

A letter to Chavez on Libya

Saturday 12 March 2011, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 11 March 2011).

Dear comrade,

Like millions around the globe, I find the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela inspiring and your 'socialism of 21st century' indeed motivating. I, therefore, did not hesitate in endorsing your call for a Fifth International. In my limited capacity as activist, I have been part of a global solidarity movement that defends Venezuela against the barrage of US propaganda as well as overt and covert interference.

The mass mobilisation that averted CIA-backed coup back in April 2002, did not merely reflect the popularity you enjoy; it tipped the balance across Latin America in favour of progressive forces. Your re-election and the overwhelmingly majority your party PSUV command in parliament, gained in elections even Washington does not dispute, has helped bring socialism back on agenda.

Even importantly, the Bolivarian Revolution helped end isolation the besieged Cuban revolution was facing ever since the fall of Berlin Wall. The realignment of forces around Venezuela and Cuba in last ten years has turned Latin America into the continent of hope.

It is, therefore, a legitimate expectation that you ally with progressive forces and fortify them even beyond Latin America. It seems you too understand the importance of defeating imperialism in Asia as well as Africa to guard Latin America against Yankees. However, your strategy in building anti-imperialist alliances in Middle East smacks of ignorance if not outright banality. How else should I interpret your support for Libyan madman drowning his compatriots in blood in his bid to hold onto power?

To be honest, I was nervously expecting you siding with Moamar Qaddafi. Days before you pledged support to Qaddafi, Fidel Castro had indicated, in his essay on Libya, the bent of Latin leadership. But the wise old man that he is, Fidel avoided explicitly backing Qaddafi. His essay was penned at the outbreak of Libyan uprising. The bloody oppression and heroic resistance that we have seen ever since Libya caught the Tunisian infection, I thought, might deter you in expressing solidarity with Col. Qaddafi. Alas!

Your support for Qaddafi reminds me and millions of others, your rash remarks about Ahmadinejad when he rigged the elections in 2009. While brave Iranian youth, women and workers were facing Basij, you in your TV speech whitewashed electoral fraud in Iran by declaring: "Ahmadinejad's triumph is a total victory. They're trying to stain Ahmadinejad's victory, and by doing so they aim to weaken the government and the Islamic revolution. I know they won't be able to do it."

In view of your incredible courage and immense personal credibility, I cannot fault you for opportunism. But there is definitely an element of ignorance when you characterise Iranian theocracy as Islamic 'revolution'. There is neither anything revolutionary about this Islamic 'revolution' nor anything in common with Bolivarian and Cuban revolutions. In the first place, the theocracy in Iran did not rise to power in the 1979 revolution. Bearded high jacking of Iranian revolution was what Bolsheviks would call a Thermidor.

Revolutions in Latin America and Iran's Islamic 'revolution' are heading in opposite directions. While you are building hospitals, schools, and universities with oil wealth, in Iran the petro-dollars have been pocketed by bearded capitalists.

While you are busy nationalising commanding heights of economy and ensuring a free provision of healthcare, education alongside civil liberties, Iran is handing public assets to military in the name of privatisation and gagging the free expression.

While the measures of your government have given the Venezuelan workers and urban poor a greater control over their lives, in Iran workers and citizens have been systematically disempowered.

As you were encouraging the Venezuelan workers to build the Union Nacional de los Trabajadores (UNT), labour leaders were being incarcerated for celebrating May Day.

Most importantly, the Iranian theocracy has neither any fundamental disagreements nor any basic contradictions with US imperialism. It is in a 'cold war' with Washington. The moment Uncle Sam accepts Iran in WTO-fold and concede a few more concessions, Ahmadinejad will turn his back on you. As a matter of fact, US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan was facilitated by Tehran.

Similarly, Qaddafi's 'anti-imperialism' is equally opportunistic. The recent media reports about wheeling and dealings between Tony Blair and Qaddafi might have caught your eye.

Realistically, the threat of western intervention in oil-rich Iran and Libya must be what's really worrying you. I understand oil makes up over 85% of Venezuela's exports and is indeed important for Cuba. A new regime in Iran friendly to the US or Great Britain in case of Libya, would be to lower global oil prices. But this lack of confidence in masses is misplaced. As a matter of fact, it is the USA and Israel who should worry democracy in Middle East. Hence, nothing justifies your blanket support for Ahmadinejad or your recent chanting of 'Long live Libyan independence.'

Hope you understand this term is politically loaded in Libya. The Libyan regime is using the term civil war to both deny that the revolution is not a popular uprising but an Obama-Osama joint venture.

Hope you know better than I do that revolutions are not conspiracies carried out by tiny groups as Qaddafi is trying you to believe. The Libyan uprising involves the vast bulk of the population. There is no evidence that the al-Qaida has either any role in these events or has reconciled with Washington. If anything, democracy and mass mobilisations contradict al-Qaida philosophy. Hence, understandably, al-Qaida spokesman has been silent ever since imperialist and 'anti-imperialists' such as Gaddafi are being tossed aside. The Ayatollahs in Iran, who have hosted you seven times as well as Fidel and Che's children, are equally terrified.

To be honest, anti-imperialists do not fear mass mobilisations and revolutions. On the contrary, anti-imperialists must be aspiring for, in Che's words, 'one, two, three, many revolutions'. As a matter of fact, it is not Qaddafis and Ayatollahs who will come to your rescue. It is the Arab and Iranian masses. To be honest, you have disillusioned Iranian workers and youth by hugging Ahmadinejad. I am afraid, you may also disillusion the Arabs who, thrilled to hear you on Al Jazeera, for weeks kept on discussing as to why Arab world lacked leaders like you.

You will be seen as an unprincipled leader, like any Middle Eastern Sultan, by shrugging off any obligation to defend the rights of the workers and the oppressed in Iran and Libya. Already, disillusioned by your support to Qaddafi, my friend and comrade Roger Silverman is saying: "This shows how little confidence it is worth placing in Chavez' periodic offhand calls for the formation of

a Fifth International. What kind of International would side with Gaddafi against the revolution?"

Being optimistic, I hope you will reconsider your alliances with oppressive, blood-thirsty Sultans. This will be the first step towards any meaningful Fifth International.

Comradely,

Farooq Sulehria

P.S.

* From VIEWPOINT ONLINE ISSUE NO. 41, MARCH 11, 2011

:

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/a-letter-to-chavez-on-libya.html>

* Farooq Sulehria is working with Stockholm-based Weekly Internationalen (www.internationalen.se). Before joining Internationalen, he worked for one year, 2006-07 at daily The News, Rawalpindi. Also, in Pakistan, he has worked with Lahore-based dailies, The Nation, The Frontier Post and Pakistan. He has MA in Mass Communication from Punjab University, Lahore. He also contributes for Znet and various left publications in Europe and Australia.