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Chavez vs. Thaksin: How the Media Demonizes a Progressive Leader while Praising a Corrupt Autocrat

By Tony Cartalucci
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Confounding was the Australian's (newspaper) recent op-ed titled, "Death of a ruthless autocrat," in regards to the late Hugo Chavez. Confounding not for the op-ed's condemnation of socialist policies or its criticism of Hugo Chavez, an obstruction to Western corporate-financier interests in South America for over a decade, but because of the obscene hypocrisy displayed throughout, from a newspaper and a corporate-financier-academic establishment in Australia that coddles a figure in nearby Thailand that is every bit as guilty of everything it accuses Chavez of.



Image: When is blood-red socialism ok (Thailand) and when is it “ruthless autocracy” (Venezuela)? The answer depends on whether or not you serve Wall Street and London’s international order. Contrary to popular belief, socialism is not a unified global ideology and is instead like any tool – only as good or bad as the hands it finds itself in. The use of socialism by two governments no more indicates an affiliation than would guns in the hands of two opposing armies on a battlefield.

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The piece begins with:

HE was lionised as a hero by the Western Left, of course, but it would be hard to find a leader in recent history who more comprehensively betrayed the wellbeing of his country than Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. He was driven by an irrational, demagogic and self-defeating antagonism towards Washington that blinded him to his nation’s best interests.

The rambling narrative of the Australian equates to condemning Venezuela for not opening itself up to Western exploitation, domination by corporate-financier monopolies, and the folly of its challenging of the West’s campaign of global aggression from Mali, Libya, and Syria, to Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

In fact, the Australian itself makes a point of condemning Chavez for his support of Saddam Hussein, who’s nation was occupied by the West during a brutal 10 year war, following a decade of sanctions that in total cost the lives of over 2 million Iraqis (including half a million children) and still counting. The Australian implies that Chavez was wrong to support Iraq, despite documented evidence that the Western assault on Iraq was waged upon a patently false pretense.

The Australian condemns Chavez’ “populist economics” and ends its piece by stating:

Thumbing your nose at Washington and aligning your country with the world’s worst dictatorships is a recipe for disaster. Those who come after Mr Chavez should see that and change course.

Thumbing your nose at Washington and its interests is indeed a recipe for disaster, as has been thumbing your nose at brutal empires throughout human history. Your nation will become the target of covert military operations, terrorism, political subversion, and economic sabotage, the very root of Venezuela's current malaise. Thumb your nose long and hard enough at the West, and you may even become subject to an outright invasion, as was the case in Iraq, Libya, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. Or, you may suffer a long-term proxy war, as Syria now faces.

In reality, the Australian reveals what Hugo Chavez was really guilty of. Not of being a "ruthless autocrat," or of being a socialist, but of being independent and for having the nerve to challenge the extraterritorial interests of an increasingly violent and unhinged West.

Thaksin Shinawatra – Populist, Socialist, Ruthless Autocrat, and Darling of the West.

Of course, the most preposterous statement of the Australian's op-ed would easily be, "*but it would be hard to find a leader in recent history who more comprehensively betrayed the wellbeing of his country than Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.*" The Australian might start with Thaksin Shinawatra of Thailand, propped up and coddled by the West since the 1990's, and to this day given free passage throughout the West despite being a convicted criminal and a fugitive from the law in his native country.

The Australian's editorial board itself has lent support to his despotic, nepotist regime, currently led by his own sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, defending him as a progressive, pro-democratic force in Thailand. In a 2011 Australian news article preceding Thailand's national elections, nowhere is found the same venomous language directed at Chavez in describing Thaksin's own populist/socialist schemes. No mention at all is made of Thaksin's grotesque human rights record – the worst in Thai history, his intimidation of the press, and his habitual assault on any and all who challenge him.

Indeed, while the Australian calls Hugo Chavez a "ruthless autocrat," it was Thaksin Shinawatra of Thailand who mass murdered 3,000 innocent people over the course of 90 days during a so-called "war on drugs" where police were sent into the streets to conduct extrajudicial executions. It would later be determined that most of the those murdered were not even involved in the drug trade. Human Rights Watch (HRW) would confirm this in their 2008 report titled, "Thailand's 'war on drugs'," a follow up to the much more extensive 2004 report, "Not Enough Graves."

To this day Thaksin counts his "war on drugs" as one of the many highlights of his 2001-2006 stint in office. And while the Australian fails to remind readers of this inconvenient fact, other Western propagandists, such as the Economist, boldly defend the mass murder that took place under his ruthless regime. In its op-ed titled, "Thailand's drug wars: Back on the offensive," the Economist states:

Faced with soaring methamphetamine abuse, Mr Thaksin ordered the police to draw up blacklists of suspected traffickers and "to act decisively and without mercy".

The Economist would also go on to say:

On the streets of Khlong Toey, the largest slum in Bangkok, there is nostalgia for Mr Thaksin's iron-fisted drugs policy. The 2003 crackdown drove up prices, smashed trafficking networks and forced addicts into rehabilitation programmes. In drug-ravaged communities, where the ends tend to justify the means, that was enough to turn Mr Thaksin into a hero.

The Economist finishes its op-ed by lamenting that the then military-led government which ousted Thaksin in 2006, had not kept up Thaksin's abhorrent, extrajudicial campaign of mass murder:

You might expect a military junta with sweeping powers to have kept up the fight against such illicit activity. Anti-narcotics officials say that drug seizures have risen since the military coup in September 2006.

And more recently, the Huffington Post hosted Stanley Weiss of the Business Executives for National Security (BENS) and his op-ed titled, "The Oracle of Thailand," where he praises Thaksin Shinawatra's populist-socialist policies and suggests the US would be better off if it applied his "Thaksinomics" across America. Weiss openly admits that Thaksin Shinawatra, despite being a convicted criminal and living in exile, is running the country by nepotist proxy. Yet, he defends what he considers a brilliant exploitation of Thailand's desperately poor, notoriously under-educated rural population, spinning it as:

The great innovation of Thaksin and Pansak (along with U.S.-trained academic Somkid Jatusripitak) was "the increased role of government in the allocation of credit," as Chulalongkorn University Professor Pasuk Phongpaichit writes. But not just anywhere: "Thaksinomics" focused the government's attention on the poor and rural areas of Thailand. Arguing that "a country is a company and a company is a country," the self-described "CEO Prime Minister" approached the national economy like a business, looking for ways, as Pasuk explains, to "mobilize any dormant or unexploited assets including unused natural resources and neglected human resources."

Tapping unused reserves of credit in the state banking system, the team created one rural credit fund after another. To lower household expenses, they offered low-cost housing and health insurance; provided subsidized credit for buying taxis and provided loans for children to get to school.

One might wonder how that is any different than what Hugo Chavez did in Venezuela, who also won over the population in part by using state money to subsidize his support base. The difference is simple: Hugo Chavez used socialism to co-opt the population in opposition to the Wall Street-London international order, while Thaksin Shinawatra co-opted Thailand's rural poor on behalf of Wall Street and London's interests. Weiss' BENS front is lined with representatives of America's Fortune 500 who have played a pivotal role in both Thaksin's rise to power, and his continued relevance in Thai politics.

Thaksin had been prime minister from 2001-2006. Long before Thaksin Shinawatra would become prime minister in Thailand, he was already working his way up the Wall Street-London ladder of opportunity, while simultaneously working his way up in Thai politics. He was appointed by the Carlyle Group as an adviser while holding public office, and attempted to use his connections to boost his political image. Thanong Khanthong of Thailand's English newspaper "the Nation," wrote in 2001:

"In April 1998, while Thailand was still mired in a deep economic morass, Thaksin tried to use his American connections to boost his political image just as he was forming his Thai Rak Thai Party. He invited Bush senior to visit Bangkok and his home, saying his own mission was to act as a "national matchmaker" between the US equity fund and Thai businesses. In March, he also played host to James Baker III, the US secretary of state in the senior Bush administration, on his sojourn in Thailand."

Upon becoming prime minister in 2001, Thaksin would begin paying back the support he received from his Western sponsors. In 2003, he would commit Thai troops to the US invasion of Iraq, despite widespread protests from both the Thai military and the public. Thaksin would also allow the CIA to use Thailand for its abhorrent rendition program.

In 2004, Thaksin attempted to ramrod through a US-Thailand Free-Trade Agreement (FTA) without parliamentary approval, backed by the US-ASEAN Business Council who just before 2011's elections that saw Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra brought into power, hosted the leaders of Thaksin's "red shirt" "United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship" (UDD).



Image: The US-ASEAN Business Council, a who's-who of corporate fascism in the US, had been approached by leaders of Thaksin Shinawatra's "red shirt" street mobs. (click image to enlarge)

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The council in 2004 included 3M, war profiteering Bechtel, Boeing, Cargill, Citigroup, General Electric, IBM, the notorious Monsanto, and currently also includes banking houses Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, Chevron, Exxon, BP, Glaxo Smith Kline, Merck, Northrop Grumman, Monsanto's GMO doppelganger Syngenta, as well as Phillip Morris.

Thaksin would remain in office until September of 2006. On the eve of the military coup that ousted him from power, Thaksin was literally standing before the Fortune 500-funded Council on Foreign Relations giving a progress report in New York City.

Since the 2006 coup that toppled his regime, Thaksin has been represented by US corporate-financier elites via their lobbying firms including, Kenneth Adelman of the Adelman PR firm (Freedom House, International Crisis Group, PNAC), James Baker of Baker Botts (CFR), Robert Blackwill of Barbour Griffith & Rogers (CFR), Kobre & Kim, and currently Robert Amsterdam of Amsterdam & Peroff (Chatham House).

Robert Amsterdam of Amsterdam & Peroff, would also simultaneously represent Thaksin's "red shirt" UDD movement, and was present for the inaugural meeting of the so-called "academic" Nitirat group, attended mostly by pro-Thaksin red shirts (who literally wore their red shirts to the meeting). Additional support for Thaksin and his UDD street-front is provided by the US State Department via National Endowment for Democracy-funded "NGO" Prachatai."

Time to Grow Up

It is time for the general population to refine their understanding of socioeconomic-political processes. Socialism is not an internationally unified political ideology. It is a set of tools that is only as good or as bad as the hands that wield them. And just because these tools can be found in two different hands, does not mean that both hands serve the same agenda – no more so than would guns in two opposing armies' hands indicate a mutual agenda or alliance.

Hugo Chavez used socialism to build a support base, because if he didn't, Wall Street and London would do it themselves with their proxy opposition front in Venezuela – just as they have done in Thailand with Thaksin Shinwatra.

The proof is in the West's own narrative, where they hypocritically celebrate Thaksin Shinawatra's "Thaksinomics" while condemning Chavez' "Chavismo." It would appear that socialism is only "ok" if it is used to co-opt the population for the interests of Wall Street and London. "Thumb your nose" at the West, and it doesn't matter what socioeconomic strategy you employ, you are a "ruthless autocrat" whose days are numbered and whose memory will be immediately defiled upon your passing.

Governments do not adhere to political ideologies, they simply use them when and where profitable. In the US where a corporate-financier oligarchy literally writes the policy for politicians on both sides of the aisle, the use of socialism *and* "free market" economics is done in tandem to achieve a multitude of goals that would be impossible using only one or the other. While the West itself placates its population with socialism, such policies are condemned when employed contra to their interests, especially when used to galvanize a population against Western advances – as was the case in Chavez' Venezuela.

In reality, socialism is but a single tool. An entire nation cannot be sustained upon it, no more than an entire house can be built using only a hammer. The true test of a government is not whether it uses socialism or not, but with what other tools it employs it. A nation must seek to build upon socialism's stop-gaps with sustainable, pragmatic solutions. Outside of Wall Street and London's international order, many nations are doing just that, but progress is difficult to gauge when the West arrays the summation of its influence and power against such progress.

The general population's habit of perceiving socialism, capitalism, or any other socioeconomic system as a unifying ideology is folly. The ruling elite, whichever side they stand on, do not see such systems as unifying ideologies, but merely tools. It is time for the general population to look at how these tools are used, and whose hands they are actually in, instead of fixating on the tool itself as being inherently "good" or "bad."

The story of Chavez and Thaksin illustrates the double standards and hypocrisy hidden in plain sight and casts doubts on narratives proposing anyone using "socialism" is part of a unified global cabal. Such a notion falls flat unless financial and political ties can be documented. In the

case of Hugo Chavez and Venezuela, the chasm between his movement and the West's use of socialism couldn't be any deeper or wider.