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## **Bush to Chavez: Just Ignore Your Constitution**

**by Jacob G. Hornberger**

President Bush's recent advice to embattled Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez reflects Bush's cavalier attitude toward constitutional restraints. In the midst of all the political turmoil in Venezuela, Bush, who apparently despises Chavez, aligned himself with his political opponents and called for early presidential elections, with the aim of ousting Chavez from power prior to the end of his six-year term in 2006. The problem, which Bush apparently didn't think was any big deal, is that the Venezuelan constitution does not allow for the calling of such early elections.

Several months ago, the Bush administration tacitly endorsed a military coup in which Chavez was temporarily ousted from power in favor of army generals who would now be running the country. (Since U.S. files on these things are customarily not opened for at least 30 years, owing to "national security," we may not know until at least 2033 what exactly the U.S. government's role was in the attempted military takeover.) To Bush's apparent dismay, however, the people of Venezuela ousted the military men from political power and restored their democratically elected president to power.

As most everyone knows, Chavez is a died-in-the-wool Marxist socialist, much as Salvador Allende was when he was elected president of Chile in 1970. In 1973, Allende was ousted in a military coup in favor of army general Augusto Pinochet.

While the U.S. government still refuses to open its files on its involvement in the Pinochet coup (despite the lapse of nearly 30 years), many people suspect that the U.S. government, primarily through its agents in the CIA, helped to engineer the military takeover in Chile. During the succeeding 17 years, Pinochet and his military minions instituted a "war on terrorism" that ending up killing, torturing, and terrorizing thousands of Chilean people, partly through the military tribunals that the Pinochet regime was using for its judicial system.

We might not like it that other countries elect died-in-the-wool socialists to office, but why isn't that their democratic right? After all, if the American people have the right to elect such ardent advocates of the socialistic welfare state as Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, why

shouldn't the people of other countries have the democratic right to elect Marxist socialists to office?

To put it another way, what moral right does the U.S. government have to interfere with the democratic processes of other countries? Indeed, what moral right does it have to use U.S. taxpayer money to finance foreign political campaigns, which it often does? Isn't it a violation of U.S. law for foreign governments and foreign nationals to interfere with American political campaigns? Doesn't that make the U.S. government vulnerable to a charge of hypocrisy?

Moreover, isn't it somewhat embarrassing that our elected officials favor unelected military generals to run the governments of foreign countries? Isn't it also embarrassing that our own president advises foreign rulers to simply ignore the constitutional restraints that their citizenry have imposed upon them?

After all, a constitution is the supreme law of the land that the citizenry have imposed on their public officials to control the exercise of their political power. If public officials can simply ignore those restraints, isn't such omnipotent political power what dictatorship is all about? And isn't the United States supposed to stand against dictatorship, especially when it uses such political devices as a "war on terrorism" to torture, kill, jail, and terrorize innocent people, as the Pinochet regime did?

Unfortunately, as everyone knows, in knowingly and willfully deciding to ignore the provision of the U.S. Constitution that requires him to secure a congressional declaration of war before waging war, Bush is engaged in the very same constitutional misconduct that he advised Chavez to commit.

The good news is that a few days after he advised Chavez to ignore his country's constitution, Bush recanted and called for a referendum instead of new elections in Venezuela. Maybe he'll do the same here before he orders an invasion of Iraq.

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