

THE MILITARY IN THE REVOLUTION AND THE COUNTER- REVOLUTION

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The Bolivarian Revolution of President Chávez is being threatened by a new coup d'état. The opposition has rejected the conciliatory spirit and the space for dialogue generously opened by the government, interpreting this gesture as a weakness. The neighbourhoods of the wealthy have started to arm themselves. On Tuesday, June 11, the opposition gathered 80,000 to 100,000 people in Caracas. A week later they started hitting pots and pans in the upscale neighbourhoods. They are preparing a new strike backed by the business sector. They accuse Chávez of corruption and the attorney-general of the republic of being partial. Rumors are creating an atmosphere of destabilization. The media are once again playing the protagonist role in the preparation of the environment for the coup.

Meanwhile, Chávez remains unprovoked. He knows he has popular support and that he is able to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people all over the country. His motto has been to organize the mass of people that expressed its voice in the streets on April 12, 13 and 14. He does not miss a single opportunity to call for the creation of Bolivarian Circles of the most diverse type. He knows that when people are organized and not unarmed—they count on the support of the majority of the Armed Forces—they are invincible.

We think that in the text we provide below we can understand why the Venezuelan leader is so optimistic despite the betrayal of a meaningful number of members of the high ranks within the Armed Forces.

*This text is the translation of Chapter III from Marta Harnecker's book: **Entrevista a Hugo Chávez Frías, Un hombre un pueblo.***

I. THE MILITARY WORKING WITH THE PEOPLE

—Many times I have had to defend you against those who criticize you for having surrounded yourself by the military. I understand the anguish of the leader of a government who must make swift decisions to fundamental problems but who cannot count on a state apparatus adequate to the circumstances. I think this is what has driven you to look for support from the military. But then it seems that there is a contradiction between the fact that the main executors of the most important tasks of the revolutionary process are the military and the fact that this process is conceived as one in which the sovereign people exercise power through participation in all areas. I understand that

1. Hugo Chávez Frías. *Un Hombre. Un Pueblo*, published in Venezuela by Asociación Civil Universitarios por la Equidad in 2002 and in Spain by Gakoa also in 2002.

the military is often efficient and disciplined, but it's not accustomed to delegating power, it's not prepared to make people participate.

I have heard, that in this sense, Plan Bolívar 2000 has meant many good things for the people: roads, schools, houses, which are concrete solutions, but they are solutions that come from above without people's participation.

On the other hand, I'm convinced that participation cannot be decreed; people need to learn how to participate. It's a slow cultural-transformation process. We have a video that refers to the slow, hard work necessary to reach this transformation; it has to be done and it's necessary to have the cadres who facilitate this task. What can you say about this?

190 — Let's suppose that that criticism—which I have heard before even in party meetings—is completely true, in the sense that the militaries only know how to give and execute orders but are not inclined to participation. Which is not really true. I am the first military of that group. I feel that since by youth my orientation was participation and I had wonderful experiences when I was commander of some remote units, especially in small towns where, with the militaries, we launched participatory actions that were very good lessons and that conflicted with the local political power: How is it that this soldier gets involved in people's affairs, fixing roads and engaging in sports with them. This is not my tendency alone. If that were the case I would have clashed with a closed military structure, authoritarian and non-participatory, and would not have lasted for too long in the army.

1. WHY SO MANY MILITARIES IN THE GOVERNMENT

191 — Now, you are right when you are saying that you understand that there are so many militaries in my government. Imagine February 2, 1999, with almost all of the gobernaciones and municipalities even more than opponents: adversaries (99.99%); the Congress against; the Supreme Court against; we received a budget that was already decided; a government almost without resources to pay salaries; the price of oil was at seven dollars; on top of this, an immense level of expectations generated by our triumph: around the Palace there were lines of thousands of people asking for jobs, with their sick kids, sleeping there, on the ground, not letting my car pass, “We are not leaving until Chávez hears us.” To all of this one has to add a party structure engaged in the political struggle: the new constitution was coming, all of that was coming. Then I decided to use the Armed Forces. I believe that without the participation of the military in the social area, Plan Bolívar 2000 (initiated in 1999 and continuing in 2000), the process would not have advanced in its political arena as quickly as it did.

2. PLAN BOLÍVAR 2000: BURSTS OF LIFE, INSTEAD OF GUNSHOTS OF DEATH

192 — This is how Plan Bolívar 2000 was born, a civil-military plan.

193. My order was: “Go house to house combing the terrain. The enemy. Who is the enemy? Hunger.” And we started it on February 27, 1999, ten years after the *Caracazo*, as a way of vindicating the military. I even used the contrast and I said: “Ten years ago we came out to massacre the people, now we are going to fill them with love. Go and comb the terrain, look for misery. The enemy is death. We are going to fill them with bursts of life instead of gun shots of death.” And, in truth, the answer was really beautiful.

194 . While we, the politicians, were engaged in the political struggle, 40,000 soldiers were on a campaign to attend to the health of the people; opening roads with military engineering equipment; flying passengers in military planes to the most poor areas, charging them at cost.

1) ONE PERSON, ONE PLAN

195 — I told each one of them: “Show me your plan based on your resources and capacity.” And each component of the Armed Forces started outlining its plan. The Air Force and its plan of social routes: helicopters and military planes flying where no roads existed with passengers who carried their chickens and little boxes. The seamen and Plan Pescar 2000: they have been there, involved with the fishermen, organizing co-operatives, repairing iceboxes and refrigerators, giving them courses, etc. We gave the National Guard the task of mainly protecting the citizens and controlling delinquency, but also programs all over the country, even in indigenous areas that had previously never been served. I hope you can go there. There are things that seem like miracles, without denying improvisations and even corruption in some of the military, especially in the higher ranks, and the sabotage of the opposition. But the kids have developed an impressive social conscience.

2) PLAN CASIQUIARE 2000

196 — The Guard started to invent Plan Casiquiare 2000. (Casiquiare is a river in the jungle, which is inhabited by thousands of indigenous people.) They even built a boat to go from village to village, bringing medicines and doctors to examine children and vaccinate people; building houses with the indigenous people, but according to what the indigenous people wanted and not according to what we thought.

3) BARRANCO YOPAL AND CARAVALI

197 — Then, things like Barranco Yopal and Caravali started to arise with the Cuiva and Yaruro peoples. Many years ago I used to go to Barranco Yopal, taking with me sheet metal and poles to the natives, because with those materials they built winter huts, which they left during the summer. They were nomads: hunters and gatherers, as they have been for five hundred years. I saw native women give birth there, squatting on a hill, throwing away the placenta and cleaning the baby, and then kept walking. Most of the children died of malaria, tuberculosis or any other type of disease. They were violated; they were drunk most of the time in the village. The native women prostituted themselves. Many times they were raped. They were ghosts, scorned by most of the population. They sometimes stole in order to eat. They did not have the notion of private property; for them, to enter a place and grab a pig for food because they were hungry was not considered robbery. But what did I see there now? The militaries with an agricultural technician and their capacity of mobilization: vehicles, equipment, organization, promptness; but with the natives, with the native capitanes⁷⁴ leading, wearing a cap with a sign reading “Plan Bolívar.” The militaries carried the materials, helped them with some engineering personnel and soldiers more than anything, while the natives outlined the houses and worked building their schools and houses.

3. TO WHOM DID IT OCCUR THAT THE COMMUNITY SHOULD PARTICIPATE, AND NOT ONLY RECEIVE?

198 — To the militaries and some civil advisors: an agricultural technician, an engineer. Plan Bolívar has not only been military, each garrison has contracted civilian technicians who know their work.

199 Well, then, those natives were happy, their faces changed. They took me to see their crops. On only four hectares they were producing sugar cane, watermelons, bananas, corn, papayas. They were eating well and now they were asking for a truck to take their produce to the village to sell it.

74 Indigenous form of expression to name their leaders.

They had already received small boats with motors and training in their use because before they used to fish with harpoons, with spears from the shore of small rivers. I went fishing with them a couple of times. They used to fish with their bare hands or with big stones. That community was resuscitated.

200 Once I gave a speech in that region. I used a sentence from Zarathustra. That time I said: “Fifteen years ago I came here and I saw you with your ashes. Now I am back and I see you with your fire.”

1) PLAN WASP

201 — There you also have Plan Wasp, which is an awakening of participation. General García Carneiro invented this plan. One day he came to me with this plan. “What is this? People will be vaccinated?” “No, my friend. They, on their isolated plots of land, will build their own houses.” “Explain that to me.” And they showed me some illustrations. “Look how they used to live,” he said and showed me the photograph of a family standing in front of a hut made out of wooden poles and sheet metal. “And look two months later. The same family, now happier, with a house.” Who built that house? The community. While a private company builds one of those houses for ten million bolívares, Plan Wasp does it for three million. Why? Because it is the community that builds the houses. And that, at the same time, allows us to reactivate employment. The militaries obtained some machines to make building blocks and they give courses with civilian technicians and masons. They also make wooden doors. With INCE (National Institute of Educational Cooperation)—to which I appointed a retired general who is a very demanding and extremely efficient man; I know him well because he was my teacher—they were able to build 40 ambulatory classrooms⁷⁵ for technical education. If the portables did not have tires, or if they were dismantled, we gave them money to repair them. We obtained credit from Spain for new equipment and such. Now we have all those portables rolling across the country. They arrive in a place; they give their courses and teach people how to make doors. Then, together they make the doors, the building blocks, the roof tiles and build the houses. Corruption is minimal. We can’t say zero, but it is decreasing significantly.

202 Where did this come from? From the heart of Plan Bolívar and certainly not only from the military, but from those militaries who are in contact with reality, from the soldier who understands that resources are not enough to build houses and asks himself what to do. People begin to talk, to calculate, and from that interchange Plan Wasp is born.

2) A HIGHWAY AT LOWER COST

203 — In a place, some militaries finished the lanes of a highway that was about 20 years in stagnation. The budget to finish it with asphalt and everything that was needed was around 5 billion bolívares. With the military machinery and the military engineers, they were able to complete the job with only 1.5 billion. That means, the cost of many of the works—housing, highways, bridges, roads that nobody had been able to use—went down. A gigantic operation was done.

3) VOLUNTARY MEDICAL WORK

204 — And regarding health, let’s not even talk about it! A formidable voluntary medical network was organized. Operations involving surgical war hospitals begun, I mean the social war. There were lines of people. Once, in a town named Zaraza, militaries and civilians from Plan Bolívar

⁷⁵ Portables.

operated on more people—eye operations, leg operations—than the hospital of that town had performed in the previous 10 years. A very impressive performance! I remember that once one of those kids said, “You have to see how beautiful is to give back the eyesight to an old man and see him crying out of happiness, and hear him saying, ‘To think that I believed that I was going to die without seeing the blue sky again.’ That is what makes us happy. We feel that we are useful.” This contact with the people unleashed a flow of feelings and desire to participate.

4) GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF COJEDES

205 — The governor of the State of Cojedes—a large prairie state south of Caracas, almost at the centre of the country—is a lieutenant-colonel of the National Guard, who had no participation in any of the uprisings. He was the military chief of Plan Bolívar in that state right at the moment of the constitutional process. When the election process for governor started, he came to me one day and said: “Look, President, I want to ask for my resignation.” “Why, muchacho, you are only a lieutenant-colonel?” “Well, the parties of the revolution here are asking me to be gubernatorial candidate in order to defeat the adecos⁷⁶.” “Are you sure about that?” As a result, after a few days I received a letter signed by the MVR and other leaders of the leftist parties from that state. With his candidacy we even solved a problem there that seemed to have no solution: the internal divisions. This kid was able to bring them all together, we won the elections, and now he is governor. He revealed himself as a leader. Of course, he and his guards spent a lot of time in the villages, in the countryside, serving the people and that how they started to view him as a leader. There are many cases like this one. I have mentioned only a few.

206 And look, many political leaders have not reached the stature of the militaries and even more than one resentment has arisen, because at the time of the leadership they found themselves surpassed by kids who learned the technique of leadership as I already told you.

5) ERRORS AND DEVIATION OF RESOURCES

207 — There are many good examples but, however, we also have a few bad ones. But the accumulation of the good ones is marvellous and exceeds the errors and defects of some people and irregular actions. These last ones were sent to the auditor-general’s office for investigation. The auditor-general of the republic told me a few days ago that he has detected that Plan Bolívar—which started with errors—is one of the plans that has improved a lot.

-What errors are you referring to?

208 — For example, the money planned to solve one problem was used to solve another. These budgets are strictly directed: if 20 million bolívares are allocated to repair housing, it cannot be deviated for other expenses.

209 I remember once, a crying woman appeared from a burgeoning crowd with a child with a dislocated leg. He looked like a rag doll. A grown-up child, seven or eight years old, who couldn’t walk, and she carried him. I saw her; she impressed me immensely. I stopped, I stepped out of the car, and it wasn’t the governor who was with me but the general chief of the garrison and, at the same time, the head of Plan Bolívar. The woman told me that the child was born like that and that she had never had the resources for surgery. “Come here, general, write down the address. Send him for an operation.” Then, the surgery had to be paid. Another time it was a prosthesis that someone needed. And things like that. Someone had to pay and so they took the money from some of the budgets. Some did it out of inexperience, while others took advantage.

76 Militant of the Acción Democrática Party.

210 Then, because at the beginning the auditor-general's office was in the hands of those opposed to my government, they started to take advantage of these situations to campaign against me.

211 When the denunciation erupted—"Corruption in Plan Bolívar"—I thought that they destroyed the plan. Imagine! The press, trying to destroy all our projects, came out with a list that included the names of all the militaries supposedly corrupt. I called some of them and told them that they had to justify the expenses to the last bolívar. Then, an investigative process was undertaken: they had to find the guy with the leg, where had they paid the wooden leg made for that person. Invoice after invoice was scrutinized. That way, almost everything was justified. Some cases are pending; others, when they couldn't justify them, were removed.

6) OPINION OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL OF THE REPUBLIC

Obviously, a lot of people ended up with the first information from the press and never knew the results of the investigation. It's terrible how baseless campaigns are launched and then, when the data gathered demonstrate the falsehood of the accusations, the media don't publish corrections and if they do it they do it in such a small way that nobody notices.

212 — That's the way it is. But, anyhow, back to the Plan. The auditor-general of the republic determined that the goals of Plan Bolívar in 1999 and 2000 were accomplished to 280 per cent.

213 This year, for instance, we haven't been able to allocate resources for Plan Bolívar. What they're doing is finishing things pending from last year, like the project that we witnessed today⁷⁷.

7) CURRENT PHASE: THE RETURN TO THE GARRISON

214 — Now the Plan is in another stage, the one we call 'entering the structure.' There are no longer hundreds of militaries in the streets. I already have governors, mayors, plans in action, structure. It's no longer the government of three years ago; therefore they limit themselves to a sort of coordinators of special projects with local and regional governments. They are no longer doing things by themselves.

215 There are militaries who have returned to the garrison to dedicate themselves fully to their routine activities—we had even gotten to the point of utilizing combat units—because we need combat units to train for combat: infantry battalions, submariners, paratroopers, everyone doing their training. So, a lot of these people returned to their routine functions.

8) ORGANIZING RESERVIST UNITS

216 — We're also organizing reservist units. What is that? We call kids who had already been in the Armed Forces, most of them unemployed youth without specialized education, without formation, to constitute cooperatives. In 2001 we organized eight thousand of those kids and they started to form cooperatives. The same idea: cooperatives, micro credits, donations of land; we have even transferred state assets that were idle in the hands of FOGADE (Guarantee Funds of Bank Deposits). When we had this phenomenal bank crisis, many bankers left, but they left a lot of assets. The state appropriated them because they were deposit guarantees. Many have been sold to recover capital, but there were still land and abandoned factories. We have been transferring them to some groups of reservists in order for them to function as reservist units, so they have military training—which hasn't been accomplished too well because of lack of resources—and work to form cooperatives. They receive agriculture courses and start working.

⁷⁷ He refers to a little school and medical centre in Puerto Cruz.

217 This is part of Plan Bolívar: to organize the reserves—the people—and give them some instruments of work. Plan Pescar (Fishing) 2000 continues. It has already accumulated capital and established fishing cooperatives in contact with the Navy. The Navy supports them, arrives at their wharves and helps them repair engines. This is also the experience of the National Guard, working together with indigenous people at the borders.

4. THE DEFEAT OF THE APRIL COUP HAS ITS BASE IN CIVIC-MILITARY ACTION

218 — Marta, what happened on April 12 and 13 has something to do with this civic-military process. Above and beyond the social attention, above and beyond the social participation—which could be null, little or great—that might have been at stake in Plan Bolívar and its errors, the goal has been accomplished: a civic-military alliance. On April 12, things happened that had never happened before in this country: hundreds of thousands of unarmed Venezuelans, many of them without political direction, without orientation, without a preconceived plan—our error—took to the barracks and concentrated in great numbers in front of and around them, singing the national anthem. They spoke to the soldiers and yelled to them: “¡Soldado, consciente, busca a tu presidente! Soldier, with conscience, go and find your president!” and “¡Soldado, amigo, el pueblo está contigo! Soldier, friend, the people are with you!” Not only did they go to Fort Tiuna, but also they went to many barracks in different parts of the country. Why did the people go to those barracks? Never before had something like that happened. And it wasn't because I was there. In fact, the masses that surrounded Fort Tiuna on the third day, when it was already known that I wasn't there, were impressive: 300,000 people or more.

219 This also happened in places like Maracay, where a group of militaries from the brigade of paratroopers saw that there were people outside the barracks, but they said: “More people are needed, we need more people to join us,” and they went to the neighbourhoods. Of course, they know the leaders of the neighbourhoods and those leaders know them, because each military unit made its plan and allocated areas to themselves. Such-and-such battalion corresponded to such-and-such neighbourhood. They've been doing that for three years, during which time the military goes to the neighbourhoods, does patrols, builds a school or fixes a medical clinic. The military already knows that going to such neighbourhoods it is not going to be rejected, as it was before. After the February 27 massacre, for instance, to go to a poor neighbourhood a soldier had to dress as a civilian. He was taking a risk, because the people knew that the militaries were those who had massacred them. Today, when a soldier shows up people greet him with enthusiasm and happiness.

220 All this reaction would not have happened without the profound contact between the army and the people. That is Mao. The water and the fish. The people are to the army what the water is to the fish. In Venezuela today we have fishes in the water and that is the reason behind the campaign against Plan Bolívar, to try to break, to fracture that unity. A good part of the militaries are beside the people. Of course, not everybody. There are sectors of the military that are opposed; they echo the discourse of the adversaries. What is this discourse? That Chávez is going to destroy the Armed Forces. The operative capacity of the military body is affected, because now the militaries are cleaning the sewers, in other words, degrading the plan. They clean the streets and that, on radio, in the press and on television, pinches the outside and inside too, and some soldiers echoed that. However, the response to the plan is positive: one can see them happy. Today I saw those soldiers there, in particular the one responsible for Plan Bolívar in Puerto Cruz, the captain of the Navy, Becerra, who was happy to see his school finished, the one he built with his people.

II. EXPLAINING THE COUP

-Regarding the peaceful aspect of the Revolution, when you've been asked if you fear that a new Chile might happen in your country, keeping in mind the coup d'état against Allende, you've answered that the difference between that and this process is that the first one was a Revolution without arms while the Bolivarian Revolution has arms and people ready to use them if it's necessary to defend it. On the other hand, you expressed before the coup in April 2002 that any intent of a coup d'état could generate radicalization of the Revolution, therefore the oligarchy had to think seriously about taking that step. You've also affirmed that having a military force doesn't necessarily mean "using the arms" but counting on them as "a supporting and dissuading force"⁷⁸. In fact, as per your account, the Armed Forces blocked a military-coup attempt in preparation during the electoral process of 1998 and they stopped the electoral fraud at the beginning of the process. On the other hand, one cannot negate that they've played an important role during the current process: in first place, as guarantors of six electoral processes in less than two years, avoiding fraud and military coups; in second place, as the main executors of Plan Bolívar 2000 and of the emergency plans to confront the consequences of the natural disasters that affected many Venezuelan villages.

I understand that until before the coup of April 11, 2002, you estimated that the majority of those in high command supported you, despite that in the last few months some officials of high rank appeared publicly asking you to resign as president of the republic, and General Guaicaipuro Lameda had recently resigned as president of the state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA). He expressed to have disagreements with some policies of his government. Is that the case?

However, the coup on April 11, 2002, was only possible due to the fact that an important sector of the high ranks supported the opposition, although it's also true that your return to power was due to, among other things, that many in those ranks rethought things and finally you ended up with a majority support within the military.

1. ERRONEOUS PERCEPTION OF THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT

-What is the reason for your erroneous perception of the level of support within the Armed Forces?

And here a large topic is unveiled: how does a leader of the country obtain objective information of what is going on in his country? On one side, it often happens that the people around him, in order to please him, to save him worries or because of opportunism avoid informing him of the problems by giving him rosy information. On the other side, the attitude of the leader subtracts himself from paying attention to critical information. Is there any mechanism to avoid what Eduardo Galeano in a conversation named as the echo problem: the leader and his echo?

221 — Or as Matus says: "The leader and his bell jar."

222 Look, in regard to the first question, without any doubt I overestimated the strength of a group of people whom I believed I knew well enough, maybe it was the heart... When feelings play an important role it is sometimes fatal, tragic. Since 1999, I kept respecting seniorities—respecting the military roll with minor variations. There was no beheading of the military leadership. And regarding the perception of their disposition to respect the constitution, the government, the commander-in-chief, I was wrong. In reality, it wasn't a total mistake; if that had been the case, you

78 Heinz Dietrich, *Hugo Chávez: Un nuevo proyecto latinoamericano*, Editorial de Cinecias Sociales, Havana, 2002, p. 31.

and I wouldn't be sitting here. Because in reality the answer that we experienced on the Saturday and that allowed the government to return to power shows in a very objective manner that the great majority of the generals were not involved. It was a minority that was able to mislead the rest. I mistrusted some of them. There was no surprise regarding those who engineered the coup. We had delicate information about, for instance, the military attaché in Washington and some expressions from some other generals. But I admit that I was wrong regarding some persons in key positions, like the commander-in-chief of the army, General Vázquez Velasco, and that I never even thought that a group of officers was able to reach such extremes as to get involved with the movement for the coup. There, one has to assume self-criticism: one needs to be much more cautious.

223 With regard to the resignation, it was something that had a really negative effect. Many militaries were surprised by the way the situation was managed, but they reacted later on.

224 Well, in any case it's been a learning experience. From now on we're going to pay much more attention to some signals, we're going to try to be more precise in our individual evaluation: the interests of each human being and the internal conflicts of the institution, often injected from the outside.

2. HOW A LEADER OBTAINS OBJECTIVE INFORMATION

225 — Now, with regard to the second question on how a leader can obtain exact information about what is going on in the country. I don't doubt that a leader needs a team that constantly follows current events and informs him without impairing the reality, without covering up information. Now, it's true what you said, that for different reasons the information given to the head of state is not sufficiently clear, and I think this is unavoidable. What do I do in order to correct that situation? I read the papers, which is one way of staying informed. I particularly like to rummage through the inside pages where denunciations, letters from the public and the readers' page are printed. I read this and I start calling people. "Look, what happened with this?" "What kind of problem is that?"

226 On the other hand, in palace I have a group of people, some are militaries, others are civilians, whom I call the *Inspectoría*. I send them to do unannounced inspections on some particular sites; I ask them to bring me information about what they find along with photographs and reports from the people. That way I learn of many things that work, things that work badly and things that don't work at all. I insist that they tell me the truth. I insist of the Chief of Intelligence that he tell me the facts, the tendencies, at the moment they occur. Obviously, my informants have to have judgment because the president doesn't need to be overwhelmed by rumours, by information circulating on the streets, but he needs to be informed of those facts that in their judgment may impact the decision-making. It's a constant predicament of mine. And in this I think we are improving.

227 And, on the hand, Marta, I tend to run away from the confinement of the bell jar that Matus refers to in order to have direct contact with the people. I receive a huge amount of papers and letters. Naturally, I don't have time to read them all, but I do read a fair amount of them, and the kids who work with me read, process, and give me abstracts. That way many complaints from different areas—social, economic and popular—reach me. Or contact with small groups such as the one in Las Malvinas, with 60 leaders from the neighbourhood who inform, criticize, make suggestions, present preliminary projects and ideas. Other times, walking on the streets, I ask questions.

228 All of these are mechanisms, some institutional, others personal; some respond to the political situation when they ought to be rather structural.

229 I'm aware that this cannot be limited to personal, spasmodic actions. It must be a continuous process with a methodology that allows us to diagnose, evaluate and inspect. We need to organize an office capable of detecting problems and tracking instructions. I believe this is the best way of staying informed at the highest level possible of the surrounding reality, because it would be terrible that one were kept deceived, that one end up like an autistic person, thinking that everything is well while the country is sinking.

-And in relation to your consulting team, do you aim to surround yourself with critical persons? Do you readily accept criticism?

230 — Yes, of course, and I actually ask for it. I don't like complacent people. If there are decisions to be made that a minister or official does not agree with, it seems to me absolutely correct that the issue be discussed, deliberated to reach the best option.

3. THE DIMENSION OF THE TREASON

-Don't you believe that the first thing to keep in mind is that the militaries are not one homogenous group? I believe that the coup of April 11 reveals exactly that you can count on the support from the majority of the troops, the non-commissioned officers and the young officers. Those who betrayed you were essentially members of the high ranks, the sector most susceptible to the ideology of the dominant classes. Is that right?

231 — Yes, but it's not all the generals....

-How many generals took part in the coup?

232 — Those who really participated in the coup d'état, those who had been planning it for quite some time and those who subscribed to the operation of manipulation and support of the coup are no more than 20 per cent, and perhaps I'm exaggerating. And if you analyze almost all of them, one by one, you may understand their reasons. Some are political, some are economic. Some, because they don't quite understand the political process, others because they're influenced by that persistent campaign that if communism, if the Colombian guerilla, if Bolivarian popular militias, if the plan to weaken the Armed Forces, etcetera. Some were confused, others were engaged in the coup..

233 Of almost 100 generals, that little group is no bigger than 20, despite the fact that many of them were in the video⁷⁹. The one who read the communiqué was among the conspirators but the majority of them were there because they had been called; they were manipulated. They were told: "The president ordered the killing of people—watch the images—and now he wants us to go to the street to continue the killing. He himself has said that the soldier who directs arms against his own people be damned (a sentence by Bolívar). Therefore we're not going to obey that; we're going to pronounce ourselves within the institution." And many of them fell in that game, that trap, that manipulation.

4. WHO ARE THE MILITARIES ENGAGED IN THE COUP D'ÉTAT

1) MEN OF PRIVILEGE

-How do you characterize the group involved with the coup?

⁷⁹ He refers to the video in which the resignation of Chávez was announced and Carmona was installed as president.

234 — Almost all of the conspirators are men of privilege, with political contacts with the previous government, with AD and COPEI, or officers who had become wealthy, sometimes through dubious businesses in association with “dogs of war.” There were “dogs of war” involved in the coup: Mr. Pérez Recao, dealer of weapons and military equipment.

235 Finally, I continue thinking despite what happened that the majority, even among the generals—people of my generation—, was not participating in the coup.

-What is your analysis of what happened within the Armed Forces? How was it possible that the military you trusted were won over for that intent of a coup?

236 — Venezuela is living a historical conflict—that’s how we categorize it—, a terminal conflict, a war that ends and a war that begins; it’s a rupture with the past. And one cannot ignore a sector with many interactions—historical, social, economic, psychological, etc—with society as a whole and the other sectors that constitute it. So the Armed Forces have been feeling the impact of the national shake-up for quite some time already. It’s not a sector isolated from the national events.

237 And within this context a group of militaries, obviously shaped by certain criteria of democracy, were co-opted, convinced by groups of civilians, politicians and businessmen in favour of the coup. They are persons who spent one, two or more decades immersed in a process with external influences that generated individual or group interests very similar to the interests of the civilian, political and business sectors. Some of those militaries were engaged; they were the promoters of the coup and for many years they belonged to groups that took shape and shelter within established power. They accumulated privileges or took over privileged positions. When our Revolution arrived and our government took power, they started to lose their privileges such as, for example, the control of the armed institutions and the contracts of military purchasing. Therefore, it’s not strange that Isaac Pérez Recao, one of the persons involved in the coup and who is now in the United States—and it’s almost certain that he was behind Mr. Carmona—is a man who for many years did business selling weapons: rifles, grenades and armoured vehicles to the Armed Forces. This man befriended, for instance, one of our generals in Washington. The day of the coup, that general⁸⁰ came back from Washington on Pérez Recao’s plane and joined the conspirators. He even smuggled weapons—but not weapons that belonged to the Venezuelan Armed Forces—into Fort Tiuna in order to take control of some spaces.

238 Others had aspirations of becoming possible military chiefs, because they were associated with the parties that governed the country for a long time. They aspired to become division generals, military chiefs, Army chiefs, chiefs of the Armed Forces and, well, their plans did not pan out. And it was then that their resentment started: “Chávez promoted another one, but not me.” “Chávez is giving positions to his friends, but not to us who had the potential.” All those tales.

239 They were basically—with some exceptions—the militaries who became the engines of the conspiracy and, moreover, those who manipulated a group of officers.

5. WORK DONE BY CONSPIRATORS WITHIN THE GENERAL STAFF

240 — Last night⁸¹ I spoke to four generals of the Air Force whom we decided not to bring to court—I’ve been speaking to many generals one by one; almost every week I speak to a group—and one of them explained to me that one of the generals involved in the coup told him to report to

80 Enrique Medina Gómez.

81 June 12, 2002.

the command at the Carlota base. He did as he was told, and there he was told: “Look, do you know what’s going on? Watch these images. There’s a peaceful demonstration and look at the president’s people, the armed Bolivarian Circles, and pay close attention, they’re shooting, killing people.” They showed that footage, the video that everybody saw. “The president went crazy, and now he’s asking us to go out to massacre people but we’re not going to do that. Do you agree?” “Well, yes, I agree. I don’t want to kill people. What’s going on is horrible.” Moreover, he was told: “Look, the president has resigned and there is a vacuum of power. We’re writing a document; we’re going to declare our intentions to the country.” Then a television camera captures one of the generals reading the document. He was manipulated with lies and fell into the error. He told me: “I was stupid, but they’re never going to fool me again!” And I believe him, because we have identified those who really were the instigators and we know that there’s another group that was fooled, manipulated as well. That group belongs to my generation.

241 Moreover, it’s a favourable piece of information that the following day some of them started reacting, thinking more calmly, seeing the reality and assuming positions. That was before my return. I want to clarify this to you because people might think that it was because of my return that they jumped back to my side. No, no, although some did. It was the following day that the majority reacted; it occurred to them that I had not resigned. They started to declare their positions in a very strong way. Some of them did it in a more reserved manner, but in the end there were these declarations along with popular reaction, which permitted the reversal of the situation.

242 One of the generals involved in the coup, for instance, was the chief of Caldera’s Casa Militar and a very good friend of Caldera’s son-in-law. Another one of them is a retired general who was active when I won the elections and attempted to prepare a coup d’état against me but failed. He didn’t have the power to launch it that December in 1998. I mean, there are a variety of reasons—some individual, others political—that brought together those militaries and brought them close to political parties, such as Acción Democrática and COPEI, business sectors, weapons dealers, etc., and the media with some amount of power. They managed to control a conflicting moment that was fed from the outside, prepared in part by a conflict like the one affecting PDVSA, an internal conflict between sectors, a struggle between internal powers. It was on this stage that they had been preparing, for quite some time already, the events of April 11.

6. WHY SUCH A BENEVOLENT ATTITUDE? WEAKNESS OR STRENGTH?

-You say that you decided not to take them to court. What is the reason for such a benevolent attitude? You should know that there is a concern inside as well as outside Venezuela that here no one is punished, that despite the fact that this is a government that has strongly opposed corruption no corrupt person has been tried in spite of the existence of obvious evidence of corruption. The same goes for the coup d’état. I understand that within sectors of troops and non-commissioned officers that are completely engaged in the process, the attitude of the government is not understood. Neither do they understand your appointment of General Rincón, who announced your resignation, to the post of minister of defense. All of this gives the impression of weakness—not strength. There are those who think that the correlation of forces within the Armed Forces are so against you that you have no choice but to be conciliatory. What can you say with regard to this?

1) WHAT IS THE CONCEPT OF STRENGTH?

243 — You can read a reality like this one in many ways. Whether you call it weakness or strength depends on your concept of weakness and strength. After our return to power, following the coup d’état of April 11, we had many options. One was to show strength from a traditional point of view, understanding this as the execution of harsh actions, like a battalion of tanks attacking, moving

forward and destroying positions, flattening one wall after another, occupying space. Some people conceive strength that way. It's a respectable concept. I'm not diminishing its merit, but that doesn't mean this concept is valid for every situation. I imagine that when the Nazis were marching toward Leningrad they had this concept in mind: we're going to move forward to the heart of the enemy to blow it up. There is another concept of strength. Look at those bamboos⁸². It's an image used by the Chinese: the bamboo bends over without breaking, as opposed to other trees that seem so strong but that nevertheless break. I believe I've had this concept of strength forever—the strength of flexibility, maneuvering and intelligence, and not brute force, meaning the expression of strength as an immediate response without persistence over time.

2) THE OPTIONS

²⁴⁴ — Going back to what I was telling you, when I came back I had a few options. One of them was to show strength in the sense I was just talking about—if we had sent a few people to jail that would have been interpreted as strength, but we didn't do that. Some of them have left the country; others are in their homes, a few under house arrest and others without restrictions other than weekly appearances at court since they are under a process of investigation.

²⁴⁵ I remember, Marta, that at the time of our uprising we were all jailed, as they say here, “*a Raimundo y todo el mundo*”—everybody. We were 300 people and there wasn't enough space for us in the jails. They had to invent prisons. The area immediately surrounding the jail where I was detained was mined because they were afraid that people would come to rescue me. We were not allowed to talk to the country for fear that we would expose the truth. In order for our wives, children and relatives to visit us we had to write a list and send it to the Ministry of Defence a week earlier so they could authorize their visit. Pablo Medina, indeed, proposed at the time that we be questioned in Congress. The answer was: “That is not possible! Those conspirators shouldn't be allowed to talk!” So we had to do an interview with José Vicente Rangel in Yare. The hidden tape got out secretly but the government found out and stopped the show. They searched my house; they even took my children's clothing and some money that belonged to my first wife. I would ask, was that a demonstration of strength? In reality, it was a demonstration of great weakness. I'm not afraid, and I couldn't care less that Carmona Estanga was in the National Assembly for, I think, 15 or 17 hours, being questioned, and that it was transmitted live on television and radio across the country. And that General So-and-So and Admiral So-and-So tell their version of the truth. I believe some of them ended up in a very bad position when they said, for example, “There was no coup here.” People were laughing. No coup? And Carmona Estanga was saying, “There was a vacuum of power and the militaries called me and I was sworn.” Nobody, not even he himself, believes that. He made a fool of himself. People are aware of that. I believe it's been a lesson, a learning experience. Now, I don't deny that there are people, especially young and impulsive people, that may think that this is a sign of weakness and that that man shouldn't be talking, that he should be jailed in Yare, where I was detained. Perhaps you yourself share that opinion.

²⁴⁶ Now, I want to clarify that it's not that the conspirators are acquitted. No, Marta, we are applying the constitution.

²⁴⁷ We decided to become a political party, to get involved in elections, to win the government, to create a new constitution, to recognize five powers and elaborate that constitution, which contains elements according to which a general, an admiral—the constitution doesn't allow for exceptions—

⁸² He's referring to the bamboo in the garden of La Casona, the presidential residence in Caracas where this part of the interview took place.

must first be brought to a trial of merit and then to a court of justice. We decided to accept the rules of the game that we've established and that's what we're doing now.

²⁴⁸ The attorney-general of the republic already elaborated the pre-trial of merit. This can't be done from one day to the next, because if one is not well backed the trial can fail. One has to create documents, interview people. Three attorneys interviewed me for five hours; they interviewed a lot of people. Then, the attorney-general, according to the timing established by the constitution, handed over a large document to the Supreme Court of Justice, which is currently reviewing it to see if there are grounds for a trial against those men.

²⁴⁹ If we don't fulfill these steps, we would be in violation of the constitution. Of course, the auditor-general's office has also adopted some measures. It has established some restrictions—they can't leave the country, they have to report themselves, they can't emit public opinions, they can't participate in demonstrations.

²⁵⁰ If following the constitution is considered a sign of weakness, imagine what that would mean!

²⁵¹ If the constitution is too permissive in some articles—and we've already detected some vulnerabilities—then it should be revised to see if amendments are necessary. That is as valid as when one builds a house and discovers that some of its columns are weak and a decision is made to strengthen them. There are people who already think about proposing amendments to strengthen parts of the constitution. That is a valid constitutional process. For their part, the opposition is also demanding amendments and it's valid that they do so, that they collect signatures, that they go there; after this process we have to call a referendum.

7. DIFFERENT LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

252 —Therefore there are different levels of responsibilities. First there is group of militaries, those truly engaged in the coup d'état. They are facing the pre-trial of merit. There's another group that we've decided not to put on trial based on a very thorough investigation, but to instead bring them to the "Council of Investigation," which is another instance of the Constitutional Law of the Armed Forces.

1) MILITARIES BROUGHT TO THE COUNCIL OF INVESTIGATION

-When you say, "We have decided," what do you mean?

253 — I speak in plural because it's not only me. I receive recommendations from the military ranks and from other sources that provide me with intelligence information. I'm in charge of gathering other information. Thus, we consolidate information in order to come closer to the truth regarding the role played by such and such soldier. This Council of Investigation is also a very serious body that can't be created from one day to the next—you can't discharge a soldier who has already reached a rank, and who has some rights, without reasons. The constitution establishes due process and the right to defence. You have to grant him the right to defend himself; otherwise we fall into the same tendency as Carlos Andrés Pérez. He discharged a few soldiers like that, without trial or investigation. They were even taken barefoot; their weapons and everything were taken away—a humiliation. And the innocent and the guilty alike paid. Many were innocent and a few were guilty in this case of ours.

254 The men brought to the Council of Investigation are already in the final stage. About five days ago I signed a recommendation to discharge two admirals, one was the commander of the Marines in Carúpano in the East, and the other was here in Caracas. We consider that their fault was grave but not a crime, because if the Council of Investigation determines that it was a crime or

presumption of crime, the investigation follows the route of the pre-trial of merit, which is longer. The Council of Investigation is faster because it depends on the commander-in-chief. There are currently about 15 generals and admirals from the Army, the Navy, the Air force and the National Guard appearing before the Council of Investigation. And after that we'll decide if we should put them on trial, arrest them for a few days, admonish them verbally or discharge them from the institution.

2) VERBAL ADMONITION

255 — What I'm doing with some of them is to bring them here to talk to them for two or three hours and tell them, "You made a mistake." I also tell them, "Well, look, you can keep your position, but you have to realize that you made a mistake and that if there is ever another similar situation, I hope you don't do it again." In other words, it's a moral sanction. That is within our laws and military regulations—it's what we call a "verbal admonition." I've seen a general crying here, saying, "Damn, Hugo, they fooled me, I was naïve." And I know he meant it and he told me, "Look how my children have suffered, because I was in the newspapers and my children love you very much." I've even taken on the task of publicly vindicating some of them in order to redress the moral damage done to a man with more than 20 years in the Armed Forces, a man who has grandchildren, who feels like a soldier and who hurts because he was fooled when he was told that Chávez has resigned and that Chávez killed some people. So, he said, "How could I believe that, why the hell didn't I wake up and think that this was a lie! I didn't believe my superior when he told me, but I believed the one who phoned me, and I believed the television and the whole campaign, like many others around the world."

256 I think it would be very unfair if those manipulated and deceived officers were sent to jail. Because the only thing many of them did when they were called was to report to their commands, where they made them stand up in front of a journalist with a camera. And then one of them, the conspirator, started reading while they were standing there.

3) AVOIDING A WITCH HUNT

257 — After the coup d'état we have transferred militaries, and the just thing is that the decisions have direct relation with the level of gravity of the implicated person. In that regard we've acted extremely carefully. It would be terrible to start a witch-hunt within the Armed Forces.

258 One officer told me, "Look, see this photograph. We have analyzed it. The day you didn't arrive, Colonel Moreno wasn't wearing his red beret; he had a green beret. Why did he remove the red beret and put on a green beret? This may indicate that he didn't want to look like red beret." I want to clarify that Colonel Moreno is the chief of Casa Militar and he was with me to the last minute of the coup d'état. I said to the officer: "Look, be careful with what you're thinking; if we're going to start doubting everybody, we're going to end up mad. That colonel risked his life that day. You're not aware of that because you were not there. Do you know why that colonel was wearing that beret? He and Colonel Morao and the soldiers under their command were all wearing green berets because they, as part of the tactical plan to retake the palace, decided to change their red berets since they made them targets easy to detect. Instead, with the green berets, people who saw them didn't know on which side they were. They removed the sign that identified them as people of the Chávez regiment and the Presidential Guard of Chávez." The guy, in good faith, doubted Colonel Moreno. But imagine that because of a misinterpreted photo, because of gossip or a comment, some militaries start being questioned without any real reason!

259 Another told me, "Look, Colonel So-and-So went home, nobody saw him around here the day we were planning the taking back of the palace." In fact, that colonel was in another place

coordinating something else. It means that one can't let oneself be guided by impulses, by preliminary observations, and unleash—in such a complicated and sensitive environment as the Armed Forces—a witch-hunt.

8. WHY GENERAL RINCÓN WAS APPOINTED MINISTER OF DEFENCE

-Can you explain to me why you appointed the general who announced your resignation to the country—General Rincón—as minister of defence? Nobody can understand that.

260 — Nobody?

-Nobody. How is it possible that someone who said that you'd resigned when you had not can count on your trust?

261 — There are many versions, but I do know the truth. Maybe I'm the only one who knows it exactly. I know what drove him to say that. He is not guilty, but a victim of a situation in which I am involved; maybe this is why I'm the one who understands him, perhaps more than anybody else. I would feel badly if I had discharged Rincón.

1) HE CONSIDERS THE RESIGNATION WITH FOUR CONDITIONS

-Why? Did you have an ambiguous position at some point?

²⁶² — I wouldn't say ambiguous, but there was a moment when we in fact started to discuss the topic of the possibility of the resignation. That was when I realized that we had lost almost all our military force on hand in order to resist or move to another place. So I called José Vicente and William Lara, the president of the assembly, who were there at the palace, and other people, other ministers, and I asked them to come to my office. We then studied the constitution and we began to think about the possibility of my resignation. I said to the group: "I'm able to resign, but only if four conditions are met. The first one was to respect the physical safety of all men, women, the people, and the government—physical safety and human rights. The second one: respect of the constitution, meaning, if I resigned it would have to be before the National Assembly and the vice-president would have to assume the presidency of the republic until new elections were called. The third condition was to address the country live. The fourth one was that all the officials of my government should accompany me along with those kids who were my bodyguards for years. I knew that they wouldn't accept, because that would be a shock group that I would have within my reach.

²⁶³ Then the emissaries—General Arturo Sucre, minister of infrastructure, and General Rosendo—went to Fort Tiuna. They talked to the conspirators and came back saying that, yes, they accepted the conditions.

2) CHÁVEZ LETS RINCÓN KNOW HIS DECISION TO RESIGN

264 — I had authorized General Rincón, who had been with me the whole evening and night, to go to Fort Tiuna to find out what those people really wanted, and at that moment he was already there. In the middle of these events he called me and said: "President, they're demanding your resignation and they're putting pressure on me to resign as well. But I've said that I'll assume whatever decision you make." Then I told him: "Look, Lucas, Rosendo and Hurtado have arrived and they've told me that they accept the conditions that I am demanding for my resignation. Tell them that, yes, I will resign." I gave him the green light. He leaves saying what I told him. What he said was: "The president has accepted the resignation and so have I. My position is at the disposition of high command." Therefore, I'm completely sure that he said what I had told him by phone.

3) RINCÓN DISOWNS THE CHANGE OF THE SITUATION

265 — What happened 10, 20 minutes later? He gives that declaration and leaves, but a few minutes later we receive the information that they no longer accept the conditions. I was almost certain that they were not going to accept; it was a way to gain time. Now they were demanding that I go there as a prisoner. I if decided not to do so, they would come to attack the palace. In a few minutes, the situation changed.

266 And that was the end—I accepted to leave as a prisoner.

267 Lucas left. He took his family to some place and on Saturday he returned to Fort Tiuna. He joined García Carneiro and the group of generals who were there reorganizing things. What can we accuse him of, then?

4) THIS INFORMATION WAS RELEASED

-Has this information been released? Because as far as I know it hasn't reached outside Venezuela.

268 — I explained that, I believe, to the special political commission of the National Assembly that investigated the events that took place during the April coup, when it interviewed me at the palace. I've said this before, when I appointed him as minister of defence to endorse him, to strengthen him. On the other hand, he's a man who has been with me from the beginning of the government. He was the chief of Casa Militar, he was a member of my ministry, he was commander of the Army and then inspector of the Armed Forces. And I appointed him minister of defence. Facing the new situation around us, which demands political dialogue, the most experienced man in my cabinet is José Vicente Rangel and this is why I appointed him vice-president from being minister of defence.

9. THE MILITARY COUP D'ÉTAT: LESSONS

-Can you summarize the lessons that you learned from the recent military coup d'état? When we talked, you explained to me that in Fort Tiuna the commanders of the coup were in one building, and in another building farther away were the regiments. General García Carneiro—a man loyal to you—and his troops were in this last one. You told me that the commanders had called him but he didn't want to report to them because he did not want to abandon his troops. Although, in the end, when he was told that they would go and talk to you in Miraflores he was convinced and left his troops without command. Some military chiefs involved in the coup took advantage of the situation to control the troops by means of hierarchy and lies.

269 — I've told you that I've always tried to respect the line of command. The instructions from the commander-in-chief were always given through the high ranks. Now, you could see the situation that happened, which I painted of García Carneiro and the difficulties I had communicating with him and other generals from the loyal military garrisons. And I was barely able to talk once to General Baduel⁸³ and after that I lost contact. I couldn't establish it—they had sabotaged the phone lines of the palace.

270 Well, we should take this as a lesson in order to establish more flexible communication mechanisms and direct contact from the commander-in-chief to the commanders of the operative units—those who have weapons in their hands and who command the men of the Armed Forces.

271 It's not about disowning the high ranks, it's just that in an internal or external conflict the high military commands may disappear for many reasons; they could be captured or physically

83 General Raúl Baduel, commander of the Armoured Brigade of Paratroopers of Valencia.

eliminated. The top commander must have the capacity, the communication channels in order never to lose something that is fundamental: the direct military command of the units of the Army. That was harmed on April 11. The conspirators used this to manipulate unit commanders, to neutralize other units, to deceive military chiefs who only received information from the conspirators, to disorient them, misinform them, confound them, lie to them, manipulate them.

272 So this is a lesson: a much more direct contact with middle officers, the chiefs, the officers and also the troops is needed.

-Do you believe you can count on absolute majority support from those sectors?

²⁷³ — Yes, absolutely. And I could prove it to you.

— *And how do the high ranks see this?*

²⁷⁴ Since it's not about mistrust, but to prepare oneself for any eventuality, they shouldn't see it in a negative light. Although, some jealousies could exist. Nonetheless, the predicament, the discussion, the search for the elimination of any kind of jealousy has been my concern.

10. RADICALIZATION OF THE PROCESS AND THE ARMED FORCES

-Don't you think that as the revolutionary process is radicalized it is more and more difficult to count on majority support from a group whose formation is very influenced by the values of the dominant classes and that, therefore, is very susceptible to the campaign that the reactionary sectors launch against your government, as they have showed during the last events?

275 — Yes, I think that's normal. I believe that this happens in any example anywhere in the world. Even if we apply the law of physics to swimmers crossing the Orinoco River, there will be those who say "I can't go on" for physical reasons. The same thing happens in a group of mountain climbers; some will fall behind because of weakness or accidents. If this is what happens at a physical level, it's even more common in a complex process that is influenced not only by physical laws—which isn't even the most important—but by culture, ideology, material, economics. There are people who go along with you through one phase—and we've lived it throughout this process, which for me, Marta, has lasted for almost 25 years, since I started in a firm and serious manner to organize small groups—but who later fall behind for several reasons. I have always tried to be thankful for that. I even thank those who are no longer with us because they helped at one stage. Their incapacity of moving forward is no reason to condemn them. No, they just broke down, fell behind or walked away for different reasons.

276 Many officers who were of great help before the insurrection didn't participate in the insurrection. But one can't forget their work. Of course, I'm not referring to the traitors but to those who fell behind for different reasons.

277 In prison, for example, there were people who had broken down or rather didn't want to continue. How many officers? Many—they were my comrades. They left prison and told me: "Look, comandante," or "Look, Hugo, I'm going home. I have my wife and children, I have to work to sustain them." I could never condemn them; on the contrary.

278 Look, Marta, I remember four kids who were with me once when we bought cambures⁸⁴ to feed ourselves; we ate bread, banana and drank Pepsi cola or coffee. We didn't have one cent. Everything we had was for the family far away, for our small children, our wives. One morning

84 Bananas.

when I was sleeping in a chinchorro⁸⁵ and they on mattress, which couldn't contain them all—we were in a walkway of a house belonging to a brave man who had let us stay; almost nobody dared to let Chávez sleep in his house—I heard one of them crying. I came closer, thinking that he was dreaming, and when I asked him what was the matter, he answered: “My wife called me today. She’s eating crackers and sardines.” I then told him: “Well, you know that I’m the leader.” “Yes.” “I’m going to give you an order: tomorrow I don’t want to see you here. Go to your wife, look for a job with someone who can pay you; I can’t pay you anything.” The guy didn’t want to leave, by I ordered him to go.

279 He came back one day when I was already the president and worked with us for awhile. Later, he started working on other things, but let’s say he followed his way. The majority went to look for something to do, somewhere to work; of course, they were young kids with wives and children. And then some of the radicals said, “They’re traitors, they’re weak.” I think they’re human—not everybody is like us, who left wife and children; we don’t care where we sleep; we have a great dream. Perhaps we have a superior strength that pulls us more than them.

280 What I want to tell you is that I agree with you. I consider it normal that as the process demands more, it requires people with a higher conscience, capacity, strength, force. There are people who have their limits, and that’s how far they go. At this point one may have negative surprises, but also positive ones—sometimes one has the impression that some people can’t surpass certain limits but they do indeed cross that line and even the next one, and they keep moving ahead, leaving many behind.

281 I believe that, in our case, this observation of people who keep moving forward is greater in quantity and significance than the other part. After February 4, the people has advanced much further than previously anticipated. I remember how I felt in 1992 when we surrendered. What an embarrassment! “If we had only fought to the death,” I thought, alone in a prison cell. Of course, I was isolated from reality. I didn’t know the explosion of affection and emotion that the gesture of a group of militaries had generated in the people. We had never imagined that. And what we saw at Las Malvinas the day before yesterday⁸⁶ was a passion, a passion that had awakened in the majority of those people. Therefore, I can tell you that there are people who show that they can go much further than you may think. Those who fall behind do so drop by drop, in small groups.

-You’d have to be conscious of that. I mean, in the same way you were sensitive to the one you sent home, you should be able to detect when a person has reached his limit and make a decision about him before he breaks down, right?

282 — Sometimes it’s not easy. One needs to be a lot more attentive to better develop the perception, the instinct. I do have a good instinct and many times I regret not to have followed it. I often pay attention to my strategic instinct, but sometimes I don’t consider the small instinct regarding an individual. That happened to me before April 11; I will try to not let it happen again.

11. ATTITUDE TOWARD RADICALIZED MILITARY SECTORS

-On the other hand, I’ve found out that an important group of young officers that has been leading the social task of the Revolution has become more radical and demands the adoption of more drastic measures against corruption. It asks for the acceleration of the rhythm of transformation. It

85 Hammock.

86 He refers to his visit to a popular neighborhood on June 20, 2002.

doesn't understand your conciliatory attitude toward the generals involved in the coup. Am I right? How do you evaluate its attitude? How can one channel it? What can you expect from this group?

283 — I believe that this sector or this phenomenon of radicalization of the military sectors has grown in favor of the revolutionary process; it has grown not only in number but also in intensity. You ask me how to confront this situation. What I try to do is exercise leadership. I have met with some of those who pressure and who are upset because there are no prisoners, military or civilian, and because the media continue doing what they're doing—disrespecting, inventing, twisting the reality.

284 I try to make them understand that we're making an effort, as much as we can, to maintain the strategic option that we chose and that these people are supported by a large majority.

285 I am very aware that a process of deterioration of this situation may bring as a consequence the growing or increasing weight of this tendency. This is what some sectors of the opposition do not consider.

-In the sense that they can remove Chávez, but they can't stop the process?

286 — Yes, Chávez may go, but Chávez is not only Chávez. They sometimes tend to simplify the problem. The situation we are in has awakened very radical tendencies, feelings. I'm sure that in the impossible case that I bend to the reaction, these sectors would pass over me and new leaderships would emerge. That, Marta, reassures me. Beyond my structural and political concerns and errors, I'm certain that this process has no way back. This movement of change, of restructuring, of Revolution, will not be stopped. Now, the chance that it may take another course, that is possible.

287 I have said it publicly; it is not only a comment for you or your publication. No, I have said it, and many times it has been misrepresented as if I were launching a threat. No. I say it as a conclusion. Now, after what happened, I say it with even more conviction.

288 Here I can quote John Kennedy's thought in this regard. He said that if the revolutions in these countries were not peaceful, they'd be violent revolutions. That's when the Alliance for Progress (Alianza para el Progreso) was born. I read it in your book and in its context⁸⁷, which I imagined but didn't know.

289. Now, I'm convinced that if we were to fail in this effort of making profound political, economic and social changes in this way, other ways will come, Marta, other ways will come. Perhaps violent ways, perhaps military ways or perhaps civic-military ways. But this process has assumed its own strength. I give as an example a river, a river you can dam but not detain. If you don't give it the possibility to flow it will tear down the dam or find its own course, but it will always flow toward the sea.

87 He refers to the section "La Respuesta de los Estados Unidos," paragraphs 31 to 36, particularly paragraph 32, of the book "La Izquierda en el Umbral del Siglo XXI. Haciendo Posible lo Imposible" by Marta Harnecker, Siglo XXI, Spain, 3rd ed., 2000.