assumed power, this volatile social and political landscape has resulted in a high level of tension between the government of Hugo Chavez and the assortment of political parties, business leaders, and unions that comprise the larger “Opposition.” A movement in its own right, this “*Oposicion*,” has managed to organize massive strikes that have paralyzed the country and the Venezuelan economy for months at a time, and even a 48 hour “*golpe de estado*” or *coup d’etat*, in April of 2002. This strife, coupled with increasing levels of crime have ultimately threatened the stability of democratic institutions and civil peace in Latin America’s “model” of stability and democracy.

The need for the implementation of Second Track *Citizen’s Diplomacy*² in the form of dialogue and resolution is thus crucial to diffusing the potential for future violence within a now highly polarized Venezuelan society. It is the purpose of this report to offer a brief *Diagnosis* and *Projection* for the potential for conflict, and then outline the *Citizen’s Diplomacy* model and how I would recommend its implementation in the case of Venezuela.

Part 1 Diagnosis: Conflict Assessment

Historical Background

In 1958, with the establishment of the *Pacto de Punto Fijo* the dictatorship of Perez Jimenez was brought to an end, and the rotating two-party political alliance of *Accion Democratica* (AD) and *Social Cristiano* (COPEI) instated. This political pact, which was sanctioned by the Venezuelan armed forces, and sponsored by the Catholic Church, the Venezuelan chamber of commerce *Fedecamaras* and the United States, would come to define the emerging petroleum economy of Venezuela in the 60’s and 70’s as one in which a powerful economic and political elite would solidify and control monopolies within the private and multinational sector.³ Ultimately concentrating an abundant amount of wealth and resources into a few hands, with influential political ties. (Venezuela, like most Latin American countries, is home to one of the most unequally distributed economies in the world.⁴)

Throughout the 1980’s this robust “protectionist” economy would make a brutal transition to a “*Neoliberal*” one, which resulted in the restructuring of the Venezuelan foreign debt, and the implementation of monetary programs demanded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Like most countries within Latin America this Washington Consensus

² John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens’ Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

³ “Millennium Development Goals” (May 2006) United Nations Development Programme. <http://www.undp.org/mdg/news/20060125-venezuela.shtml>

⁴ “Restore Rule of Law, Protect Rights in Venezuela,” *Human Rights Watch* (April 12, 2002) <http://hrw.org/press/2002/04/venezuela0412.htm>

economic model generated a profound socio-political crisis in the late 1980's and early 1990's that was only exacerbated by President Carlos Andres Perez, who relentlessly instituted the "social austerity" programs and cuts demanded by the International Monetary Fund, and at the same time was accused of rampant corruption and electoral fraud.

This mounting economic and political crisis generated a growing civil unrest that spilled on to the streets of the Venezuelan capital of Caracas in 1989. This produced increasingly violent social protest and a state backlash which resulted in an upwards of 5,000 deaths. This crackdown would come to be known as the *Caracaso*.⁵

This period brought to the forefront the stark economic and social polarization that had existed, but which had now worsened to the point of open conflict and violence. This growing socio-political uncertainty sparked rumors of the increasing likelihood of a military coup. On February 4, 1992 the then Naval Corporal **Hugo Chavez Frias** along with a group of military officials made a coup attempt against then President Carlos Andres Perez. Chavez's attempt was thwarted, and as a result, he was imprisoned and removed from the armed services.

However in 1997, after leaving prison, Chavez founded the *Movimiento V Republica (MVR)* and in joining electoral forces with the *Polo Patriotico* in 1998 won the Presidential seat in an election characterized by a growing *Chavista* movement that donned red bearets and incited the need for a profound shake up within the Venezuelan political system by removing the traditional ruling "*Oligarquia*." Chavez assumed power in 1999 and almost immediately dissolved Congress, and called for a *Asamblea Constituyente*, which would be charged with the responsibility of writing a **new Venezuelan constitution**. This *Asamblea* was comprised of a vast majority of representatives of the *Polo Patriotico* party, who won 120 of the 131 seats up for election. After drafting the new Constitution, and it having been approved by the *Asamblea* it was put up for public referendum and on December of 1999 was given a 71% approval. Though the elections were marked with a historically low voter turnout of 46%.⁶ This new constitution was ratified nonetheless, and contained sweeping institutional reforms that not only changed the name of the country to the Bolivariana Republic of Venezuela, but concentrated presidential power, transformed the two house legislative branch into a single *Asamblea Nacional* (comprised of national elected representatives), and in addition to the traditional Executive, Judicial, and Legislative

⁵ "Millenium Development Goals" (May 2006) United Nations Development Programme.

<http://www.undp.org/mdg/news/20060125-venezuela.shtml>

⁶*Ibid.*

branches of government, the Constitution created two additional branches of power: the “*Poder Electoral*” in the Venezuelan Electoral Council (responsible for electoral oversight) and the “*Poder Moral*,” which in essence was an idea of Simon Bolivar, to have a branch dedicated to the defense of the *Pueblo*, its conscience, and its well being.

In accordance with the new constitution, new presidential and legislative elections were held in July 2000. Chavez deemed these the “Mega-Elections,” and solidified his mandate by winning reelection, and his party *Polo Patriotico* assuming two-thirds of the new *Asamblea Nacional*. This unprecedented political mandate empowered Chavez with a 6-year term (with the possibility for re-election in December of 2006), and enabled Chavez to seek out a vast political platform to bring about a “profound transformation to the social and economic sectors of the country.” To accomplish this, the new *Asamblea Nacional* in November of 2000 approved the controversial *Ley de Habilitacion*, which gave Chavez the authority to legislate by Presidential decree (sidestepping the legislative branch), in all economic, social, and public administration matters for a year. The following November 2001, his government approved 49 of his Presidential decrees as law, which produced a strong backlash from the business community and Venezuelan middle class, already upset by the vast institutional changes brought on by Chavez and his government.⁷ Within this legislative pack of laws, the *Ley Organica de Hidrocarburos* and the *Ley de Tierras* and *Desarrollo Agrario* were two of the most controversial. The first reaffirming the absolute and inalienable property right of the Venezuelan state over all natural resources, wells, mines, and hydrocarbons like oil, existing in and on Venezuelan soil. The second, refers to the expropriation of rural lands, which “do not serve a socially determined function,” so as to be redistributed equitably, and then cultivated so as to develop agricultural and alimentary security.

Both of these new laws were perceived as threatening to the private sector, and in response *Fedecamaras* (roughly translated as the Federation of Business Bureaus and Production), and CTV, the *Confederation of Venezuelan Workers*, both old assignee’s to the old *Punto Fijo* political pact, organized a massive national strike for December 10, 2001. Soon after, a conflict between **PDVSA** (The Venezuelan state operated petroleum authority,

⁷ “President Carters Statement at the End of Venezuelan Trip,” (July 9, 2002) The Carter Center. <http://www.cartercenter.org/doc1040.htm>

responsible for 86% of all the foreign currency that the Venezuelan economy generates⁸) and the Chavez government began to grow when the directors of the PDVSA claimed that the government was trying to manipulate its operations politically.

Between December 2001 and April 2002 heightened social unrest was generating increasing instability, as the Chavez government and his *Chavista* supporters were under increasing attack from *Fedecamaras*, CTV, and the PDVSA, whose “*Oposicion*” movement had spread to include the major private media moguls, the upper and middle classes, and even sectors within the military who in February of 2002 were openly calling for the Presidents resignation.⁹

This *Oposicion* called for a new “indefinite” **general strike** for the 9th of April 2002, that by the 11th of April had generated in massive street demonstrations in the capital and throughout the country by both pro-Chavez *Chavistas* and the anti-Chavez *Oposicion* groups. On the 11th, these two groups collided, and 15 people from both the *Oposicion* and the *Chavistas* were killed under dubious circumstances.¹⁰ Shortly after an announcement by a group of Military generals, demanded the forceful resignation of Chavez. As a result Chavez was taken by force and essentially kidnapped and taken to an unspecified military base outside of Caracas, while Pedro Carmona and Carlos Ortega (both Presidents of *Fedecamaras* and CTV respectively) assumed power.

The following day, **April 12th**, produced what can be legitimately defined as a military coup, as Venezuelan armed forces Chief General Lucas Rincon, had communicated that while still being held in an unspecified location, Chavez had formally resigned from power. This unconfirmed declaration led Military General Efraim Vasquez to formally install and recognize Pedro Carmona as the new President of the Republic, whose first act as President was to dissolve all public powers, and declare that new legislative and presidential elections would be held in a years time. A dramatic shift that would be challenged almost immediately as the day following pro-Chavez *Chavistas* both civil from the neighboring lower class neighborhoods, and from the military took to the streets violently demanding that Chavez be reinstated, and that Chavez’s Vice President Diosdado Cabello immediately assume control of the government until Chavez resumed power.

⁸ I: Historias de las Encuestas,” (July 4, 2004) and “II: Éxitos y Fracazos de las Encuestas,” (July 11, 2004) *Ultimas Noticias*, www.ultimasnoticias.com.ve, also available at: www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/index.php?act=ST&f=15&t=6489

⁹ Michael Shifter, “In Search of Hugo Chavez.” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, (May/June 2006)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

On the 13th of April, huge sectors of the wider Venezuelan population began to demand the return of Chavez. These mounting and increasingly violent mobilizations ultimately culminated in the resignation of Carmona, and a hero's homecoming for Chavez to Caracas and to *Miraflores*, the Presidential Palace, as President, 48 hours after being taken from power.¹¹

MANY DETAILS, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN USEFUL TO SUM-UP WHAT DO YOU DETECT TO BE THE MOST IMPORTANT NEEDS/CONCERNS OF BOTH THE CHAVISTAS AND THE OPPOSITION/S

Attempts to Resolve the Conflict:

April 12, 2002: The Dividing Line – Chavez & La Oposicion

This attempted military *coup d'état* led by the emerging *Oposicion* further entrenched the now profound political and social polarization between pro *Chavistas* and anti *Chavistas*, and revealed growing institutional instability that compelled the Chavez government to establish a process of dialogue, instead of direct state prosecution with the leaders of the “*Oposicion*” and their attempted coup.

In July 2002, the government attempted to initiate an official “Dialogue” with this assortment of major **private media** heads, and leaders from the business sector, students, and urban middle class that almost immediately failed. Notwithstanding Chavez turned to the international community and specifically the ex-North American president Jimmy Carter to attempt to bridge the now abysmal differences between the Chavez Government and the *Oposicion*.

Unfortunately upon intervening, the first date chosen by the **Carter Center** to initiate dialogue between the groups happened to be set for the same day as a massive political and social mobilization across the country of the *Oposicion* against the Chavez government. The leadership felt that in coming to the table for dialogue with the government meant sending a message of “no confrontation” to a base of support that was mobilized under the strategy of a sustained “**open lucha**” against the Chavez government. The resulting absence of the *Oposicion* on that first date of “dialogue” upset Carter who publicly expressed his discontent to the international community. Despite this, Carter then sought out the assistance of the **Organization of American States (OAS)** and the **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**. And along with Secretary General of the OAS, Cesar Gaviria, and Kofi Annan,

¹¹ “Restore Rule of Law, Protect Rights in Venezuela,” *Human Rights Watch* (April 12, 2002) <http://hrw.org/press/2002/04/venezuela0412.htm>

Secretary General of the United Nations, Carter formed the **Tri-party Commission on Venezuela**.

This second attempt at Dialogue between the Chavez government and the *Oposicion* was successful in bringing the two sides together and held under the title of *Mesa de Negociacion y Acuerdo*, or, the “Table of Negotiation and Agreement.” The principal objective of this new round was to seek out agreements to solve the countries crisis through the electoral process.

However, in the developing of this second round, the political climate of the country began to heat up intensely as the leaders from both the Chavez government, and the *Oposicion* continued to deliver increasingly aggressive speeches and warnings.¹² This political and social escalation grew markedly and in October 2002 the newly formed *Coordinadora Democratica* from the *Oposicion* organized a massive demonstration calling for new elections. The *Chavistas* responded with an equally intense and larger counter demonstration. The *Coordinadora Democratica*, and the CTV, in response, then organized a 12-hour strike, while 14 soldiers from the *Oposicion* declared disobedience to the Chavez government.

At the negotiations the Chavez government openly accused the *Oposicion* of plotting another coup attempt by planning an indefinite strike. The *Oposicion* accused Chavez of being authoritarian and anti-democratic. The dialogue was going nowhere and was soon put on a hold as the *Oposicion* organized another general strike for **December 2, 2002**, prompting Chavez to refuse to meet for negotiations with the *Oposicion* as long as the strike was held.

What was originally intended to be a 2-3 day strike ended up lasting 62 days, which resulted in multi-million dollar loses to the Venezuelan economy, and a fight for power on the street and increasingly within the leadership of the state run oil company PDVSA.

In the end Chavez retained power, and during the lull following the strike, managed to regain a relative social and politically stability, while the *Oposicion* set its next sights on removing Chavez from power by soliciting an electoral public “Revocation Referendum.” As written into the new constitution by the *Asamblea Constituyente* in 1999, this electoral referendum process essentially enables the public to invoke the power of a “recall” of a residing President.

¹² President Carters Statement at the End of Venezuelan Trip,” (July 9, 2002) The Carter Center. <http://www.cartercenter.org/doc1040.htm>

This referendum process was negotiated as an “electoral means” out of the crisis and agreed upon at the “Table of Negotiation and Agreement” on May 29, 2003. A year later, the “*Referendo Revacatorio*” was presented to the Venezuelan public as a simple “Si o No” vote for whether Chavez should stay in power. Under intense international scrutiny, Chavez won the election by a convincing 60% “**Si**” vote that ratified him as president of the Republic, and further affirmed the legitimacy of his mandate and power.¹³ This highly publicized vote shocked the *Oposicion* who almost immediately accused the government of fraud, despite the reaffirmation of the results by the Carter Center, the OAS, and the United Nations.

The Current Situation

It has been the steadfast belief of the Tri-party commission that a sustained electoral process is the only solution to the institutional political crisis, however, the elections have only seemingly intensified the social and political polarization and conflict within Venezuelan society.

In 2005, there were two different elections held. The first local elections were on August 7th for Municipal Council, and parochial posts, and then on December 4, national parliamentary elections were held for the *Asamblea Nacional*, the *Parlamento Latinoamericano* and the *Parlamento Andino*.

This process got off to a rough start as for the August 7th local election three new non-government organizations from the *Oposicion*: ***Sumate, Bravo Pueblo y Alianza Popular*** campaigned for a **mass abstention** from the elections. The traditional parties however, *Accion Democratica* and the *COPEI*, believed it to be more damaging to be missing from the elections than to be beaten by the results. As a result of these first elections Chavez’s party MVR became the strongest political party in the country ahead of *Accion Democratica* and *Podemos* respectively.

In the national parliamentary elections on December 4th, the campaigns for both the *Oposicion* and *Chavista* candidates held large mass demonstrations in Caracas and throughout the country. However, in weeks leading up to the elections the *Oposicion* presented to the government a **list of concerns** they expected to be met as a condition of participating in the election cycle. They were stated as follows:

¹³ Javier Corrales, “Hugo Boss.” *Foreign Policy*, (March/April)

- Access for the *Oposicion* to the complete electorate database held by the *Registro Electoral Permanente*;
- Serious doubts in the integrity of the electronic voting system;
- Tainted last minute voter registration campaigns
- An overall lack of confidence in the *Consejo Nacional Electoral* branch¹⁴

In addition, the parties aligned to Chavez continually denounced the supposed “**destabilization plan**” organized by the internal *Oposicion* and increasingly overt external actors. Once again the potential for conflict and violence was high. And despite warnings in the days preceding the elections given by the Chief of the OAS mission, RubEn Perina, that an abstention from the elections was not “positive” for Venezuelan democracy, the principal *Oposicion* parties of the *Alianza Unitaria*, which was comprised of *Accion Democratica*, *Copei*, *MAS*, *Proyecto Venezuela*, *Un Nuevo Tiempo* and *Primero Justicia*, one by one removed their candidates. They based their decision on the following reasons:

- Lack of transparency in the Chavez governments handling of the elections,
- Doubt in the electoral process,
- The withholding of a possibly tainted electoral registry,
- The subjectivity of the politicians appointed to the Venezuelan Electoral Council.¹⁵

As a result of this total abstention on **December 4, 2005** the Chavez government assumed complete control over the *Asamblea Nacional*, which the *Oposicion* now auspiciously criticizes as being absolute, and thus “anti-democratic.”

Today, this Venezuelan socio-political crisis continues to remain dangerously polarized going into the presidential election cycle set to culminate in elections in **December 2006**. A period in which the Chavez government holds a relatively stronger position over a highly divided *Oposicion* without a leader nor a definitive alternative to Chavez NOW THERE IS ONE UNITED FRONT WITH ROSALES AT THE HEAD, THE GOVERNOR OF MARACAIBO’S STATE. An opposition movement that is now in disarray on what to

¹⁴ “Millenium Development Goals” (May 2006) United Nations Development Programme.

<http://www.undp.org/mdg/news/20060125-venezuela.shtml>

¹⁵ *Ibid*

do after a failed military coup, and now 3 democratic elections that have only strengthened Chavez's mandate and international standing as a democratically elected leader.

Current Conflict Stage

In short, this conflict on the surface level of political discourse is “about” **democratic legitimacy**. The *Oposicion* putting in doubt the authority and legality of the Chavez government in the eyes of the domestic constituency and the international community, and Chavez's continued challenge of maintaining institutional legitimacy while making the sweeping social, political, and economic reforms outlined in his discourse *Revolucionario*.

On a deeper level, I believe this conflict to be symptomatic of even greater and more troubling socio-economic divisions that have found their manifestation in two politically polarized movements. However, in formulating the appropriate response to this conflict it is essential to gauge the current stage of the Venezuelan conflict according to easily identifiable and thus negotiable variables that can be measured and compared with empirical study of past *Citizens Diplomacy* processes. For this diagnosis I refer to the nine stages as outlined by Gurr and Davies¹⁶ defined as follows:

1. *conventional politics,*
2. *unstable or militant politics,*
3. *low-level or escalating hostilities,*
4. *war,*
5. *stalemate,*
6. *deescalating or largely contained hostilities,*
7. *contested settlement,*
8. *settlement,*
9. *or reconciliation.*

¹⁶ John Davies and Ted Robert Gurr: Preventive Measures: “Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems.”. Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

Taking these variables into consideration I currently (August 2006) classify the more specific manifestation of the “Chavez Government – *Oposicion*” conflict as in at a “**low level, and slowly escalating hostilities**” stage.¹⁷

Parties and Perceptions

In synthesis, since 1997 Hugo Chavez’s red beret inspired *Revolucion Bolivariana* campaign has brought to the forefront profound socio-economic divisions within Venezuelan society, which throughout the 90’s coalesced into two starkly opposing political forces and the resulting primary parties of the current conflict: The Chavez Government, his ***Chavista*** supporters, and the ad hoc coalition of old political elite sub groups that are now loosely grouped together as the “***Oposicion.***”

This *Oposicion* since Chavez’s 1998 assumption to power have attempted by all means, including massive strikes and demonstrations, political and social destabilizing campaigns, military coups, and electoral referendums to remove Chavez and halt the expansion of his *Revolucion Bolivariana*. Chavez, through his polemic renaming of the country, restructuring of the *Asemblea Nacional*, the creation of a new Venezuelan constitution, broad social, political, and economic reforms, and electoral consolidation of power has only further provoked the *Oposicion* and generated doubt about the integrity of Venezuelan government institutions in the eyes of the international community.

This perception of skepticism has been increasingly expressed most openly by one of the **peripheral** actors in this conflict, the **United States** who has assumed a much less moderate stance for a now increasingly antagonistic approach to the Chavez Government. Resulting in diplomatic assaults and warnings by US Secretary of State Condellezza Rice, and public provocations like those of outspoken Christian Evangelic leader Pat Robertson, that conversely seem to only invigorate Chavez’s rhetoric in citing the US as an external protagonist and agitator of internal Venezuelan domestic issues.¹⁸ In early 2006 Venezuela expelled a member of the US diplomatic mission who was accused of spying. The Chavez government, and *Chavista* supporters also point to direct U.S. influence through supposed “proxy” NGO’s (I consider to be **sub-groups** in this conflict) within the *Oposicion* like ***Sumate***. A Venezuelan NGO that has taken on an increasingly stronger leadership role within

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ Peter Wilson, “Venezuela’s Chavez would lose Recall Vote, Poll Finds (Update 1),” *bloomberg.com*, http://quote.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000086&sid=aKNvYA3oDmVM&refer=latin_america (June 23, 2004).

the coalition, while receiving funding and support from the US State Department. The *Chavistas* have almost always responded by explaining that this collusion is part of a much larger US strategy to suspend the presidential elections, destabilize the country, and force an international intervention by multinational organizations like the OAS and the European Union. They point to the **mass abstention** campaigned by *Sumate* as evidence of an attempt at undermining the legitimacy of the Chavez Government and its institutions.

And now once again in facing the decision of whether or not to “abstain” from the elections, the *Oposicion* has presented another **list of demands** to the government. The first requires a trustworthy electoral arbiter in the Venezuelan Electoral Council. In response the majority Chavista *Asamblea Nacional* in April of this year formed the ***Comite de Postulaciones Electorales***, with the job of electing new directors for the Council. Yet even before this committee could convene, the *Oposicion* responded by arguing that it was biased in its composition: 11 representatives from the *Asamblea Nacional*, 4 members of civil society organizations in favor of Chavez, and 5 representing the *Oposicion*.

Now 4 months before the elections the *Oposicion* political parties continue to threaten to abstain from the elections if a reliable electoral arbiter is not developed. While Chavez in response has threatened that if the *Oposicion* continues with this “destabilizing posture,” which challenges Venezuela’s, and the Chavez Governments institutional integrity, he will call for another public referendum to change the constitution to allow him to be re-elected indefinitely MEANWHILE, AS MENTIONED, THERE IS ONE CANDIDATE, AT LEAST, ROSALES.

A compromising position for all parties involved, that breaks with the specific demand of another **peripheral** actor, the Tri-party commission; the Carter Center, OAS and United Nations, in which a continued and sustained electoral process is the only solution to the institutional political crisis.

Current Prospects for Dialogue:

Under these circumstances, in which the *Oposicion* is in disarray and in search of methods by which to remove Chavez from power without resorting to overt violence and or a campaign of covert destabilization, and the Chavez government in search of means to maintaining democratic legitimacy while implementing a revolutionary political project without using a system of outright political repression, dialogue is key.

The common denominator at this stage of the conflict is the mutual interest in realizing each of their objectives by peaceful means; namely through the channels of the electoral process. However, the very real possibility for violence between the ardent supporters of both political movements exists, and thus the danger of a small spark igniting wide spread violence, evident.

I believe the need for building and facilitating channels of dialogue between representatives from all principal, sub-group, and peripheral actors crucial, so as to highlight the shared cost that violence would incur on both sides, and to strategize together on how best to avoid this end.

Thus, the implementation of a Second Track *Citizens Diplomacy* model¹⁹ in this conflict may provide the best opportunity to improve the understanding the needs and concerns of all actors, and to explore options which may facilitate a electoral process that will allow the two sides to move in the direction of a peaceful and sustainable resolution.

THERE HAS BEEN ANOTHER EFFORT OF THE “NINIs” [NI GOBIERNO NI OPOSICION]

Part 2 Prognosis: *Alternative Future Scenarios*

This continued uncertainty and growing socio-political polarization within Venezuelan society has become, for the moment, a seemingly uncompromising dichotomy between *Chavistas* and the *Oposicion*. And upon taking into account the amount of potential destabilizing factors brought on from this crisis, the potential for an escalation in hostilities is high. The question that remains, is what future scenario is most likely to occur, and what will be the predominate factors and actors that will continue to either agitate this fragile situation, or be addressed and de-escalated, so as to become a contribution to reconciling this conflict.

In my judgment there are three plausible future scenarios for this conflict that can be anticipated:

The First Scenario is one by which the situation remains dangerously the same. As subgroups within the *Oposicion* will continue to prolong its non-violent “destabilization” campaign with the aim of de-legitimizing the electoral mandate of Chavez. And in this absence of a formidable electoral opposition, the Chavez government will only continue to further concentrate its power enabling his government to pursue an increasingly

¹⁹ John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

revolucionario political agenda with very few checks and balances. This situation will enable the *Oposicion* evidence for its claims of a “totalitarian” Chavez regime, and possibly generate and mobilize enough public discontent and hostility towards the government so as to organize more aggressive economic and social strikes with the end of removing Chavez from power. This is ultimately the objective of the *Oposicion*, and thus in my opinion their “*Best Overall Outcome* for the *Oposicion*.”²⁰

The Second Scenario, is that in having believed to have exhausted all other strategies in removing the Chavez government, i.e. a 62 day strike resulting in a failed coup attempt, a referendum, and now “mass abstention” from the electoral process, a desperate *Oposicion* will instead choose to resort to a increasingly “violent” destabilization campaign that could prove to be quite dangerous for Venezuelan society and the region. This scenario could take the shape of an organized campaign of staged disturbances throughout the country by a decentralized *Oposicion* coalition of sub-groups with the aim of sparking a violent confrontation with the Chavez government. Chavez, after being elected for another 6 year mandate and having changed the constitution to enable re-election indefinitely, will have near total control over all democratic institutions. This unprecedented power will be backed up with a growing military apparatus that has been building up not only in arms, but in rhetoric. A dangerous mix, that could very well be incited to “crack down” on the dissent of the *Oposicion*. Even worse, is the possibility that this scenario would spiral into a “resistance” war by the *Oposicion* against the “barer of Castro’s torch,” Chavez, and in the context of regional interests and stability could prompt the influence of international actors like the U.S. and or N.A.T.O. to intervene with economic sanctions, and or allied military support of the *Oposicion* under the context of “stability.”

I WOULD ADD THE INCORPORATION OF THE CIRCULOS BOLIVARIANOS AS ARMED MILITIAS [CHAVEZ BOUGHT 100,000 KALATCHNIKOV'S AND GOT 30,000 DELIVERED

The Third Scenario is a negotiated and monitored assimilation of the *Oposicion* into the electoral process, and is what I would argue to be the *preferred overall outcome*²¹ to this conflict.

This scenario would entail the *Oposicion* learning from its mistakes, consolidating its

²⁰ John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

²¹ *Ibid.*

strength under a coherent leadership, and offering to the 40% of the Venezuelan electorate who voted “NO” to Chavez a coherent political alternative that addresses the very real social and economic concerns of Venezuelan society.²² A slow process, but the only one that does not compromise the same ideals they are demanding of the Chavez government: democratic and institutional legitimacy. But with Bush support, who cares? I AM NOT SURE I UNDERSTAND THE FULL MEANING OF THIS LAST PHRASE.....

This is probably, the most dangerous scenario for the Chavez government in terms of holding onto power, but conversely the most important in justifying his claims to democratic legitimacy on a domestic and international level. Outside of a mass migration to Miami this is the *Best Overall Outcome*²³ for the Chavez government as bringing the *Oposicion* into the democratic fold would cast away a cloud of doubt over the legitimacy of his government.

Moreover, in actively accommodating the participation of the *Oposicion* in the electoral process, the Chavez government will remain in good favor with the Tri-party commission, and further diffuse the validity of the Bush administrations *Populista Dictator* that “must be addressed” type of rhetoric.

The Short Term Expectation:

For the short term however, there will unfortunately likely be a continuation of the same: A politically divided and socially decentralized *Oposicion* continuing to threaten to abstain from the electoral process with the hope of de-legitimizing the Chavez government. In turn, enabling Chavez to continue consolidating his power. Come December however, it is probable that the *Oposicion* will present a candidate, but one that will most likely fail in representing a wide enough base of interests to capture even a third of the electorate. As a result, an increasingly divided but restless *Oposicion* will likely continue with its low-level destabilizing campaign. DITTO

Largely as a result of this uncontested Chavez mandate, and with near totalitarian control over the functions of government the *Chavistas* will be able to continue to pursue its *Revolucion Bolivariana* political agenda, and socio-economic reforms. The challenge for the Chavez government will be in balancing this power in the face of increasing corruption, the temptation to suppress civil liberties, in the face of increasing non-political violence and

²² Javier Corrales, “Hugo Boss.” *Foreign Policy*, (March/April)

²³ John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

crime, and escalating hostilities brought on by a prolonged campaign of destabilization by the *Oposicion*. Authoritarian tendencies will be difficult to resist, especially in the face of the provocations brought on by the latter.

In summary if the *Oposicion* continues to “abstain” from the electoral process while continuing to deliver a confrontational message of “open *lucha* to their base, I believe increased violence, and a increasingly violent campaign to “de-stabilize” the county can be expected in the months and weeks prior to the presidential elections in December 2006.

The current status quo stage of this conflict is a dangerous mix of a deeper concentration of power in the hands of the Chavez government, and a growing discontentment within varied and decentralized subgroups of an *Oposicion* that will only grow increasingly volatile with time. A mutually accepted electoral solution facilitated and monitored by a third party commission between the two principal parties must be agreed upon so as to avert the current status quo escalation of hostilities.

Part 3 Treatment: *Proposed Initiative*

In Part 1 and Part 2 of this analysis I have sought to give a comprehensive and descriptive historic summary that places all of the varied dynamics driving this conflict in the context of the larger tale of events that have slowly transformed Venezuelan society over the past 50 years. The purpose of such a detailed analysis was to provide an accurate foundation by which to gauge the varied perceptions and arguments of all actors involved, and the actual stage of this conflict, so as to then speculate about possible future scenarios. Taking this all into account, I believe the relevance and applicability of the CIDCM Second Track or *Citizens Diplomacy* model²⁴ to be key in the successful resolution of this Venezuelan conflict. In this final Part 3 of this investigation I will propose an initiative according to this model (and presented according to the format used by John Davies²⁵) based on the argument that th process will provide a needed catalyst for negotiating innovative potential solutions to this dispute based on “mutually benefiting interests.”²⁶ I will conclude that the need for this initiative will demand an immediate implementation of this Second Track *Citizens Diplomacy* model, based on a multi-year commitment.

²⁴ John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

²⁵ John Davies: “Guayana and Venezuela Border Conflict.” Preliminary Draft Concept Paper; Center for International Development and Conflict Management. Univeristy of Maryland, 2003.

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²⁶ *Ibid*

The Proposed Objective:

The overall objective of this initiative is to engage Venezuelan civil society, as well as private, and public sector leaders in a “constructive dialogue.”²⁷ This meeting will be held out of the public eye, and thus free of immediate political repercussion.²⁸ Through a mediated and integrative dialogue, it is the aim of this approach to facilitate innovative thinking on how relations might be improved. This will be achieved by consensually identifying “mutually benefiting interests” and tangible strategies for how best to resolve the conflict and that as a result of the groups combined influence held within society, these strategies will emanate to an official decision making level and ultimately effect policy.

The first stage of this proposed initiative is to accurately identify these key and influential academic, political, and community leaders, as well as journalists, business and student leaders from both the Chavez government and the *Oposicion*. These will be individuals who will willingly agree to participate in this Second Track *Citizens Diplomacy* exercise and who accurately represent the many different sub-groups within the Chavez government, and in the political leadership of the *Oposicion*.

This initial selection process is crucial in ensuring that the ‘mutual benefits’ and strategies agreed upon reflect the genuine interests and perspectives of the parties involved in the conflict and are not at risk to be swayed by a particularly dominant political tendency and or agenda.

To avoid this risk on a political level it will be necessary to include participants from the *Oposicion*, beginning with the traditional Venezuelan political parties ***Accion Democratica*** and the ***COPEI***, as well as newly formed sub-groups within the *Alianza Unitaria* like ***Sumate*** and ***Primero Justicia***. In addition, representatives from ***CTV***, the ***Confederation Venezuelan Workers***, and ***Fedecameras*** (*whose roles and perceptions were explained in greater context in Part I and Part II*).

In seeking out participants representing the Chavez government and his supporters it is also necessary to take into consideration the differences and divisions that exist within the

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ John Davies: “Guayana and Venezuela Border Conflict.” Preliminary Draft Concept Paper; Center for International Development and Conflict Management. Univeristy of Maryland, 2003.
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government and the parties within the *Asamblea Nacional*. Participants should be actors close to *Miraflores* (the Presidential Palace), and politicians within the *Movimiento V Republica (MVR)* and *Polo Patriotico*, as well as include Military professionals, representatives from the Department of Education, and sympathetic academics. All of these sub-groups who collectively comprise the primary two parties of this conflict must be represented in this constructive dialogue so as to achieve the aim of defining true “mutual benefits” and interests that will be capable of defining a successful and lasting settlement.

Outside of this political core, additional groups within Venezuelan society will be essential to the fulfillment of these “mutually beneficial” strategies. One actor being influential *journalists* covering the two sides of this conflict: both from **private media** groups, and Venezuelan **state run media**. A vital component in facilitating increased understanding and dialogue between a divided society, and in shaping public perception towards resolution. The objective will be to get the *journalists* to consensually agree to accept responsibility to no longer publish potentially biased and politically provocative reports, and to instead commit to balanced journalism. Also, to be proactive in educating and engaging the public towards a cessation to violent hostilities, and eventual reconciliation.

In addition to academics who will form a part of the initial group convened to provide the initial groundwork and outline for the constructive dialogue, **student organizations** are yet another influential and important actor on University campuses (particularly in the escalation/resolution of this conflict). Although it will be a difficult to find consensus between groups such as *Movimientos Estudiantiles Revolucionarios*, the *Federacion de Centros Universitarios de la Universidad de los Andes* and the *Movimiento Popular Merideno*, who are sympathetic towards the Chavez government, and pro-*Oposicion* groups such as *Movimiento 13 de Marzo*, *Movimiento 20* and *Bandera Roja*, the objective will be to reach an agreement between the student organizations to first, revoke outside pressure and support from politically polarizing entities, and secondly, to concentrate the debate within a pluralist and open academic environment, and lastly, to keep university campuses free of potential violent outside agitators. The effect of this will assist in diffusing escalating hostilities on university campuses, which in early June 2006 spilled over into open shoot-outs between police and pro-*Oposicion* student organizations at the University of Merida.²⁹

²⁹ “Millennium Development Goals” (May 2006) United Nations Development Programme. <http://www.undp.org/mdg/news/20060125-venezuela.shtml>

In the case of Venezuela, it will also be imperative that leaders from the **business community** participate as there exists a very clear and tangible gain for both sides to find consensus on how best to improve the conditions for economic activity and business growth. Namely **stability**, and what this implies for both foreign and domestic investment, as well as sustainable development so as to ensure future growth from the enormous economic windfall brought on by unprecedented oil revenue. The 62 day strike of PDSVA, and the resulting loss of nearly \$2 billion in economic revenue to the Venezuelan economy³⁰ is testament to the importance of addressing this component of the conflict. The economic potential is enormous, and is obviously a major economic and political factor in this present conflict and debate, and thus one that must be addressed in finding a potential resolution and final agreement. Thus, representatives from **PDVSA, Fedecameras, the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Development, and the Ministry of Commerce**, will be essential in strengthening ties with opposing business leaders and identifying the mutual gains involved in bringing about stability to not only the Venezuelan economy but to society on a whole.

I THINK, AS SAID IN SPANISH' MUCHO ABARCA POCO APRIETA' NAMELY THAT YOU ARE AIMING TO INVOLVED TOO MANY STAKEHOLDERS IN ONE PROCESS. REMEMBER THAT WE USE THE STRATEGY OF PARTNERS IN CONFLICT SO THAT THEY HAVE A COMMON DENOMINATOR ACROSS THE DIVIDE. NOW WE HAVE ORANGES AND APPLES, AND PERHAPS THERE IS MATERIAL FOR THREE DIFFERENT AND IF BUDGET PERMITS, PARALLEL TRACK, ONE OF YOUNG POLITICIANS, THE SECOND BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND THE THIRD MORE COMMUNITY BASED, OR ACADEMIC/STUDENTS.

WHERE DO YOU WANT THEM TO MEET, HOW MANY ,WHO ARE GOING TO BE THE SPONSORS, THE UNIVERSIDAD CENTRAL?

The second stage of this proposed initiative will then be to bring these participants together for a Second Track summit, held out of the “public eye,” and moderated by an experienced and trained moderator of the CIDCM *Citizens Diplomacy* model. This mediator will begin by instructing a series of confidence and trust building exercises (Davies and Kaufman 2006)³¹ between all of the participants. Then offer a presentation of the program and the clear objective and rationale of the Second Track method. Followed by a brief

³⁰ Michael Shifter, “In Search of Hugo Chavez.” *Foreign Affairs Magazine*, (May/June 2006)

³¹ John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman: “Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Applied Techniques for Conflict Transformation.” Rowman and Littlefield, 2003.

explanation of Conflict Resolution in Theory and Practice³² so as to ease in to exercises aimed at understanding the image of the other and dealing with the participant's stereotypes of one another. This will be supplemented with trainings on consensual decision making processes, and how best to begin a dialogue towards identifying the particular issues, needs, and interests at stake for both parties. This exercise will demonstrate where there exists the potential for shared and complementary goals. Once these "win/win mutually beneficial interests"³³ are identified the group will be prepared to then develop potential solutions and strategies to be promoted in each of their respective spheres of influence.

In order to achieve the objectives outlined in this proposed initiative, and with the presidential elections in less than 4 months time, this project should be implemented immediately. However the success of this initiative is largely predicated on a long-term commitment of at least two to three years.

The third stage of this initiative is the most important as it involves the participants active implementation of the strategies developed in the Second Track summit into their respective sphere's influence. As well as actively maintaining their continued participation in ongoing *Citizens Diplomacy* workshops and trainings. One of the long-term objectives of this initiative is to develop these CIDCM tools of mediation and dialogue in past summit participants so as to produce a 'multiplier effect' in the development of ties between the two conflicting parties within society long after the direct involvement of CIDCM. The ultimate goal is to build the capacity for internal integration and conflict management that will promote stability and diffuse further hostilities within Venezuelan society.

All of these *stages* are of course pursued with the explicit objective of building, and reinforcing the conditions necessary for ultimately effecting the decision making process on an official level within the leadership of both parties towards resolution.

Conclusion:

Despite the dangerous escalation of socially divided and politically polarized violence within a Venezuelan society that prior to the *Caracaso* was considered the model of democratic stability in Latin America, there exists a tremendous potential for diffusing the

³² *Ibid*

³³ John Davies: "Guayana and Venezuela Border Conflict." Preliminary Draft Concept Paper; Center for International Development and Conflict Management. Univeristy of Maryland, 2003.
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recent escalation of hostilities with the implementation of Second Track *Citizens Diplomacy*. The model is very simple in its essence, and represents the only real path towards reconciliation: one of creating an environment by which to facilitate dialogue free of political repercussion, so as to logical think out the essence of the crisis in a consensual way, and discover mutual benefits and interests for both parties that will enable actors on an official and leadership level to actively seek resolution with a wide base of influential and popular support.

In the short term, I believe that a potential “mutually beneficial agreement” must resemble the *Third Scenario* outlined in Part 2, as it represents the *Preferred Overall Outcome* to this conflict: a slow assimilation of the *Oposicion* into the electoral process and as a result into the *Asamblea Nacional* that will begin the process of balancing the Chavez government, and providing the necessary checks and balances that are fundamental in reinforcing the democratic legitimacy and Venezuelan legacy that both parties are in search of.

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THE THIRD PHASE IS TOO SHORT AND NOT FULLY INTEGRATING THE CLASS AND FULL MATERIAL, WHILE THE REST OF THE PAPER IS REALLY GOOD, THE LAST ONE IS OUR MAIN CONCERN AS CONFLICT RESOLVERS, AND I GUESS THAT YOU WERE RUNNING OUT OF STEAM OR THAT IT WAS EASIER TO GATHER AND PROCESS DATA, THAN GET YOU TO INVEST MORE TIME IN DEVELOPING YOUR OWN STRATEGY OF HOW BEST TO ORGANIZE THIS THIRDS PART OF YOUR PAPER