

ERNESTO VILLEGAS POLJAK

APRIL INSIDE THE COUP



EDITORIAL
NOSOTROS
MISMOS

5th. edition

**APRIL,
INSIDE THE COUP**

ERNESTO VILLEGAS POLJAK

First edition: Editorial Galac, 2009

First, second and third reprint

Second edition: Fundarte, 2012

Third edition: Editorial Metr polis C.A., 2015

Fourth edition: Editorial Nosotros Mismos C. A., 2019

April, inside the coup

  Ernesto Villegas Poljak

Cover image: Ernesto Morgado

Soldier loyal to the Bolivarian process in the retaking of the White Palace

on April 13, 2002

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Cover design: Paulo Conde

Casing design and layout: Carina Falcone

Legal Deposit: MI2020000662

ISBN: 978-980-7803-10-6

Caracas, 2020

*This book is dedicated to:
Jorge Recio,
who lives up every day to the Spanish meaning of his name.*

*Miriam Caripe,
a street vendor with guts, the women's face of these people.*

*And to the memory of: Maja Poljak and Cruz Villegas,
beacons that light up with their love and revolutionary
struggle.*

*Jesús Romero Anselmi,
an understanding friend, a restless journalist.*

*Hernán Mata Rodulfo,
The pioneer reader of these pages, unforgettable
navigator of joy.*

*Juan Vives Suriá,
the most authentic expression of sanctity, always hand in hand
with the outcasts, the powerless and oppressed.*

*Ana Rosa Cruz de Tortoza,
mother of all the victims.*

ACKNOWLEDMENTS

To all my family, for their encouragement, understanding, and advices. And for enduring months of absence. To my son Santiago and Karen Cortés, my niece and author of the original design of the book cover, I entrust them to give my gratitude to all the «Villeguera».

To Ligia Monagas and her daughter Carmen Eugenia, for organizing an ocean of documents, newspapers and cassettes.

To Mercedes Rizo, for insisting me to sit down to write and for miles of transcribed interviews, which would not have served as documentaries sources without the help of VTV and other Venezuelan TV channels workers, as well as to a TV Radio 2021, C.A. army of transcriptionists —anonymous, like many— the company led by Mercedes. I also thank them all.

To photojournalists Orlando Ugueto, Egilda Gómez, Ernesto Morgado, Wendys Olivo, Jesús Castillo and Enrique Hernández, for their April photographs' treasure which illustrate these pages.

To Felipe Saldivia, Giulio Santosuosso, Carlos Parra and Héctor González Varela for reviewing the originals and for their wise suggestions.

To Galac Publishing house, for their support in the first edition of this book and their disinterested support for this second edition. Both Giulio and Carlos, as well as Eva María Romero,

Carmen Blanco and María Antonieta Catania earned a special place among the godmothers and godparents of these pages.

To Elsie Rosales and Carmelo Borrego, for their friendship and legal orientation both inside and outside the classrooms.

To Olga Dragnic, for her journalism teachings and for a decalogue of suggestions, one of which was magical: concatenate the facts according to their chronological order. Task that by itself, illuminated hitherto dark corners of the addressed subject.

To Angélica Méndez, Rigoberto López, Gustavo Suárez, Jorge Solé, Lilian Blaser and Douglas Alzurutt for sharing with me and with the Venezuelan people, the videos of an unrepeatable era.

To Jenny Russián, habitless nun, and to the rest of Fundalatin team, for trusting me with documentary jewels bequeathed by Father Juan Vives Suriá.

*To Alexis Rosas, for initiating me in this path with *The Bush's Terrorist* (Caracas, 2005), a four-handed written book without which I would hardly have embarked on this other adventure.*

*Alexis is the author of *The Night of the Generals*, one of the most complete and best written works about April 2002.*

To the producers, interns and other colleagues who throughout the last decade, made possible the making of an infinity of interviews conducted by me on radio and television, and which fed my perception of those historical moments. They were Carlota Reyes, María Clara Carbajal, María Silva, Josefna Bastardo, Kelly Mayor, Carlos Vásquez, Jorge Abreu, Milagros Inojosa, Ysabel Baena, Keila Guillén, Vladimir Villegas Tovar, Laurita García and a long list of people I love which I cannot continue, due more to reasons of space than of pettiness.

To Lenín Aquino, Frank Salcedo, Rubén Martínez, Gicela Fuenmayor, Germán Saltrón, Ángel Bellorín, Carlos Subero, David Paravisini, Mercedes Chacín, Jesús Zambrano Mata, Lelis Páez, Luigino Bracci, Mariana Silvia, Ildegar Gil, Luis Lafratta, José Luis Pacheco, Néstor Viloría and all those who, being or not on this list - incomplete, like all others - contributed directly or indirectly to feed these pages.

To Mariana Hernández and others who, without knowing them in person, supported me with their efforts to reconstruct the events of April 2002, which has so far been confined to cyberspace and which one day must transcend ink and paper.

To Jorge Rodríguez and Freddy Nández, for their efforts to give life to the second edition of this book.

This edition would not have been possible without the loving persistence of my wife, Klara Aguilar. I infinitely thank her and Humberto Castillo, my life brother. I reiterate the acknowledgments of previous editions.

PROLOGUE TO THE CURRENT EDITION

The world situation is presented to us in a very convulsive way; despite scientific and technological advances, contradictions between the reality we live in and humanity's most cherished dreams such as: equality, freedom, social justice and peace are accentuated every day. The predominant capitalist system is showing degenerations which widen the gap between rich and poor, consequently multiplying war conflicts that in turn generate multiple and varied threats to the stability of states.

In this context, Venezuela, which has always been a gravity center in the region and the entire American continent's geopolitics, has been facing marked **interventionism**, the perverse practice of meddling in the internal affairs of other countries which is normally carried out by foreign powers or power groups through political, economic, social and military actions among others. In this regard, in December 1998, with the election of Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías as president and the emergence of the Bolivarian Revolution, the aforementioned interventionism was dramatically accentuated. This was undoubtedly due to the proposed firm determination of the total transformation of the Venezuelan State towards a more humane, just and egalitarian socialist model, in frank opposition to the excesses that the ruling classes of the bipartisan **puntofijista** political model carried out, which affected

the whole society and especially the always dispossessed and most vulnerable social strata.

Hugo Chávez managed to carry out in record time an unprecedented process of structural changes which took shape in December 1999 with the approval of a new Constitution by the vast majority of the Venezuelan people. Then, in November 2001, protected by the enabling law previously granted by the National Assembly, he enacted a set of laws aimed at the collective benefit but which affected the interests of economic corporations and traditional party leaders. This resulted in the carrying out, based on manipulation and deception, of protests focused in the city of Caracas, whose climax was April 11th, when a coup d'état was carried out against Hugo Chávez, who fortunately for the good of the people, was reinstated in power two days later.

Ernesto Villegas Poljak, renowned journalist, politician, writer and intellectual, with a well-established career in various positions within the national public administration in which he stands out as President Hugo Chávez' last Minister of Communication and Information, presents us a new edition of *Abril, golpe adentro* (*April, inside the coup d'état*), an exceptional historical report —as he puts it—, in which the depth, sharpness and detail can only be offered by a seasoned journalist, who was very active during that fateful day and who reported these shocking events abided strictly to the principle of truthful, timely and uncensored information.

This work accurately relates not only the coup brotherhood's vileness, who allied with the media's acquiescence and its terrible news opacity, wanted to destabilize the country by generating chaos, anarchy and death, but also strikes with sharp sagacity the ignorance of the conspiratorial elites who tried to seize power by violent means without considering the forceful reaction overflowing with dignity and courage that popular masses would have. It is well known that dominant oligarchies always belittle and demonize progressive currents.

During such unfortunate events, I was appointed as commander of the "Liberator Simón Bolívar" Infantry Battalion, a tactical unit stationed at Fort Tiuna, a place where good part of the sedition acts took place. For this reason, with sincere humility, I can consider myself an exceptional witness and responsibly validate the facts embodied in this work, reiterating the highest professionalism with which the author developed it, qualifying it without fear of being mistaken as one of the most complete, precise and objective works written on the subject so far.

To delve into this extraordinary journalistic work not only delights us in its interesting narrative, but also makes easier the analysis of what could perhaps be described as one of the most complex episodes in our contemporary history. Consequently, it allows us to have a better understanding of the national socio-political reality of that time and that of the present. In April 2002, the *de facto government* headed by Pedro Carmona Estanga,

wanted to destroy in a single act, all the institutions which had been approved by **the original power** (the Venezuelan people) by **popular sovereignty**, and this made evident the awkwardness and fascism of such pseudo-leaders.

As a soldier, back then as battalion commander and today as minister of the Popular Power for Defense, with great military pride I am pleased to recall the vigorous movement which emerged from within the Bolivarian National Armed Forces itself which joined the people who vehemently demanded the presence of its legitimate president in order to execute the necessary actions to bring him back to power and to reestablish the constitutional continuity. This fact constitutes the first great demonstration of civil-military **union**, a beautiful concept sown by the Supreme Commander in the nation's collective consciousness and which currently represents the most powerful and solid base for *the comprehensive defense of the nation*.

Today our beloved homeland suffers an aggression of greater magnitude than the one suffered in 2002, with new methods and actors who seek to apply the classic **forced regime change** pattern already applied in many other nations by the American empire. It is a **hybrid offensive** which combines **soft and hard power** with the support of some countries and multilateral organizations whose superlative goal is to overthrow the current government and establish one prone to its petty interests in order to seize the

country's wealth and undermine the social demands conquered under the shelter of the Bolivarian Revolution.

Finally, I must point out that reading *Abril, golpe adentro* (*April, inside the coup d'état*) constitutes a warning for Venezuelans who love this land of grace, in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, strengthening ourselves in moral and spiritual values, thus as in the most pristine libertarian traditions inherited from Bolívar, Zamora and Chávez, to tirelessly continue fighting for the preservation of the nation's dignity, sovereignty and independence.

*“... the People of Venezuela
is resolved to bury itself
entirely in the midst of its ruins
if Spain, Europe, and the World
insist in stooping
it under the Spanish yoke ”.*

Simon Bolivar. Government Palace.
Angostura, November 20, 1818.

Commanding General Vladimir Padrino López Minister of Popular
Power for Defense

THE HOURS OF APRIL FACTS OF A REAL COUP

There are hours in the life of nations when people face up to their destiny. These are hours when everything is put at stake, when social peace demises under the worst threat. Hours when people and their lives worth nothing. Hours planned with deceit and death. Hours when history materializes, when the naked wills shake, turn into bodies who say *yes* or *no* to life or death.

A decade is a good period of time to start evaluating from a certain distance, but with a thrilling emotional closeness, the weight and transcendence of an event in the life of a country. Ten years later, the April 2002 coup has become a part of our national epic history from the perspective of most Venezuela's popular and revolutionary struggles. On April 2002, Venezuela witnessed the triumph of lie and death for some hours. Over the televised bloody bodies of unwary and innocent people, we lived terrified the suspension of democracy and the ascent of fascism.

In the framework of this epic story, the April coup has two faces: a gloomy April of snipers and corpses whose death was planned in cold blood, an April of despicable deceitful generals, when the powerful media lost their most benign mask and colluded to cause bloodshed in order to favor their most sinister desires. But there is also the bright April of a civil and military resistance which acted in an exemplary and resolute manner, thus quickly reverting the

conspiracy and the restitution of the deposed President to his legitimate office.

As long as the truth prevails over oblivion, April will be the scene of an unprecedented feat of the people: to reverse in less than 48 hours a coup d'état which was of a new kind, carefully and technically planned by the oligarchy and the Empire, with the open and careful participation of that key power enshrined in the realm of political adventures of the new century: the power of media representation and delusions. A techno-political and psycho-political coup unable to trick the intuition and insight of a population that offered a unanimous and immediate resistance, as well as a spontaneous and lucid response that put an end to the carelessness and over-confidence of mass media, corporate establishment and bourgeoisie.

Already a classic, Villegas Poljak's historic essay was published for the first time in 2009. Ten years later, Venezuela's socialist administration is distributing this book cost-free to the people, the one who had the main part in this drama as the political actor of those hours. It's an essential document and a memorial to the deadly demise and the subsequent popular resurrection — the counter coup— which brought about in a heroic fashion the subsistence and the life itself of the current Bolivarian Revolution, as a renovating trend of the 21st century in Venezuela and the whole world.

There was the intention to manipulate the facts, and there still is,

by denying that April's events were a coup d'état. The euphemistic formula of a "power vacuum" was used to justify the overthrow of a legitimate government and its usurpation by the darkest forces.

The first virtue of *Inside the April Coup* is that it puts the facts down in black and white and establishes from all standpoints that what happened in April 2002 was indeed a coup d'état and that calling it otherwise is suspiciously insufficient.

The April feat is a three-act play that is already embedded in the Venezuelan popular imaginary, memory and consciousness. Its plot goes as follows: a) The manipulation of the masses and the planned slaughter (April 11); b) the oligarchic usurpation and dismantling of the State (April 12); c) the popular countercoup and the President's return (April 13).

Following a demanding compilation, concatenation and analysis, Ernesto Villegas Poljak brings to light the details and situations, mechanisms and purposes related to that attempted perfect crime which was planned to succeed, and whose main mistake -typical of the right-wing everywhere- was to underestimate the will and the response capacity of the Venezuelan people. The emphasis of this research has been focused on the two first moments of the whole process, and Villegas Poljak has pledged to continue the saga eventually, with a second book titled *Inside the Countercoup* on the fast civic-military reaction during the coup. It is going to be worth waiting to see it.

Thanks to this book, the Venezuelan people will have at sight,

for the cultural heritage of its own heroic memory, an accurate, systematic and faithful reminder about the planning and carrying out of the April coup, the phases of the whole process, its developments, actors, conditions and circumstances that allowed its immediate reversion by the will and action of the people against whom it was perpetrated.

J.A. Calzadilla Arreaza
March, 2012

WESTERN COUPS AGAINST POPULACE DEMOCRACIES

(Introduction to the first edition)

Editorial Galac takes pride to publish this book written by our friend Ernesto Villegas, thus contributing to shed light over the true developments of those three days that changed the history of Venezuela – April, 11, 12 and 13, 2002.

This book is destined to substantially nourish the historic memory, one of the great needs of our country. Some decades ahead, when our grandchildren or great-grandchildren ask us what happened during those three days, these pages will provide them with abundant answers.

They are written in a simple and direct manner, generously supported by quotes, documents and testimonies, as well as the experience of Ernesto himself, who first covered those events as a reporter and then conducted a careful research condensed in this work.

The honest people in the opposition ranks —there are many— will be as captivated as the supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution with this reading. And, I'm certain, the former will be as surprised as the latter before the abundance of data that have been blurred, manipulated or simply concealed so far.

Anyone who, upon reading this book, still says that on April 11, 2002 there was no coup d'état in Venezuela but a “power vacuum”

can only be regarded as self-deceiving or as someone with such a petrified and biased perception that, even before the real facts, is unable to change that false perception. Or he or she maybe fits the kind of people described in *The Twilight of the American Culture*, the Morris Berman's book that, in my opinion, should be better titled as *The Twilight of the United States Culture*: people that, as experts as they are, know almost nothing outside their specialty field.

In view of the large body of evidence gathered in these pages, only those who despise democracy will remain stubbornly rejecting the truth.

The word “democracy” stems from the Greek words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (rule). It was born in the Greek city-states as a proposal of direct democracy, where all citizens had a say and voted on all the laws, particularly in Athens, during the 5th century BC. That is, the word “democracy” means “government of the people” and political regimes that use the term should be characterized by the citizens' participation in the organization and exercise of Government.

Pericles (492-429 BC) said that the *raison d'être* of the city — the “polis” — was to guarantee freedom, justice and the complete development of the individual personality. The law was one and for all in the polis, where the citizens participated in public discussions, as well as in the city management.

But to his date, that is, over two thousand years later, democracy has really never existed and, I'm afraid that it has always been a charade. In fact, already at Pericles' Athens, that participation was effective only for a small part of the population (around 10%). This participation was exclusively reserved for "free" citizens, the same kind of people we call today "oligarchs", while the rest of the population had to produce, clean, keep the city in good conditions so that the "citizens" would be able to speak in the public space.

For many centuries, the term almost disappeared from daily life and re-emerged with the French and American revolutions at the turn of the 18th century, but this time not with the meaning of direct democracy but representative democracy, a regime where a group of citizens elect the officials to represent them in the various fields of the State, with variations from country to country as to the areas subject to election. For instance, there are countries where the president is elected by the citizens (Venezuela), whereas in other countries, the president is elected by the members of the parliament and other special electors (Italy).

But, as in Athens' democracy, the participation of people in modern democracies has always been restricted to a minority, even though the law establishes that it is for all and, as a matter of fact, common people were never included as "representatives". Yesterday, the oligarchs were the masters of the country just because today, they remain in the same position because they were elected.

In Venezuela, until very recently, lots of poor people were not registered to vote and they did not have identity cards. That is, the “populace”, taking the expression of a Catholic priest, did not participate in the electoral process.

And, as the new is born from the old, the mental models of the newly born representative democracy were just pale substitutions of the monarchy’s: the King was replaced by the President; the nobility by the Congress, and so on and so forth, up to the substitution of venture captains by traffic officers, but leaving public governance intact.

Most of the times, when we consider the history of Latin American countries, we find white presidents, European descendants. How many cases and in how many countries we find indigenous, black or *mestizo* congressmen or presidents?

This is the first time in the history of the world that some countries are trying to live a real democracy. In Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, etc. Let’s go back ten years ago in Bolivia and try to imagine a Constitutional Assembly made up of indigenous people, or an indigenous president. The simple idea is hilarious, as it was the thought of a dark brown-skinned president in Venezuela, 15 years ago. Fifteen years ago, when I published my book *Reinventar a Venezuela* (Reinventing Venezuela), I said that this is a so racist country that black people don’t even dare to complain!

And when we consider the march of April 11, 2002, that march which was intended to oust a democratically elected president, we

find that 95% of the marchers were white, European, children of Europeans, grandchildren of Europeans who, from their western arrogance were unable to think that the colonial times are over. In contrast, those waiting for Chávez's return in Miraflores, on April 13, were 95% *mestizos*. I, as someone who was born in Rome but in love with Venezuela and adopted by this country 30 years ago, belonged to the remaining 5%.

If we look to Bolivia, we will discover that the secessionist leader was a first-generation Bolivian, the son of a Yugoslavian! Paradoxically, Ernesto, who also is a direct descendant from a Croatian-Yugoslavian mother, instead supports the liberation of peoples under the western oppression. It is not by chance that the *gorillas* recently deposed a president elected by the Honduran people, Manuel Zelaya, just because the former President was aligned with the Alba (Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America) and Hugo Chávez. They replaced Zelaya with an Italy-born Honduran, much to my embarrassment, and whose family name is Micheletti.

Among Western-minded people, in Venezuela, Bolivia and Honduras, just to mention three examples, prevails the idea that everything has to be done to get rid, whatever, of those "populace" democracies. For them, democracy is meaningful if it occurs among them only.

They brag about democracy, but they mock at it. That's exactly what they did in Venezuela in April 2002, when they orchestrated

and carried out a coup against “the populace”. They didn’t realize that the conscience of “the populace” had grown and that it would take to the street to restore that same democracy they were mocking at.

After reading the last page of this book, many will believe, as I do, that it was too much of a kind gesture the amnesty decreed by President Chávez in December 2007 to favor those who played leading roles in the April 2002 coup. Let’s hope this executive order could be revoked and I invite the experts to study the ways to do so. In the meantime, the readership will find attached the full list of those who signed the so-called Carmona Decree which dissolved the Branches of Government on April 12th, 2002. Their names will remain printed there for history.

Giulio Santosuosso
Editorial Galac Chairman
November, 2009

THE JOURNALIST'S JOB

To write about the developments of April 11th, 2002 involves risks and demands thoughtful dedication. This is a topic of which we have heard so much, in daily nutshells or in in-depth reports that the author has to endeavor to deliver a useful result. That is exactly what Ernesto Villegas has accomplished, both in the compilation and in the organization of data so as to present them in this book.

I met Ernesto Villegas back in the 90s, when he was a young journalist covering the political source for the Venezuelan newspaper *El Nuevo País*.

During the exchange in the usually long waiting hours when we covered a source he gave me a good impression for his political knowledge and his journalistic skills, typical in his brothers Mario and Vladimir as well. That's why I did not hesitate to recommend him when the editor of the *El Universal* newspaper asked me to propose a candidate to join the Politics section.

He managed to impress the chiefs with his talent and unbiased reports. Despite they were aware of Villegas' left-wing stance, the editors eventually trusted him to the extent that he was assigned to cover the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference, and also a disparate job such as interviewing ELN guerrilla fighters or alleged supporters of ETA in Venezuela under Carlos Andrés Pérez's administration. Chiefs are fond of journalists whose performance makes them feel

calm and confident; they like to work with reporters who can get them off the hook. And that is exactly what they found in young Ernesto.

His work in *El Universal* catapulted his career.

His competitive work brought him to public notice among the personalities involved in the national public debate, where Ernesto stood out for getting scoops, for his political analysis and his skills to contextualize the news.

Later on, with the advent of a time marked by fast political changes, the events of April 11th found Ernesto faced with two contrasting positions. He writes:

I had the privilege of living and reporting those events as a journalist. I knew and interacted with some of the leading characters on both sides of the political spectrum. At that time, I worked simultaneously as the host of En Confianza TV program for Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) and as a political reporter for El Universal. Among my close friends, I used to call them “the revolution channel and the oligarchy newspaper”, respectively. Once the waters were cut off, I quit my job at the newspaper a couple of weeks after de coup, and stayed at the channel.

Though his embrace of Hugo Chávez’s revolution separates Ernesto and I from each other, from the onset we agreed on clearly defining those events as a coup d’état, as well as on the recognition of Chávez as Venezuela’s Constitutional President. So, his account

–which intends to be broad and attempts to convey the view of the opposition as well- needs not to persuade me.

The work has the virtue of being well documented.

Ernesto lets us know the sources where he got the information, a big deal in contrast with the journalism that is practiced today.

This book is not a barricade in the political struggle but a sober account of those events.

Carlos Subero
Journalist
November, 2009

A NECESSARY WARNING

From Chapter III on, the reader will find a number of excerpts added between the paragraphs and highlighted as follows:

“This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test. This is a test”.

These quotes correspond to the testimony given by Rafael Arreaza before the office of the deceased Prosecutor Danilo Anderson, on September 27th, 2004.

They were taken from the record that was drawn up that date.

The wording has been slightly edited in order to facilitate the reading and understanding. Completing names, specifying positions or capacities and re-arranging them chronologically is the sort of edition applied.

A copy of the witness' statement has been included attached hereto so as to allow the reader to judge the accuracy of the excerpts from the original document.

Arreaza's testimony is quoted until Chapter VI. Later, in Chapter X, which deals with Danilo Anderson's assassination, we quote the questions posed to the witness by the Prosecutor and the corresponding answers.

INTRODUCTION

Many books have been written about the April 11th, 2002 coup d'état in Venezuela, so it's far from my intention to add just "another one" to the shelves.

Pure chance, however, led me to put together this historic report when a document, that looked newsworthy at a first glance, fell upon my hands. Such document renewed my interest on the topic and finally gave life to the following pages.

The finding pushed me into a pool of old newspapers, reports, copies, videos, transcripts and books that, following a habit inherited from my father, I had been building up for years. Finally, this material was going to be useful and have a purpose.

The document triggering this narrative adventure contains the testimony of Rafael Arreaza –“minister” of Public Health during the *de facto* government installed in Venezuela in April, 2002. The statement was voluntarily given by Arreaza to Danilo Anderson, a Prosecutor inquiring the April coup, two months before Anderson's brutal assassination on November 18, 2004. There is a blood bond between Pedro Carmona Estanga, the “president” of the spurious Democratic Transition and National Unity Government and the aforementioned witness: They both are second cousins.

Based on Arreaza's statement, Anderson had proceeded to serve summons to several owners and directors of Venezuelan TV stations and newspapers. He intended to confirm whether they

had participated or not at a meeting in Miraflores on Saturday April 13th, 2002, where –as per Arreaza’s testimony- it was agreed to implement the infamous “blackout” policy which marked those decisive hours. Simultaneously, Anderson was conducting the accusation for the commonly known crime of civil rebellion against the 400 signatories of the decree that dissolved the Branches of Government on April 12th, 2002.

Let me put it clear: This is not a book about Anderson, but about one of the cases he was investigating, the one that perhaps led him to the grave: The April coup.

It’s a book that pays especial attention to the events that unfolded “inside the coup”, that is, it’s focused on those who organized, led, encouraged, supported and accompanied the coup.

Besides the quoted testimony, the reader will also find witnesses’ statements by other leading actors of the plot, whose accounts have been organized in terms of time and space, highlighting coincidences and contradictions.

Inevitably, this report also scrutinizes the development of the events on the other side, i.e. the targets of the coup, where I also found revelations and answers that had remained concealed in whole or in part behind a sort of historical mist; until now.

Many will feel that they did, observed or lived things which are not rendered here, particularly aspects related to the organization and mobilization of the masses on April 12th and 13th. These are aspects impossible to be covered in one chapter and deliberately

reserved for a future and broader edition or, perhaps, a new book that could be titled *April, inside the counter coup*. Complaints about shares of prominence will also emerge among the reactions to this book and for good reasons. The coup only lasted 47 hours, but all the facts that occurred during that period of time could indeed make up by themselves an encyclopedia. To come to know the real duration of that April, it would be necessary to multiply 47 by the number of people who participated, observed or heard something crucial at those moments. These pages are perfectible, as much as any other human work. They are open to future expansion or to further accurate specifications by the witnesses and the main actors who may feel that their related experiences are not properly rendered here.

Organized by topics, these are some of the questions that the reader will be able to clarify with the help of this book:

- The background of the coup: What facts happened and what chronological order they followed in Miraflores Presidential Palace and *Fuerte Tiuna* military garrison (headquarters of the Ministry of Defense), on April 11th, 2002? Who proposed and chose Pedro Carmona Estanga as the “president”? Was Carmona called to be the “president” before or after Lucas Rincón’s announcement? What role did late Cardinal Ignacio Velasco play in Carmona’s appointment? Which was his role in the civil and military meetings before the coup? Why and how the idea of a Government *Junta*

was discarded? For how long had the military been plotting? Where was Charles Shapiro, the U.S. Ambassador to Caracas, and with whom did he meet during the days and hours prior to the coup? What happened during the meeting held on Wednesday April 10th, one day before the coup, at Jorge Olavarria's office, where the decree that would be issued 24 hours later was studied?

- The decisions inside the de facto government: Who drafted the April 12th, 2002 decree and on what grounds? How did they make the decision of dissolving the Branches of Government, especially the National Assembly? What was the topic discussed and agreed upon among Carmona and the chiefs of the main media during the meeting held on Saturday, April 13th in Miraflores? How did the negotiations with Hugo Chávez develop to force him to sign his resignation?

- Actions of the ousted government: Why did General Lucas Rincón make the crucial announcement of Hugo Chávez's resignation, "which he accepted"? Did Hugo Chávez accept to resign? Under which conditions? Which options did Hugo Chávez consider during his captivity? What is the so-called *Ávila Plan*? How was this plan commanded and carried out amidst the April 11th crisis?

- Cuba's role: What are the similarities and differences observed by Fidel Castro between Hugo Chávez and Salvador

Allende? Which were the topics discussed by Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro when they talked by phone the midnight of April 11th? What arguments did Fidel use to talk Chávez over to preserve his own life? What was the plan to send two Cuban planes to pick Chávez up?

- The April 11th casualties: How was it found and which was the content of the video where journalist Otto Neustaldt, former *CNN* correspondent in Caracas, reveals that he recorded the military pronouncement with an officer talking about human casualties and snipers “before the first casualty”? Who were the supposed snipers detained the night of April 11th at the *Ausonia Hotel*, nearby Miraflores Palace? What happened to them? Why did the court release them? Why was a National Guard (NG) colonel charged with three crimes originally attributed to those alleged snipers? What military chiefs commanded the transfer of Army and Navy snipers to Caracas before the April coup?

This book leaves some questions open that wait for a broader and deeper investigation, beyond my limited possibilities, for example, the participation of snipers. I hope the data provided herein may help others dig and find the truth. I have restricted myself to present the facts in the hope that the reader may elaborate and construct a documented perception. However, I cannot arrive at a final conclusion, a pending task for the administration of justice.

I had the privilege of living and reporting those events as a journalist. I knew and interacted with some of the leading characters on both sides of the political spectrum. At that time, I worked simultaneously as the host of *En Confianza* TV program for Venezolana de Televisión (VTV) and as a political reporter for *El Universal*. Among my close friends, I used to call them “the revolution channel and the oligarchy newspaper”, respectively. Once the waters were cut off, I quit my job at the newspaper a couple of weeks after de coup, and stayed at the channel.

I kept tracking down the topic as a part of my collaborations as interviewer for the daily newspaper *Últimas Noticias* and as a columnist for *Quinto Día*, a Venezuelan weekly publication.

The stuff built up as a result of these jobs and experiences served as input to assemble this story.

Anyone elaborating on the story will find two first-person narrators: The witness Rafael Arreaza and the author.

The witness appears and disappears from time to time all along the first three parts of the book, like in a film narrated by two different voices. His words are gathered in the excerpts taken from his testimony before Anderson and have been laid out with a graphic design treatment that easily distinguishes them from the core story. Such excerpts have been slightly edited to improve understandability or specify names, positions or capacities, but the content remains intact. They have been arranged according to the chronological order of the developments, because the testimony,

as it is the case of anyone giving his or her account of those intense hours, not always follows a strict chronological criterion. In any case, a facsimile of the original document is available as an attachment which can be read in full.

Arreaza's testimony ends in Part IV of the book, when he answers before the Prosecutor's office the questions posed by Anderson in connection with the Saturday meeting.

Part IV returns to the facts of Thursday 11 in order to deal separately with the following:

Otto Neustaldt case

The snipers mystery

The amnesty granted by president Chávez on December 31, 2007, to the benefit of a large number of figures participating in the coup.

In the epilogue I deal with an unanticipated and sudden fact that occurred when I was about to send the original version of the first edition to the publisher: the decision handed down against a group of former directors and former agents of the Metropolitan Police (MP) involved in the casualties and injuries of April 11th. Two of them, Henry Vivas and Lázaro Forero, were set free in 2011 under humanitarian measures based on health reasons.

Certain details have been added to the second edition, as well as a deeper look into episodes such as the siege of the Cuban Embassy in Caracas. Excerpts of the conversation under duress between Germán Sánchez Otero, Cuban Ambassador, and Henrique

Capriles Radonski, the opposition candidate for the 2012 election are included. This edition also provides the account of a man who was hunted during those clandestine hours by Capriles Radonski: The then Vice President Diosdado Cabello.

I'm aware that I could be attacked because I'm reproducing here a document that is formally deemed "classified." Since it is a matter of public, rather than private interest, I uphold that, beyond any veil of secrecy, the citizen's right to accurate, timely and free information should prevail, as set forth in the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

This has been my firm position when other journalists, with a political stance other than mine, have confronted legal problems for having published witnesses' statements related to, by the way, the Anderson case¹.

Perhaps, as in that case, suspicions of forgery could also arise. Nevertheless, two elements proved to me the genuine nature of that witness' statement. The first one is an interview with Danilo Anderson that I conducted myself shortly before his assassination, where he quoted parts of Arreaza's testimony, but without mentioning his name. Excerpts of that interview are also included here. And second, the quotes of that document included in a book by Allan Brewer-Carías, where he challenges the witness' affirmation that Brewer-Carías was the one who convinced Pedro

1 Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *Periodismo, secreto y corrupción*, (Journalism, secrecy and corruption). *Quinto Día*, Caracas. Edición 429, 4-11 de febrero, 2005.

Carmona to dissolve the National Assembly. Only facts included in the inquiry have been refuted².

Much of the actions described here constituted crimes. Some of them were subject of an amnesty, so they were forgotten (*amnes*: oblivion) by the State, which deems them as if they had never occurred.

Some cases remain open.

It is not my intention to get involved in them. I wish to leave for the records of history rather than for the courts facts that so far have remained scattered, ignored in whole or in part about this chapter written with the blood of the Venezuelan people.

If somebody asked me to specify the journalistic genre of this book, I would say, as I already had, that it's a historical report.

Technically, it is not an interpretative report, for it fails to meet the methodological requirements of such genre. Much less it is an opinion article.

But, it would be untruthful to say that the narration of historical facts can be separated from the "interpretation" or the author's opinion about the facts narrated.

This book comes to light in a very particular moment for Venezuela, Latin America and the world. Global capitalism goes through its worst crisis, even worse than the 1929 crack, according not only to Marxists but also to its own advocates and analysts.

2 Brewer-Carías, Allan R.: *En mi propia defensa* (In my Own Defense). Editorial Jurídica Venezolana, Colección Opiniones y Alegatos Jurídicos, No. 13, Caracas, 2006.

The virus of change —an evidence of the system failure to meet its basic promises— has infected the United States itself, with its real powers fighting to preserve their political, economic and military control. In short, the mere system they represent and protect. As in April 2002, Venezuela continues to be one of the centers where the continental and probably global developments are being defined, depending on the success or failure of a political project launched by Hugo Chávez when many believed that nobody else would advocate socialism.

For those willing to study the history of these years in the future, it will be impossible to separate the outcome, whatever it is, from the events endured by Venezuela in April 2002.

Those future researchers will find, on the one hand, abundant information and, on the other hand, an evident bias.

Without concealing the perspective from which the facts are viewed, an effort has been undertaken to moderate our own subjectivities. It is up to the reader to judge whether the result is consistent with such effort.

By 2009, some of the leading characters of the span of time narrated here have deserted their political ranks of 2002. Indeed, the Bolivarian Revolution itself also changed: it was only after the April coup when it proclaimed its anti-imperialist nature and, later on, its explicitly socialist path. Inevitably, these new definitions will have an impact on subsequent political alignments.

Some will prefer to sacrifice accuracy to erase certain names

from these pages, to improve or damage the public image of such names, to nuance episodes, in short, to re-write history. Perhaps, this would be useful for propaganda purposes but not to understand a unique moment, with all its complexities.

In this connection, it would be wise, for them and for all, to keep in mind the words of our teacher Simón Rodríguez:

The natural course of things is a torrent

dragging down everything in its way

and knocking over any resistance.

This is the strength that makes revolutions:

Men who appear on them

are the instruments of necessity.

They are actors, not authors.

Let's open history: And for what is not written yet,

Let's let each one read in his own memory³.

Ernesto Villegas Poljak
Caracas, March 20012

³ In Calzadilla Arreaza, Juan Antonio: *El libro de Robinson. Un camino hacia la lectura de Simón Rodríguez*. (Robinson's Book. A way to the Reading of Simón Rodríguez). Coedición Siembraviva Ediciones y Ministerio de la Cultura, Caracas, 2005.

Part I

Background

CHAPTER I: A TRIED AND TESTED RESOURCE

A tool “made in USA”

According to an old Latin American joke, there has never been a coup d'état in the United States because there is no U.S. Embassy to Washington.

The French writer Thierry Meyssan thinks that the joke it's no longer in force.

Meyssan is the author of the world's best-seller *9/11: The Big Lie*, where he challenges the official explanation about the September 11th, 2001 attacks.

I interviewed Meyssan in Caracas in late 2008 shortly after Barack Obama's election. The writer upheld that the U.S. military establishment had staged a coup, quietly and without firing a shot, to impose Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense during the final years of George Bush's administration. They had chosen Gates to be their “strong man” behind the civil power in Washington, in the finest Latin American style.⁴

Shortly after the interview, I read that Obama had ratified Gates and then I took Meyssan's thesis more earnestly.

True or false, there is a long history of coups sponsored, funded, encouraged or tolerated by the United States in order to count on

⁴ Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *Robert Gates, el poder detrás del trono* (Robert Gates, the power behind the throne). Semanario *Quinto Día*, del 24 al 31 de enero, 2009.

“friendly” governments, particularly in Latin America. There is plenty of evidence of this, such as countless declassified documents available, for example, at the National Security Archive, George Washington University.⁵

The coup is part of a toolbox with an array of modes of interventions. Open interventions, like invasions. Or covered interventions, such as funding candidates and political organizations.

If the “threat” to the U.S. interests takes the form of a left-wing, progressive or too much nationalist government — even more if it claims to be socialist—, the coup alarms are triggered.

It was automatic in the times of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Both superpowers struggled to expand or preserve their “spheres of influence”.

Chile, the coup and the gringos

In his book *Chile, el golpe y los gringos*, Gabriel García Márquez tells how the plot to oust Salvador Allende, in Chile (1973), began in Washington in 1969, when his victory in the September elections that year was but a mere possibility.

Three gringo generals met there with several Chilean generals, whom they asked what they would do if Allende was elected. One of them spoke for all:

5 <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>

We will take *La Moneda* Palace in half an hour, even if we have to burn it⁶.

This was the first of many contacts of the Pentagon with officers from the four branches of the Chilean Armed Forces. With them, García Márquez tells, “a final arrangement was made whereby the most adept Chilean military to the spirit and interests of the United States would take power, in case *Unidad Popular* (Allende’s political party) won the elections”.

The project was assigned to the Office of Naval Intelligence, “which centralized and processed the data provided by other agencies, including the CIA, under the top political direction of the National Security Council”.

According to García Márquez, it was normal that the mission were entrusted to the Navy instead of the Army “because the coup in Chile had to coincide with UNITAS Operation, the joint maneuvers of U.S. and Chilean units in the Pacific”.

These maneuvers were carried out in September, the same month of the presidential election, and it was natural to have all class of warfare equipment in the Chilean soil and sky, and men trained in the arts and science of death as well as.

Allende remained in power for three years only. The military, under the command of a general called Augusto Pinochet, who was appointed by Allende himself to head the Army, overthrew

⁶ García Márquez, Gabriel: *Chile, el golpe y los gringos* (Chile, the coup and the gringos). Cuadernos Alternativa, Editorial Latina. Segunda Edición, Bogotá, 1974.

him on September 11th, 1973, putting an end to the first trial of a peaceful and electoral transition to a socialist government.

About Allende, García Márquez wrote:

His major virtue was consistency, but fate held in store for him the unique and tragic greatness of dying defending by the gun the anachronistic monstrosity of the bourgeois Law; defending a Supreme Court of Justice which, having repudiated him, would later legitimize his assassins; defending a mean-spirited Congress that declared him an illegitimate President and pleurably succumbed to the usurpers' will; defending the freedom of the opposition parties which had sold their souls to fascism; defending all the moth-eaten paraphernalia of a shitty system that he was determined to annihilate without shooting a bullet.

Fidel, Chávez and Allende

I was a kid when Allende was ousted. And I grew up at a home thrilled by the news about Pinochet's horrors.

In October 2000, I was assigned by the newspaper *El Universal* to cover a joint press conference in Caracas of Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro, presidents of Venezuela and Cuba, respectively.

I asked the Cuban leader to elaborate on the similarities and differences he observed between Allende and Chávez.

By then, Chávez had not yet proclaimed himself a socialist, but just a Bolivarian, a revolutionary and a Christian.

Fidel Castro said they were "two different worlds":

Allende was a great and honest political leader, a true leftist,

in theory and praxis, born out of the left-wing ranks who counted on the support of the people and the opposition of the U.S. But it is an unusual phenomenon, unlike Allende, the leader of this revolution (Chávez) was not born out of the left-wing ranks but, instead, he emerged from the Venezuelan army ranks, out of his own meditations of what he observed in his country.⁷

A morning with the President

It's Monday, very early in the morning. The sun is about to rise. The roosters already crowed their first cock-a-doodle-doo and birds are starting to sing. They do so after a weird night, when a cacophonous concert of pots, pans and metallic lids startled them and the whole city, as it used to happen during the years of Carlos Andrés Pérez's administration.

It was the first of countless occasions that a presidential national broadcast by radio and television stations was received with a simultaneous and noisy pot banging, which resounded in Caracas eastern neighborhoods and other not so well-off places. The middle class, and certain popular sectors that feel they also belong to such middle class, are no longer willing to listen to the President. They protest banging their pots and pans.

The reason? The 49 decrees passed in the framework of

⁷ Joint press conference offered by presidents Hugo Chávez and Fidel Castro in the occasion of the opening of the Simón Bolívar International Press Center, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Caracas, Venezuela, 10-30- 2000.

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an Enabling Law which expired on November 12th, 2001, at midnight. They were the first legal instruments developing the general guidelines of the Constitution that had been passed by the 1999 referendum.

Among friends, an anti-Chávez journalist said:

The Constitution is pure philosophy, but the laws are a step forward in real terms.

An intensive media campaign has convinced that part of the country that these laws threaten their life styles, values and aspirations, as they open the door to “communism”.

Hugo Chávez arrived early to the studios of *Venezolana de Television* (VTV TV Station).

With special deference, he greeted Jesús Romero Anselmi, an experienced journalist and a five-time winner of the *National Press Award*, whom he shortly afterwards would appoint president of VTV.

Romero Anselmi used to host a short program where he analyzed the press headlines, immediately before *En Confianza*, an opinion program that I began to host four months earlier, in parallel with my job as a journalist for *El Universal* newspaper.

Barely one month later, the national business federation and the Confederation of Venezuelan Unions (known by its Spanish acronym CTV) —the visible heads of the opposition— would call a 24-hour “national civic strike” for December 10th, 2001 in order

to protest against the decrees under the Enabling Law.

Rehearsed in December, the play would be staged once again on the eve of the April coup.

A coup d'état was a scenario Chávez was reluctant to admit, at least in public. It was November 13th, 2001.

Pot banging, a form of dialogue

Pots were banged yesterday, during your televised address to the nation.

This is also a form of dialogue. With few exceptions, the pans are being banged at the usual places. In the working-class sectors, where our humble and conscious people live? No. Absolutely not.

Is this *cacerolazo* (local name for pot-banging) similar to that against CAP?

Come on, please! That was the protest of a whole country: the upper class, the middle class and the popular sectors. That 30% of the population who voted against me have the right to continue expressing themselves and it's our duty to listen to them. I heard that and asked for reports. I'm bound to inquire why that lady bangs her pots and to find out whether it is because of a chemical reaction or due to a real and logical reason.

By then, his enemies considered that he was against the ropes, without popular and military support, which he deemed a very dangerous perception.

The Military High Command had just issued a statement

rejecting the rumors of a coup.

When I warned him that the word “revolution” was absent from that statement, Chávez dismissed the fact.

The most important thing is not the name, but to make the revolution: A change of the social, economic and political structures.

***Globovisión* trespasses the red line of the garrisons**

Late in 2002, Chávez was already used to metaphorically exchange “full lead” with the media, a local expression sarcastically used by Chávez to describe sharp and sustained public criticisms by the media against him and by him against the media.

But when the media started to use active-duty military officers for their verbal sparring, they trespassed a line that Chávez didn’t want to see desecrated.

Globovisión was the first media to do so.

In proportion to the size of country, the scope of this TV station is as small as its headquarters: An old house located in La Florida neighborhood. The channel only has open signal in the capital cities of Caracas and Valencia, but it reaches to the rest of the country by cable or satellite services. But Chávez’s frequent and public criticisms against *Globovisión* ended by legitimizing the station as his main adversary. The channel replaced the old political parties with an exaggerated influence on the Venezuelan public agenda. Many regional TV and radio stations, mostly

owned by businessmen contrary to the government, re-run the news, shows and advances from this TV channel, thus multiplying its opinion-building capacity.

Globovisión broadcasted the first pronouncement by an active-duty military officer rebelling against Chávez. Captain Luis García Morales, a National Guard (NG) officer, announced the creation of the Venezuelan Patriotic *Junta* composed of active officers from the different branches of the National Armed Force (FAN) and demanded the President's resignation "because he was destroying Venezuela". The captain was detained and transferred to the Military Intelligence Division (known by its Spanish acronym DIM), where he was interrogated.⁸ Later on, he would be seen in a picture taken in Florida, U.S., training with long weapons and wearing fatigues along with groups of Cuban counter-revolutionaries.

Before the video broadcast, an executive of the channel delivered a tape to the Government and assured that this was the only copy available, which earned him an unusual acknowledgment by President Chávez.

But there was a backup tape and the channel ran the video in prime time.

When I mentioned the topic of *Globovisión*, Chávez said that the channel executives have acted in bad faith. Quoting intelligence sources, he told that García Morales had been taken in a car belonging to the TV station and was interviewed at the

8 *El Universal*, 07-27-2000.

place of a *Globovisión*'s employee. He also referred to another episode with *Globovisión* on the top of the cast of characters: The station had broadcast a piece of news according to which nine taxi drivers had been murdered on a single day by the underworld. The information, that happened to be false, provoked a massive traffic jam in Caracas, due to street demonstrations organized by the taxi drivers union.

Based on both episodes, Chávez asked the National Commission of Telecommunications in Venezuela (known by its Spanish acronym *CONATEL*) to open an investigation in order to consider an eventual revocation of *Globovisión*'s broadcast license.

I asked Chávez about this case:

President, from the bottom of your heart, are you considering to close *Globovisión*?

I still don't know. *CONATEL* is doing an objective and unbiased investigation. My decision will be based on [the recommendations given by] the Minister of Infrastructure, General Eliécer Hurtado, a respectful gentleman and devoted to civil liberties, the same as Jesse Chacón⁹ and *CONATEL*'s staff. If the investigation proves that *Globovisión* could be harboring a conspiracy, a decision would become necessary. The same would be applicable to the State-run TV station, should it be the case.

At this point, I allowed myself to make a comment to Chávez,

9 Conatel Director at that time.

not without clarifying that it was a strictly personal opinion binding nobody but me. Journalists, I said, ordinarily reject the closing of any media. I told him that together with the rest of the personnel I was a victim of that sort of decision when Editor Rafael Poleo closed the daily newspaper *El Nuevo País*, in December 1994, just to reopen it a month later with a new staff. By the time of this interview, November 2001, I still felt myself a member of a solid rock and supportive union that I anticipated would reject the loss of jobs in *Globovisión*.

I understand that position. If I were a journalist I would think the same. I don't want to close *Globovisión* either. The closing of a TV channel is not in my spirit. I would ask you in your capacity as an ethically sound journalist to also reject the manipulation of the media by the particular interests of their owners or others interest that they defend. I would do it. I don't want to close *Globovisión*. I have not a deliberate intention against anyone or any media unlike what happened earlier in Venezuela when the freedom of speech was ordinarily restricted.¹⁰

10 As you will see further on, Chávez's administration did not close *Globovisión* in 2002, neither along the following years of his tenure. On the contrary, five months after this interview, the movement that deposed Chávez on April 11th, 2002, silenced VTV, the only dissident voice to reject the coup among the pro-coup media. On that occasion, no journalistic union denounced the closing of VTV or expressed solidarity with its workers. *Globovisión* sent a reporter who showed the empty facilities and studios where "Channel 8 programs were made", including that show where I interviewed Chávez. This episode and the behavior of the organizations that gather all the Venezuelan journalists helped me to review my sense of belonging to them and to identify more clearly the corporate vision entrenched in that and other labor unions. Even so, some years later, when Chávez decided not to renew RCTV broadcast license, I wrote an article emphasizing the

He then proceeded to recite the dark record of the IV Republic governments against the freedom of the speech, as well as the vetoes and campaigns against him after he broke into the political scene.

García Ponce warns about a coup in progress

One of the phone calls to *En Confianza* TV program took the conversation with President Chávez back to the military realm. Sergeant Yuri Guevara, from the popular neighborhood of Petare, mentioned the rumors about a coup in the military garrisons and expressed to Chávez his support.

How close or far is Venezuela from a military coup?

The distance is from here to the sun. The most conclusive response was that of the National Armed Force (FAN, according to its Spanish acronym). Not only the High Command through a statement amidst the many rumors and shameless incitation by political corpses. No. There won't be a coup in Venezuela. These are very small groups composed of retired officers who have been in touch with the old political elite. They have common interests and spread rumors divorced from reality. General Lucas Rincón¹¹ told them: "Go and find something to do, if you have nothing to do. Go sweep the floors or do something useful".

need of making a clear distinction between the station's owners and its workers, and proposed solutions to preserve their jobs (*En solidaridad con los trabajadores*, published in *Quinto Día*, on June 01-08, 2007).

11 Commander-in-Chief Lucas Rincón Romero, General Inspector of the Armed Forces of Venezuela.

Later on, I showed Chávez some videos with Venezuelan personalities who wanted to ask questions to the President.

Guillermo García Ponce, an experienced journalist and chief of the Revolution Political Command, made a straightforward warning about a coup in progress:

Mr. President, there are open talks on the streets about the progress of a conspiracy plan to overthrow your government. A cattle breed association is raising funds and asking one million bolivars per member in order to finance a campaign to justify the coup. They have a list with over 6,500 people who will be hunted, detained and even executed in Pinochet-style assassinations. Even worse, there are people in your own government encouraging the conspiracy. 72% of the staff in the ministries voted against the candidates proposed by your administration. May I be permitted to remind you that the Spanish Republic was not destroyed by the German and Italian tanks imported by Franco, but by the Fifth Column, that is, the enemies inside the own republican government who opened the gates of Madrid. What kind of steps are you taking to prepare, organize and guide our people so they could protect the Bolivarian Republic and defeat the conspiracy plans?

Chávez began by expressing his respect for García Ponce and noted:

Our country can be assured that we remain alert vis-à-vis the almost public calls for a coup by those old corrupt political

elites. Active-duty military officers involved? No, Guillermo. We shouldn't overestimate the dogs' barking. As Don Quixote said: They bark, it means we are riding forward. Unlike Allende's, this is and will continue to be a peaceful revolution, yet not unarmed. This revolution counts with people going through an organization process and I know that you [García Ponce] are working on this. We are re-launching the MBR-200 (the Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement 200) and there are thousands of Bolivarian Circles, people and parties on the street, MVR (the Fifth Republic Movement party) governors and mayors, and other allied parties. Recently, I held a meeting with the PPT (a pro-Chávez party) leadership, with Aristóbulo Istúriz, Pablo Medina.¹² We have agreed on strengthening the patriotic alliance and to go to the streets to increase popular organization. In the case of the National Armed Force, this is one of my big tasks: To guarantee, as we actually do, that they backed the transformation project. There won't be a coup in Venezuela, but we will remain alert, Guillermo.

Chávez and Carmona's *tête à tête*

By chance, the following video corresponded to Pedro Carmona Estanga, chairman of Fedecámaras, who talked to Chávez in this way:

Mr. President, faced with a complex political, economic and

¹² Pablo Medina, who always had differences with Chávez, was his ally in several occasions, but Medina ended as his bitter enemy.

social situation in Venezuela, don't you think that it's time to propose a sincere rectification, looking for the national reunification and agreements on fundamental topics, for example, the rectification of the laws that were passed hastily and without consultation under the Enabling Act?

Chávez answered as follows:

Carmona Estanga has said things that are untrue. One time in Miraflores we agreed to set aside formalities between us. You [Carmona] didn't do it, but I keep on doing so. The same way you invite me to rectify, I also invite you to rectify. You are falling under the influence of others. Let's be objective. Stop defending things that cannot be defended. I told you in private and now I'm forced to respond in public. Are you going to defend the *latifundio* (feudal form of landowning), Carmona, in a country like Venezuela, with abundant fertile lands?

He listed the regions of the country where the size of big landowners' estates exceeded what is established by law, adding that instead of growing food there, they reserve high quality lands to shepherding or keep them idle.

—Many of them, Carmona, I can prove it, do not even hold deeds. South of Maracaibo Lake almost nobody has deeds. These are public lands, most of them invaded by powerful people. The Agrarian Reform Law, passed by Betancourt -and in force until today-, established a maximum of 5.000 hectares of lowest quality lands, class 6 or 7. For those lands south of the Lake, which are class

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1 and 2, Betancourt Act established the maximum of 150 hectares for private estates. They never complied with that provision. All those who had estates south of the Lake larger than 150 hectares of lands class 1 violated the law for 40 years. They have 10,000 hectares engaged in cattle raising activities, thus destroying the land instead of growing plantains, porcelain-cocoa or many other crops appropriate for lands class 1. This is about achieving justice in order to assure peace for all, including you Carmona, the cattle breeders and their families. I'm willing to keep the dialog open, Carmona, but remember that I am not bound to a particular sector but to the whole country. You have to recognize this.

The turn came for journalist Earle Herrera who introduced a humor note to the interview:

President, to a certain extent my question is metaphysical. There are sectors preparing the funeral of your Government. They are buying candles, coffins, hearses and some are even appointing ministers themselves. Is there any reason for all this funerary fuss? How does it feel when people are intending to bury you with so much anticipation?

Chávez broke in laughter:

Ha, ha, ha. It is the dead who are buying candles and making coffins. I'm very confident and I feel the popular affection wherever I go, as well as the support and affection of the National Armed Force in the garrisons, naval or air bases that I visit. As Jesus said: "Let the dead bury their own dead". Maybe those coffins and

candles are for themselves, not for me or for us.

The last videotaped question came from former left-wing leader Teodoro Petkoff, founder of the Venezuelan political party *Movement towards Socialism* (known by its Spanish acronym MAS), who by then had already founded the anti-Chávez evening newspaper *Tal Cual*. Petkoff made wait our producer a long time, before recording his brief question:

When are you coming to *Tal Cual*?

Sparing his words and with a half-smile, Chávez dismissed him with a single phrase:

Visiting *Tal Cual* is not included in my agenda.

The arrogance of *El Universal*

Once the “on air” sign turned-off, I stayed with Chávez at the studio for some minutes. The President consented to give me another interview, this time for *El Universal*, a media that in spite of its tense relationship with the Government had assigned me in three previous occasions to interview Chávez. In one of those interviews I was accompanied by Andrés Mata Osorio, editor and owner of *El Universal*. The President asked an official of the Presidential Guard, also called the Military House, for his agenda to check availability.

The 28th. It's OK for you?

Perfect.

Some days later, one of the newspaper's chiefs told me that

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El Universal was no longer interested in an interview with the President. Annoyed, I left a phone message to Teresita Maniglia, Deputy Minister of Communications and Information, cancelling the appointment.

This was probably the first time that a newspaper rejected an interview scheduled with a Head of State.

The conflict has escalated to a point of no return.

CHAPTER II: FINAL COUNTDOWN

Pro-Chávez Generals under Scrutiny

In early April 2002, General Jorge García Carneiro was the chief of the 3rd Infantry Division —comprising *Fuerte Tiuna's* troops and tanks— and he commanded the Ávila Joint Task Force. The latter gathered units of the Army, the Navy, Air Force and National Guard, which were in charge of the execution of the *Ávila Plan*. This task-force also included the *Cazadores* Battalion, now called *Caribes*, stationed in Maturín, Monagas state, which can be mobilized to Caracas when needed.

The objective of the Ávila Plan is to control the critical points of the city in case of serious disturbances of public order.

When García Carneiro was briefed that way, he thought it was weird, considering the agitation prevailing in Caracas streets at those moments: He had to take his leave with his staff officers from *Fuerte Tiuna* to *El Vigía*, in state of Mérida, and stay there from 5 through 18 April, 2002. What for? The purpose was to carry out some military exercises for a hypothetical war with Colombia, which exercise under such circumstances seemed weird to him, to say the least. The troops would remain in Caracas.

García Carneiro addressed to the General Commander, Efraín Vásquez Velasco, and explained his disagreement with that order “in view of the developments in the capital city”.

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Two days later, he received a radiogram:

This is to ratify that you must move your control post for the scheduled exercise.

However, García Carneiro managed to stay in Caracas.

General Raúl Isaías Baduel, commander of the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade, stationed in Maracay, also points at Vásquez Velazco as the officer who tried to neutralize him.

According to Baduel, since April 5th he was aware that Vásquez Velazco intended to dismiss him.

On Monday, April 8th, Vásquez Velazco showed up in the brigade.

The visit, according to Baduel, was part of a plan to substitute him:

A rumor had been spread since long that I was involved in a conspiracy.¹³

In fact, according to some columnists Baduel was about to make a pronouncement against Chávez.

In February 2002, President Chávez was allegedly concerned about press reports informing that Baduel had invited commanders Francisco Arias Cárdenas and Jesús Urdaneta to visit his brigade. Both officers, who accompanied Chávez during his uprising on February 4th, 1992, had turned into fierce enemies of the Venezuelan president.

13 VTV, *En Confianza* TV program, 12-04-2006.

Vásquez Velazco would attribute to General Lucas Rincón to order him to go to Maracay and deal with the case of a major who “seemingly was somehow discontented with the government”.¹⁴

Vásquez Velazco claims to have given Baduel a vote of confidence.

In turn, Baduel argues that he frustrated his dismissal by staying in Maracay, instead of going to Caracas on April 8th, as it was scheduled.

He was going to seize that opportunity to keep me in Caracas and appoint a new Commander for the brigade, a general supportive of their plans.

To say the least, the CIA was aware

Saturday April 6th, 2001, the CIA station in Caracas sent a cable to Washington titled: *Venezuela: Conditions Ripening for Coup Attempt*.

This document was disclosed by the Venezuelan-American lawyer Eva Golinger, who asked the U.S. State Department to declassify the cable.

Dissident military factions, including some disgruntled senior officers and a group of radical junior officers, are stepping up efforts to organize a coup against President Chávez, possibly as early as this month, [CROSSED OUT]. The level of detail in the reported plans – [CROSSED OUT] targets Chávez and 10 other senior officers for arrest”.¹⁵

14 Interpellation before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly, which investigated the facts of April. 05-17- 2002.

15 <http://venezuelafoia/espanol.html>

The portions marked as CROSSED OUT are parts of the text that the CIA reserved for itself, probably to protect its sources.

Five days before the events, the aforementioned document closed with a picture of April 11th, 2002 facts:

To provoke military action, the plotters may try to exploit unrest stemming from opposition demonstrations slated for later this month.

In her book *The Chávez Code*, Eva Golinger comments:

The “level o detail in the reported plans” implies that the CIA had the “reported plans” in their possession on April 6th, five days before the coup actually took place, which could only mean that they were in close contact with the plotters.¹⁶

Greetings to the “white mafia”

Monday, April 8th. Place: Meliá Caracas Hotel. Activity: Farewell reception for China’s military attaché in Venezuela. Guests: All his counterparts in Caracas and officers of the host country.

Among drinks and snacks, the guests whisper about the situation in and outside Venezuela’s military garrisons.

A man wearing the U.S. Navy uniform and insignias joins a group of officers, predominantly in white as it is proper for navy officers. His Latin name is David H. Cazares, a captain and U.S. Navy attaché. From early on he tried to rub off his smile on the group and jokingly says:

¹⁶ Golinger, Eva: *The Chavez Code. Cracking U.S Intervention in Venezuela*. Fondo Editorial Question, Caracas, March 2005.

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Greetings to the white mafia.

The olive green uniform of a General of the Army contrasted among the lily-white dressed men. The nameplate on his chest reads “González”. It is Roberto González Cárdenas, deputy director of the High Studies Institute for National Defense (Iaeden). For his baldness and surname, Cazares thinks he is Néstor González González, a general who in the forthcoming days will publicly rise against his Commander-in-Chief, Hugo Chávez.

Cazares approaches González Cárdenas and asks him:

Why haven’t you contacted our warships and the submarine anchored in *La Guaira*?

At that moment, they are interrupted by the Brazilian Navy attaché who was leaving the reception and wanted to say goodbye to the officers. After the interruption, Cazares insists:

We have three ships cruising along Venezuelan shores and a submarine anchored in La Guaira, all of them fully equipped. I don’t know why they haven’t been contacted. That has an operational cost.

When he gave his statement about this episode before the Investigation Committee appointed by the National Armed Force, González Cárdenas claimed to have answered to Cazares that he knew nothing about that, that he would ask “the chief”, thinking of General-in-Chief Lucas Rincón Romero, Inspector General of the National Armed Force.

In the Army there are two generals sharing the family names González Cárdenas: Roberto, the leading character of this episode, and his brother Andrés Eloy, who was involved in the coup in the capacity as “deputy director” of the Intelligence and Prevention Services Division, known by its Spanish acronym DISIP, during the brief interlude of Carmona.

U.S. Ambassador Shapiro’s visit

Wednesday April 10th. Place: Headquarters of Caracas Metropolitan Mayoralty, at Bolivar Square, downtown Caracas. Activity: Visit by the U.S. Ambassador, Charles Shapiro, to Metropolitan Mayor Alfredo Peña. Background: CTV and Fedecámaras (the Worker’s and the Business national federations, respectively) have called for a “national civil strike” with different demands to Chávez’s Government. The demands go from the revision of 49 decree-laws enacted under the Enabling Law to rejecting the recent appointment of PDVSA’s chairman, Gastón Parra Luzardo, an oil expert and an enemy of privatizations and denationalizations.

In fact, the strike seeks to put an end to the Government. But the strike planners use euphemisms.

Venezuelan journalist Roberto Giusti, a columnist and interviewer of *El Universal* newspaper, prefers to be frank:

The first thing is to recognize what some opposition sectors still deny with euphemisms nobody else believes in any longer. The strike that started yesterday does have a political character

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and it was organized indeed for the purpose of shifting Hugo Chávez from office. In this sense, the President and his preferred minion of the moment, Lieutenant [Diosdado] Cabello, are right. The intention is to radically change the power structures imposed and this should be recognized without shame or fear, because what is at stake is the basic dilemma that grips the most underdeveloped countries of the world, one that we thought had been left behind long ago: Dictatorship or democracy.¹⁷

Shapiro seems a cartoon character. He is almost two meters tall, skinny, thick glasses for myopia, Aquiline nose, clumsy body, a bushy mustache and incipient baldness. He has been in Caracas for just two months. Previously, he was in Washington, at the U.S. State Department, responsible for the Cuban affairs desk.

His host, Alfredo Peña, was a militant of the Communist Party when he was a young man and worked in *Tribuna Popular*, the organ of the party, he used to write things such as:

Communists, contrary to the theories distorting the class content of the workers' struggle, uphold the firm scientific conviction of the historic role that corresponds to the working class.¹⁸

Eventually, he deserted those ideas. As Moscow was in the past, Washington is now his model. Former director of the newspaper *El Nacional*, with which he still maintains a close relationship, he is also close to the Venezuelan TV station *Venevisión*, where he conducted the show *Los Peñonazos de Peña* (Peña's stones blows)

17 Giusti, Roberto: *Del paro simbólico al paro "combólico"*. *El Universal*, 10-04-2002.

18 Column *Lo de hoy*, *Tribuna Popular*, March 08, 1972.

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until the recently elected president, Hugo Chávez, named him Minister of the President's Office and later, in 1999, appointed him a candidate to the Constituent Assembly. During the 1998 election campaign, *El Nacional* supported Chávez's candidacy, which translated into the presence of Peña and the wife of the newspaper's owner, Carmen Ramia, in Chávez's Government. Ramia was his first director at the Central Office of Information (known by its Spanish acronym OCI).

Eventually, Peña, *El Nacional* and Chávez became irreconcilable enemies. A bad sign anticipating this result was that Peña, supported by Chávez as candidate for Caracas Metropolitan Mayor's Office in 2000, used as a campaign slogan the promise to "fill criminals full of lead".

Once elected Mayor, Peña hired William Bratton, former New York Police chief, and asked him to design a security policy called "Bratton Plan". The plan included, among other things, training an elite corp of Metropolitan Police (MP) agents, the *Fénix* Group, which 24 hours after the Peña-Shapiro meeting would play a very special role in the events occurred in downtown Caracas.

Its members were trained in the use of special weapons and tactical operations in a Caracas-based course given by *gringo* officers Javier M. Medrano and Mario Guarín, from the Washington D.C. police department. The training included buildings assault techniques and strategic positioning of snipers for hostages situations. Agents of Chacao and Baruta police corps

were also trained, as well as agents with the CICPC (acronym for the Scientific and Crime Investigation Police).¹⁹

Whereas Shapiro talks to Peña, the journalists in the waiting room to the Mayor's office exchange views about the tense situation in the country. From that place, they could hear the far away resound of huge speakers installed around Miraflores Presidential Palace, where Bolivarian militants have gathered for several days to express their support to Chávez.

A U.S. Embassy official approaches the journalists.

I was intrigued to hear that man talking about Chávez in past tense, as if the President's tenure had ceased:

He had the opportunity to rectify, but he didn't want to.

U.S. supports “democracy”, not Chávez

In leaving escorted by Peña, I allow myself to ask Shapiro a deliberately naïve question:

Does the United States support President Chávez's Government?

We support democracy and the constitutional framework.

Should the question have referred to any other country of the continent —except for Cuba—, the response would have included a “yes”. The omission talked by itself.

Shapiro was laconic. He observed the situation was “a bit complicated” and wished that “everything goes forward within the

¹⁹ Journalist Jenny Oropeza's report, published in the newspaper *2001*, and dated May 22, 2002.

democratic and constitutional framework, without violence and peacefully”.

He reminded that his Embassy’s first duty was with the 25,000 American citizens living in Venezuela, whom he asked “to be careful”.

—This is a situation with possibilities for a disgrace.

Is Venezuelan oil arriving normally to the United States?

As far as I know, yes.

Standing by him, Peña looked shorter than he really is. With a broad forehead, small eyes and hoarse voice, he completed the brief statement made by the American diplomat.

The United States, he underlined, don’t support Chávez’s Government but “democracy”.

We will count on the support not only from the United States but all the countries of the democratic alliance in the event of an attack or attempt against the democratic institutions.

Honoring the meaning of his Spanish name (big rock), he threw a stone:

If he doesn’t rule as a democrat, Chávez will be removed from power sooner than later.

A reception for the Ambassador

Peña and Shapiro will meet again the day after, Thursday April 11th, at the house of Gustavo Cisneros, the owner of *Venevisión*, who offered a reception lunch to the U.S. Ambassador.

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In his *Memorias de un Obispo* (Memoirs of a Bishop), Baltazar Porras, the archbishop of Mérida and by then president of the Episcopal Conference, tells that Cardinal Ignacio Velasco was invited, but he asked Porras to go on his stead to the lunch organized for Shapiro.²⁰

The date took place at 11:00 a.m.

At that time, thousands of people marched in the sun “in solidarity with PDVSA’s dismissed employees”, they claimed, from *Parque del Este* to Chuao, both in East Caracas, which was later diverted to Miraflores.²¹

The Country Club mansion was attended, besides Porras, by Jewish and evangelic leaders, as well as executives of the TV channels and politicians, such as Peña and Miquilena, who has just broken with Chávez and some hours later would appear in a press conference held in *Venevisión*, blaming the Venezuelan President for the bloody outcome of the march. Shapiro was accompanied by two or three aides.

The meeting, as Porras accounts in his memories, was arranged “in order to welcome the new American Ambassador”, who had come to Caracas two months earlier, in February, 2001. Donna Hrinnak was the new Ambassador’s predecessor.

20 Porras, Baltazar: *Memorias de un obispo*. Available at www.urru.org/11A/memorias_11A_BaltazarPorras.pdf

21 The previous Sunday, April 7, Chávez had fired seven managers and forced the retirement of 12 others who led the stoppage in PDVSA. He did it during his TV show *Aló Presidente*, sounding a whistle each time he mentioned a name and adding: “Thank you very much for your services”.

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In the main living room of the house, a huge TV screen showed the unfolding of the opposition's demonstration. Some walked, others observed.

Porras writes:

The concern mounted as the march headed downtown.²²

And there were lots of reasons to be concerned. Miraflores surroundings –new destination of that march of opposition supporters- had been occupied for several days by another multitude of Venezuelans with a different political stance, that is, in favor of President Chávez. Many more will join them, encouraged by the calls of political leaders supporting Chávez aired by VTV station. The machinery of the political parties supporting the Government would also be set in motion, as well as several grass-roots organizations, particularly the Bolivarian Circles. Those who made the decision of changing the course of the rally would say later that they didn't know other people were there. At most, they would excuse themselves saying that the confluence of two excited crowds does not need to end up in a clash.²³ In any case, whereas some of the marchers continued going downtown, unaware and uninformed, at Shapiro's reception they were instead very aware of the threats involved in the decision of diverting the march to Miraflores. The guests rushed to the table. The host offered some opening remarks.

22 Porras, Baltazar: Op. Cit.

23 VTV, *En Confianza* TV program, interview with Elías Santana, 04-25-2003.

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We were invited to participate. Virtually all of us spoke about the same, from our individual perspectives: Welcome, the unrest in the country, the need of working for peace and harmony for the Venezuelan people.

The lunch was served, but Porras almost didn't touch the food.

There was a lot of tension and it was recommended to go back home as soon as possible.

According to the Bishop, the tension and haste responded to the fact that "information was available that the Ávila Plan was being activated".

Those of us who had no idea about that Plan were told that the first step of *labyrinth operation* was underway: To give different orders to each security or protection body in order to prevent people from moving from one place to another, including the enter or exit points of the city.

A few hours later, amidst gunfire in downtown Caracas, a Metropolitan Police agent was heard in their internal communications network mentioning the code name "Zeus-32-americana". As we will see later on, the agent was trying to get information from a police chief about the operation downtown. Long time after this, it was disclosed that "Zeus-32-americana" was the code name of the honor guest of the lunch given at noon: U.S. Ambassador Charles Shapiro.²⁴

24 <http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/?act=ST&f=28&t=1742>

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The final battle will be in Miraflores

A giant opposition rally has already covered its original route, from *Parque del Este* to *Chuao* in the East of Caracas. Its leaders have decided to take the marchers to Miraflores, a few miles away, in order to put an end to Hugo Chávez's Government.

Let's go to Miraflores!

The slogan of Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in their struggle against the Argentine dictatorship was copied by the Venezuelan opposition some time ago.

Not one step back!

Somebody on the stage transforms the motto into:

Not a single day more!

They burst out in a collective orgasm.

It was well known that Bolivarian supporters were camping in the surroundings of Miraflores, willing to defend the revolution. But the people in that opposition march feel that, together, they are a human tsunami: They feel superior, fearsome, invincible, not only because of a supposed social, cultural and racial supremacy, but for pure and simple numerical majority.

The crowd has its own psychology. When it succumbs to euphoria, there are no valid arguments. With rare exceptions, even the most sober individual gives in before the telluric force of the crowd.

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El Nacional printed and circulated a special edition with a front-page headline that anticipated:



"The last battle will take place at Miraflores" Photo: Jesús Castillo

This was not a metaphor. The newspaper's executives are part of the anti-Chávez leadership. The most suspicious analysts will deduct later that such executives had to have privileged information about the detour of the march towards Miraflores. That is the only way they could have enough time to write, design, print and deliver the special edition before the arrival of the demonstrators to their unsuspected final fate. Or is it a case for the Guinness Records Book? To be honest, it was not necessary to be involved in the coup plot to be able to anticipate the warlike consequences of

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facing two opposite crowds. As Simón Bolívar said to his royalist sister María Antonieta:

War is not waged with a “could you please...”

Eleven kilometers separate one point from the other. Tiredness, time and meditation made a good number of the marchers who began to walk in Chuao deserted the rally. Only a portion of that human tsunami that flooded the east of Caracas will arrive to Miraflores.



Just like in previous demonstrations organized by the Venezuelan opposition, the US flag was hoisted in the anti-Chavez march, April 11th; a march detoured from his original destination to Miraflores. Photo: Wendys Olivo

An early preparation

Since very early in the morning it is known that the Presidential Palace is the target.

Agustín Blanco Muñoz, a Venezuelan historian identified with the opposition, says so in his book *Habla el que se fue*, where he interviews Carlos Ortega, the CTV president.

The university professor tells the union leader:

This was known before. At least in the UCV (Central University of Venezuela) we heard that from people linked to opposition activities. We knew that the general idea was to take the march to Miraflores.²⁵

According to Blanco Muñoz, the purpose was to go for broke to make good the outcry “he goes, he goes, he goes away”.

It was even known that the Government was allegedly prepared with a defense plan backed by snipers. But based on what I heard at the UCV, I thought that “some sectors” were prepared to go to Miraflores and, since the early hours of that morning, the people gathered in *Parque del Este* were already saying that the march would head for Miraflores because the time had come to put an end to this mess.

Blanco Muñoz fails to identify clearly who “those sectors” were. But he does tell some he labels as “radicals”:

Everybody knows how that film ends even before watching it. The State’s security corps will act.

25 Blanco Muñoz, Agustín: *Habla el que se fue. Mensaje de Carlos Ortega*, Fundación Cátedra Pío Tamayo, Caracas, 2006.

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This was the answer he got:

We know that there are snipers there, but we are prepared.

Blanco Muñoz points out that this was the first time he heard the word “sniper” that day.

The historian estimates that by 8:30 a.m., “It was not secret at all.” Everybody knew that:

One: The rally would try to get to Miraflores and there were “factors” who said to be prepared to meet this goal. Two: There are snipers placed there by the Government and probably other snipers placed by the opposition, as well ...

Just in case further explanation is needed, Blanco Muñoz translates his own words:

Therefore, it means that there are people in the march prepared for a confrontation, even an armed one.

The historian asked Carlos Ortega if the CTV knew about this getting a negative answer:

I wasn’t aware of that. The rally was scheduled to go from *Parque del Este* to *Chua*. I was one of the few who went straightforward to *Chua* because that was the route I had. What I didn’t know was that there were people and leaders who had previously made the decision of changing the route to Miraflores.

Ortega attributes to others having anticipated the detour of the March. Yet, he does recognize that he supported the demonstrators:

The people were shouting: Miraflores!, Miraflores! Then, I said: “If it’s necessary, let’s go to Miraflores”.

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Ortega tells that the original route from *Parque del Este* to *Chuafo* is a “very short distance”, he “wasn’t wearing his trainers but soled shoes”.

The CTV president will desert the demonstration before the crowd arrived to El Silencio towers. So did Carmona, the other leader of that crowd.

Once there, I received several phone calls asking me to leave the march because I was going to get killed, that there were people nearby for whom I was the target.

He doesn’t identify who warned him, but Ortega claims that it was somebody “very used to telling jokes”, to whom at first he “didn’t pay attention”. According to Ortega, that same person approached him later and insisted:

I’m going to tell your family and your children that I told you, but you didn’t want to listen to me; that you preferred to get killed, because I’m sure you are going to get killed.

In Ortega’s version, those words were enough to convince him.

It was then when I paid attention and I said to myself: “This could be serious”.

Gunshots in Bello Monte

Shortly after 1:20 p.m., Blanca León de Guédez, the head of the administration division of the UCV School of Education, was marching along the highway. She plans to leave the rally in Plaza

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Venezuela to return to her office. She has reached *Chacaito*, in front of *Aladin Hotel*, when she hears:

Bang! Bang!

It sounds like Christmas' "fireworks."

Blanca feels her left leg burns. She discovers a dark spot, touches it, looks at her hand and screams:

I have been shot! I have been shot!

A doctor comes out of the blue, tears up her pants, examines the injury and calms her down:

The bullet did not touch any bone or artery. It went in and out, without any major damage.

Narváez, her partner, was also wounded. The source of the bullet? Nobody knows. In ten minutes, an ambulance picks them up and takes them to the University Clinical Hospital. The injuries are not deemed serious.

The TV stations were not aware about these events. Or, at least, they did not report them.

They won't report either the aggressions against some peddlers selling memorabilia, key holders and caps allusive to Chávez, when the human tsunami arrived to downtown Caracas.

Save for a comment made by reporter Isnardo Bravo for *RCTV* TV Station, expressing his solidarity with his colleagues, nobody else in the media mentions the attacks to a *Venezolana de Television* crew who attempted to cover the march.

After all, it was a peaceful march and nothing should stain it.

“I’m not staying at home...”

It’s difficult to get downtown by car; there are traffic jams everywhere.

Around Carmelitas corner, a stone’s throw away from Miraflores, some demonstrators with red-painted eyeshades pass their tension to me.

What for?

To distinguish ourselves from the *escuálidos* [a term popularized by Chávez to refer to opposition leaders]. They are about to arrive.

Alí Primera’s voice steams out from the speakers:

I’m not staying at home, as I go to the battle ...

I imagine a pitched battle; I’m thrilled. I stop asking questions.

At the Vice President’s Office, Beglis Alfaro and other journalists watch Channel 8. I say hello to them and see myself on a TV spot excerpted from the previous edition of my show *En Confianza* where I asked for “peace and common sense”. That segment was titled “Dialogues for peace”.

Immediately, the same screen shows pro-Chávez leaders calling the people to go to Miraflores.

I head for *El Universal*, some blocks to the east. A National Guard column goes up along the *Urdaneta* Avenue. They carry shields and anti-riots gear and occupy the whole street. The commanding officer makes a gesture. They can run over me if I don’t step aside.

The Presidential National Broadcast

Once in the newsroom, I join those who are following the developments on TV. Suddenly, all TV stations join a national radio and TV broadcast with the President from Miraflores.

Good afternoon, dear fellow countrymen and countrywomen. We are here, at Miraflores Palace, discharging our duties. I have made the decision, according to my watch, at 15 minutes to 4 p.m., to call this joint national radio and TV broadcast in order to address the Venezuelan people ...



Photo: Jorge Solé.

Chávez addressed his adversaries:

A minority, numerically speaking, who are not negligible for

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they are Venezuelans as well a minority who seems not willing to listen, who seems not willing to see, who seems not willing to accept reality....

There is expectation about the possibility of Chávez's resignation, as rumors anticipated, but when it was clear that the purpose of the national broadcast was other than that, a generalized feeling of disapproval takes the newsroom. They were anxious to know what was going on downtown Caracas. Had the rally arrived to Miraflores? Had the two crowds clashed?

Chávez gave a thorough account of his ascent to power and of the process to pass the Constitution and then he went to comment on the strike called by CTV and *Fedecámaras*, about which he underlined that it was not intended to achieve labor improvements and failed to be as massive as its planners claimed it was.

He stressed that the flow of Caracas Subway users had increased four times in comparison to the first day of the strike.

And the subway union leaders have publicly explained that they disagree and don't support the call for a strike launched by the illegitimate CTV. The country could see that thanks to the special mechanism of joint national radio and TV broadcasts. Otherwise, people would have remained unaware of this or they would have been limited to watch it in the State-run TV station.

Split screens

A few days earlier, asphyxiated by the information blackout decided by the private media, with the State-run media in clear disadvantage, the Government resorted to a desperate measure: Use the President's power to order all radio and TV stations to join for special broadcast. In this manner, successive micros at intervals of 5 minutes showing the normal unfolding of life in the streets and conveying statements supporting the President could be watched in all channels. These images and statements were in sharp contrast with those broadcast by the private media. It was the first time that this power had been used to broadcast messages other than presidential addresses.

Such order turned the media schizophrenic. The stations split their screens into two. On one side, they showed the images ordered by the Government. On the other side, they displayed images of violence and/or opposition demonstrations. It was a bet to see who was going to prevail.

This was a "clever and creative solution" to settle conflicts not provided for in the law, according to the Prosecutor General, Isaías Rodríguez's statements, after a meeting with the UCV's University Council, which proposed him to mediate in the crisis.²⁶

Germán Mundaraín, the People's Attorney, had addressed the Supreme Court to request the court to order PDVSA's staff to

26 Últimas Noticias, 04-12-2002.

resume their activities, which were suspended by the CTV and Fedecámaras strike.

In an attempt to favor a balanced approach, Isaías Rodríguez expressed his disagreement with this proposal.

If a decision of this kind would reach the Prosecutor General's Office, I would not only enforce it in such terms, but also I would explain to the public opinion the reasons why I would not.

His office had also rejected a brief filed by Ignacio Ramírez Romero and Chagín Buaiz Gracia, lawyers with the National Federation of Human Rights, with his office a month earlier, in March 9th, to request a criminal inquiry against the leaders of the CTV, Fedecámaras, the political parties and PDVSA's managers for being clearly involved in a conspiracy.

Even so, the opposition will accuse the Prosecutor General of abiding by Chávez's plans.

Instructions five hours before the split

In the morning of April 11th, Alberto García, *Venevision's* Vice President of the Information and Opinion Division, addressed the digital postproduction editor Orlando Martínez Berman and told him:

Listen, go and make a two-box effect. We are going to put an image on one side and another image on the other side.²⁷

27 VTV, *En Confianza* TV program, interview with Orlando Martínez Berman after he was fired from *Venevisión*, 01-04-2004.

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Martínez Berman, with almost ten years working in *Venevisión*, was a supporter of President Chávez. His uncle, Luis Cabrera Aguirre, a retired Rear Admiral, was one of the leaders of the military rebellion of November 27th, 1992.

His boss did not tell him what images were going to be framed within the two boxes, but it was well known that the technique would be used to contrast conflict episodes against the micro joint national broadcasts ordered by the Government on the eve of that Thursday.

I interviewed Martínez Berman a couple of years later, when he was fired from *Venevisión*, in April 2004, for reasons he deemed political. First, his bosses recognized him in the videos of a Bolivarian rally and, then, they reprimanded him for having sent a message with political content from his personal e-mail account.

During the interview, Martínez Berman quoted the words of Vice President of the Information and Opinion Division of *Venevisión* TV Station when the presidential national broadcast was imminent, on April 11th, 2002:

As soon as the national broadcast comes on the air, you are going to put the presidential speech on this side and on the other side you will run a VTR with images of downtown Caracas.

Martínez Berman said he followed those instructions step by step, putting aside his political stance:

I was the one who split the screen. I could have said no, because I'm *chavista*. Besides, that was illegal because a presidential

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broadcast cannot be modified whatsoever. However, I did it. It cannot be said that, because of my political beliefs, I stopped performing the tasks assigned to me by the station.

The TV technician added that he had received the first instruction to design the digital boxes hours before the effective split of the screen.

I received that instruction five hours before it went on air.

Martínez Berman recalled that when Alberto García explained to him that the boxes would be used to contrast the presidential broadcast with images of violence in downtown Caracas, he insisted on reconfirming the order:

But, the presidential broadcast? Are you sure?

I'm telling you, the presidential broadcast.

That's illegal!

The presidential broadcast!

I told Martínez Berman that his statement would confirm that the screen split during the presidential broadcast was something planned in advance.

Of course, very well-planned. Because they had briefed me to do that effect long before. We [*Venevisión*] were the first to split the screen and then, less than two minutes afterwards, the rest of the channels had also the same visual effect on their screens.

Martínez Berman disclosed that, the day after, Friday April 12th, with Pedro Carmona Estanga already settled in Miraflores,

the station where he worked replaced VTV as the source channel for presidential broadcasts.

Interferences, the sign of sabotage

During the presidential broadcast, Chávez called irresponsible those who “without any grounds called for an indefinite strike” and denounced its “absolutely insurrectional” nature.

The goal of these people is not to stop the country. Don't let them mislead you. I see these images and I'm preoccupied that some people come [saying]: “Let's go to Miraflores because Chávez is finished”, deceiving many people. And they circulate the rumors that Chávez is already a prisoner of the High Command; that Chávez is already handing out his resignation, that he just needs to be pushed a bit. Lies! The situation is quite different.

He made a call to his adversaries to “come back to their senses” especially the sense of responsibility “for this country, your country”.

Think about the terrible consequences that this provocation can bring about. I'm the first one to take a deep breath, contain many things and calm down myself. I'm the first one to ask the whole people not to give in to provocations. I say it once again. But provocation is being encouraged. And the private TV stations' support has been fundamental to create this problem because, I repeat, there is not a real reason [for the strike].

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He talked about abiding by the rules set forth in the Constitution.

When he was going to talk about the recall referendum set out in the Constitution, there was an audio interference.

We could see a muted Chávez gesticulating.

Shortly after, the audio was re-established to get interrupted once again for longer this time.

You needn't to be pro-Chávez or too suspicious to understand that he was being sabotaged.

Somebody nearby commented:

That's very weird. This thing is getting serious.

TV stations suspended, save for *Globovisión*

When the audio returned, Chávez's voice was talking about the march which was headed to Miraflores:

These people are not coming here to hand out a document. They expect to arrive in here because, according to the irresponsible people who have made this call, they think that they are going to oust Chávez and that the National Armed Force is going to support an insurrection.

He referred again to the version, spread by TV, according to which the High Command had captured him.

They launch all those things in order to try to inspire more insurrectional feelings to that group of people they are bringing here.

CHAPTER III: THE FINAL BATTLE

Chávez considered that some of them “perhaps are ready and prepared, but they deceive a large group of people”, among whom he could see on TV women and children.

He recalled that under his Government there had been a number of mobilizations of various sectors and pointed out:

That march, of course, cannot arrive here with that provocative attitude as thousands of people are gathered out there. That cannot be allowed. That’s why I have ordered the public forces to make a security cushion. We have done so in other occasions, that is, a space between the people already gathered here [and those who are coming]. Because, what could happen? These people [his supporters] are here peacefully. They have been out there for three days.

He looked at his watch and said it was 23 minutes to 5 p.m. By then, several dead and wounded people from both sides had already fallen on the pavement downtown Caracas. But Chávez insisted:

Of course, that is not going to happen. But what could happen if we allow that march to arrive here, to the Palace, instilled, as it is, with that charge [of hatred] directly or through the media all these days? What for? What for they are coming here? No doubt, this is a very irresponsible provocation and the persons to be accountable for this are those who called for the rally and went out this morning to say that the march had to head for Miraflores.

PART I: BACKGROUND

Then, Chávez informed that he had ordered to suspend the signal of three national TV stations.

Right now, the broadcast signals of channels 2, 4 and 10 go off the air.

The channels he mentioned were *RCTV*, *Venevisión* and *Televen*. Curiously, Chávez didn't include *Globovisión*.

By that moment, the presidential broadcast had been intervened for a while. The private channels had split their screens to put violent images of downtown Caracas on one side and the official signal with the President's speech on the other side. Simultaneously, captions were being inserted along the lower section of the screen, denouncing the broadcast was power abuse.

Chávez said the decision resulted from a procedure that had been opened by the Ministry of Infrastructure, top regulatory body on telecommunications, and he explained in detail that Venezuela's TV stations operate under a license assigned by the State, without which they wouldn't be able to broadcast anything. That is, Chávez continued, they are exploiting a public asset as it is the radio-electrical airwaves.

You are witnesses to the many things we have endured (...) I have tolerated too much. To the limit. But one cannot tolerate the nonsense and lack of sensitivity of certain misters who own some mass media, knowingly that the airwaves do not belong to them and that they are bound to the Constitution and the laws.

He disclosed that, the night before, Vice President Diosdado Cabello and the Minister of Defense, journalist José Vicente Rangel, met with the TV stations' executives to complain for the "damage they were causing" by broadcasting over and over again violent events. The meeting took place at *Globovisión's* headquarters. The owners of the private media were inflexible before the request for moderation expressed by the high officials, while at the same time they complained about the frequent radio and TV national broadcasts with which the government responded to their agitation campaigns. Marcel Granier (*RCTV*), Víctor Ferreres (*Venevisión*), Omar Camero (*Televen*), Ricardo Zuloaga and Alberto Federico Ravell (*Globovisión*) attended the meeting. According to Cabello, only Camero treated them with respect along the conversation. "The rest of them had a mocking face", according to Cabello. In leaving the meeting, a *Globovisión's* journalist approached Cabello and told him: "Thank God there will be no *Aló Presidente* next Sunday with the current president". (Translator's note: *Aló Presidente* was a TV show presented on Sundays by President Chávez as an attempt to keep the people informed about the government actions). The Vice President replied: "Don't you count your chickens before they hatch."²⁸

During the presidential broadcast, Chávez posed as an example of media manipulation a press conference held 24 hours earlier with the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín.

28 Diosdado Cabello interviewed by the author of this book, February 2012.

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They [the private TV stations] did broadcast the press conference; yes, they certainly did. But then, they put him [Rodríguez Chacín] within a small box in one corner of the screen, so small that it was difficult to see his face and, behind him the images of some hooded demonstrators throwing stones at the police. They were no more than 10 or 15, throwing stones and occasionally passing by one side of the camera, as if they were to look for stones hidden behind the camera or nearby, and they attacked again, throwing stones at police officers. The camera remained fixed there. All the time or almost all the time that the Minister was calling for peace and reflection; they [the private TV stations] did that. This is, no doubt, a gesture of bad faith.

Chávez wondered if the TV stations owners were participating in a conspiracy.

Well, this is something to be investigated and discussed, but they have put themselves outside the law for instigating [violence]. A TV station cannot make use of the license granted by the State to attempt against the State itself or to encourage violence knowing in beforehand that there is an insurrectional plan underway and support it.

He anticipated that, according to the procedure, the TV stations were entitled to due process and they may respond and clarify the accusations against them, “until a final decision is handed do”.

The problem is basically with the private TV stations. There could be some exceptions. There are some small stations, TV

regional stations that are not behaving that way and they even came here in December. We met with them and they said: “We don’t agree with the spirit of certain national stations. We criticize, but we want to cooperate according to our possibilities”.

The opposition will accuse Chávez of having imposed the national broadcast and suspend the TV stations to conceal the violent events taking place in downtown Caracas.

The death of Tortoza

The suspension of the private TV stations signals did not affect the TV sets hanging on the walls of *El Universal* newsroom. They were connected to DirecTV satellite service, which kept airing the signals of the suspended stations.

During the presidential broadcast a rumor was circulating about a photographer shot to death downtown.

Jorge Tortoza got killed!

The newsroom, as the whole journalistic community, mourned. The victim was a worker of *2001* newspaper, but it could have been any reporter.

On that day, at least five men with cameras were shot. Among them, besides Tortoza, there were Jorge Recio and brothers Enrique and Luis Hernández, all of them wounded downtown Caracas.

Douglas Bolívar, who as a reporter who worked along with him for the Crimes news section, said that Tortoza and his family were “inveterate Chávez’s supporters”.

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Orlando Ugueto, a journalist and photographer who also shared the trade with his deceased colleague for years, has no recollections of Tortoza's political preferences.

Nevertheless, the opposition assumed that Tortoza was one of them, and now considered him a martyr and icon of their own struggle.

As of the moment of that ill-fated news, memories get mixed and it's impossible to have a clear picture of what happened first and what happened afterwards. The only certainty about this is that everything was aired on TV: *Venevisión's* video showing supposed Bolivarian followers firing from *Puente Llaguno*, the wounded, the dead, the narrator –Manuel Sáenz– blaming the people on the bridge for the casualties, tear gas, cry, grieve, pain, sadness, the military rebelling against Hugo Chávez, demanding his resignation.

The channel 8 is re-running my interview with Guillermo García Ponce in the morning. Logically, it was out of context by then.

My phone rings off. It's a university classmate. We haven't seen each other since long ago:

Pal, tell the guys there to put the interview off the air. It makes me fucking angry.

I understand brother. Take care.

A light coup

In the early evening of April 11th, the retired Vice Admiral Iván Carratú Molina, former chief of Carlos Andrés Pérez's Military House, appears on *Televen's* screens, interviewed by Marta Colomina who introduces him as an expert on military matters.

Carratú said:

In my opinion, what is going on in Venezuela with the Armed Forces is a light military coup, where the Government must interpret what is going on with the generals and admirals of the Armed Forces. Otherwise, we will see situations of pressure. The civil society has pushed and has organized itself to oust the President: The CTV, *Fedecámaras*, PDVSA, and the military are trying to make the President and his Government understands that they have to quit because [this] is unbearable. If this is not done this way, in a reasonable and peaceful manner, the use of force will come, which should be avoided.²⁹

Colomina requested a forecast:

What could happen in the forthcoming hours?

I think that in the forthcoming hours we will see military reactions of a pacific nature, to put more and more pressure on the Military High Command so that they disown the President. Otherwise, another group of generals is going to displace him. And the President will be forced to quit.

29 *Televen*, news show *La Entrevista en El Noticiero*, 04-11-2002.

Well, certainly we will have to talk tomorrow again, because things change overnight here.

We must get ready for a transition government.

Those are serious words.

Well...

“That rubbish is going off the air”

Shortly after, the screen of *Venevisión* shows Miranda State’s Governor, Social-Christian Enrique Mendoza, with a band-aid on his face and his baseball cap backwards:

That rubbish called the channel 8 we are going to put it off the air. That is the warning I’m telling you, because we were not born yesterday, we are not assholes. Channel 8 is going off the air in a few hours.

The basic rules of a coup d’état, described by Curzio Malaparte, advise to dominate communications, as the Bolshevik did during the Russian Revolution in 1917.

Luis Britto García comments:

That assault is not necessary in Venezuela: The coup plotters are the owners of the mass media. Their behavior is a prolonged cold coup, which ends with the interference of the State-run radio and TV stations and the independent broadcast (...) Brute force closed the State-run channel.³⁰

30 Britto García, Luis: *Investigación de unos medios por encima de toda sospecha* (Investigation on some media above any suspicion), edited by VTV, Caracas, 2003.

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At 9:15 p.m., VTV broadcast live from Miraflores. National Assembly representatives Juan Barreto, Ismael García and the Minister of Education, Aristóbulo Istúriz appear on the screen. They deny that the President has resigned, as rumors tell since the afternoon, and they characterize *Chavismo* as the victim of a massacre not as the perpetrator. This is their truth against that of a communications giant that screams, through thousands of mouths, exactly the opposite, supported on images that few would dare to put into question.

That was the last VTV live transmission. At 10:00 p.m., Captain José Rodríguez Monroy, chief of a National Guard platoon and in charge of the channel custody, force the staff to stop broadcasting, before returning to his command.

An armed contingent with a great fire power is approaching these facilities and my instructions are to avoid bloodshed.

Later on, I phoned Jesús Romero Anselmi who told me that being the President of VTV he was the last to leave the building.

I first ordered the evacuation of women and then I stayed with the minimum staff.

Shortly after this, the special forces of Miranda Police Department sent by Enrique Mendoza arrived. Romero saw them arrive, and put on a cap allusive to the New York Yankees to pass unnoticed.

He clearly remembered, and the rest of the channel as well, November 27th, 1992, when the premises were left literally soaked

in blood after the second military rebellion of that year and the operations to recover the building carried out by forces loyal to Carlos Andrés Pérez's government.

After that, I watched on TV the arrival of a *Globovisión* crew, which entered the facilities behind the police officers. The team reported the workers' "flight" and showed the empty studios where Channel 8 programs "used to be produced" (did that past tense mean that those shows would never been produced again?).

Two days later, *El Universal* digital version explained that VTV "is temporarily closed, in a very particular context of a nation in transition".

The source was not identified, but it had the taste of an official note.

The State-run TV station is waiting for its re-opening and transformation into a channel to the service of the people's interest. It has entered into a forced interruption which suggests a profound restructuring.³¹

Before going to bed that April 11 night, I commented at home:

Now the country is in the hands of the same who diverted the rally to Miraflores.

Casualties from both sides

The final toll of that day was 19 casualties and many more

31 Taken from *El cierre de VTV manchó para siempre el periodismo venezolano* (The VTV closing stains for ever Venezuelan journalism). Available at www.rnv.gov.ve. The original version is no longer available at *El Universal* Web page.

wounded. The press showed them as the victims, all of them, of a *Chavista* “ambush” and, thus, all were taken for opposition demonstrators.

One of the bloody pictures portrays Tony Velásquez, presumed dead, but who managed to saved his life. He was identified as a DISIP agent and an escort of Vice President Diosdado Cabello.

That doesn’t prevent *El Universal* from publishing an editorial piece, titled *The deads of Hugo* and a caricature where its author, Zapata, draws one of its characters saying:

The killers were trained by the coward...

On the inside pages, however, a side review was titled as follows:

*The first casualties were from the official side.*³²

It’s hideous to make an account of the dead by their political side, as all of them are, in fact, human beings.

The priests Juan Vives Suriá and José Ignacio Arrieta, special delegates appointed by the Prosecutor General to investigate the facts of April 11th, made a map where they identified the areas of downtown Caracas which were occupied by pro-Chávez and opposition demonstrators. Based on that, they took note of the fatal victims who have fallen down on each perimeter. They draw up this list:

In the south of Avenida Baralt, in the area where the opposition marchers arrived, the following citizens lost their lives:

- José Antonio Camallo

32 Ramírez, Roselena: *Las primeras bajas fueron del oficialismo* (The first casualties were for officialism). *El Nacional*, 04-12-2002

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- Alexis Bordones Soteldo
- Orlando Rojas
- Jesús Arellano
- Juan David Querales
- Víctor Reinoso
- Jhonie Obdulio Palencia and,
- Jesús Espinoza Capote.

A total amount of eight people who, considering their physical location, were deemed anti-Chávez demonstrators.

Jorge Tortoza was also shot to death when he was among them. To be true, he was not marching in favor of any of the two sides. He was doing his job as a photographer.

In the north, nearby Puente Llaguno, there were *Chavistas* who died as well. The casualties were:

- Pedro José Linares
- César Matías Ochoa
- Rudy Alfonso Urbano Duque
- Erasmo Enrique Sánchez
- Josefina Rengifo Cabrera
- Nelson Eliécer Zambrano
- Luis Alberto Caro and,
- Luis Alfonso Monsalve

Eight dead to which fathers Suriá and Arrieta add a ninth: Alexis González, a revolutionary who participated in the demonstrations in *Puente Llaguno* on April 11th. He died of four bullet shots in

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La Cañada, a sector in the popular western parish *23 de Enero*. There, the demonstrations in support of Chávez continued during the night.

The circumstances of his death remain unclear. His relatives believe that González was called by his name before being shot. The Vives-Arrieta report, on the other hand, places his death in the framework of the Metropolitan Police repression at *23 de Enero* neighborhood. The report reads as follows:

Witnesses point out that the Metropolitan Police was firing against the people.

The “Alexis Vive” *23 de Enero*-based popular movement was named after González.

On Thursday April 11th, Angel Figueroa Rivas also died. He was a street vendor who lived in South West *La Vega* sector. He got killed somewhere between the two human crowds downtown Caracas: Opposite to Baralt Cinema, between the corners of Muñoz and Padre Sierra.³³ The Vives-Arrieta report does not associate Figueroa to any political militancy whatsoever.

33 Vives Suriá, Juan y Arrieta, Juan Ignacio: Second Partial report of the Prosecutor General’s Especial Delegates in relation to the investigations about the events of April 11th to 14th, 2002. Caracas, September, 2002.



A field hospital installed in the parking area at “Palacio Blanco”, right in front of Miraflores. Dead bodies and wounded citizens coming from the Bolivarian concentration were taken there. Photo: Egilda Gómez.

Part II

Coup and Counter-coup

CHAPTER IV: THE EVENING OF APRIL 11TH

The Commander in his labyrinth Chávez gives himself in

In fatigue, black boots and red beret, holstered pistol and rifle at hand. Chávez is dressed like he was 10 years earlier, when he made himself known to the world on February 4th, 1992.

Filing his resignation as the Generals demand? Resisting to death like Salvador Allende in La Moneda Palace, as proposed by his Defense Minister José Vicente Rangel? Eluding at any event such a heroic yet useless ending, and preserve his life as advised by Fidel Castro? Negotiate with the coup leaders? Giving in?

Such questions swirl under his beret between the night of that Thursday 11th and the early hours of Friday April 12th, 2002.

I learned the basic principles for a commander. Accomplish the mission, but pondering the life of your soldiers. You cannot lose your mind and lead them down a cliff and bring about an unnecessary bloodshed³⁴.

Chávez told María Cristina Uribe, an interviewer of TV1 Channel of Colombia about how decisions were being made in such hours.

³⁴ In Maniglia, Teresita: *Una historia que es la suya... Un relato único* (A Story that is Yours... A Unique Tale), Fondo Intergubernamental para la Descentralización (FIDES), Caracas, 2006. The interview with María Cristina Uribe was conducted on May 20, 2002.

That was such a dilemma, he said.

It is not easy for a President, a soldier, to give in your weapon and accept being taken prisoner.

He could have gone to another city or to another place in Caracas with 300 or 500 men in arms. And call the people out to fight.

But maybe that could have been the first step into a civil war.

Fidel's advice

It was 12:38 at night when Fidel Castro, who had been trying to contact Chávez since the early afternoon, is informed that the Venezuelan President is on the phone.

Fidel inquires about the situation.

We are entrenched in the Palace. We have lost the decisive military force. They took over the TV signal. I have no forces to move and keep analyzing the situation³⁵.

How many troops have you got there?

200-300 troops, very tired.

Tanks, have you got any?

No. There were some but they were withdrawn to the garrisons.

What other forces do you have?

There are some distant forces, but I have no communication with them.

³⁵ Castro, Fidel: *Cien horas con Fidel. Conversaciones con Ignacio Ramonet* (One Hundred Hours with Fidel. Conversations with Ignacio Ramonet). Oficina Publicaciones del Consejo de Estado, La Habana, 2006.

According to Fidel, Chávez was talking about the paratroopers commanded led by General Raúl Isaías Baduel, in the city of Maracay, a hundred kilometers West of Caracas, the Armored Division and others he had not been able to contact.

May I express an opinion?

Yes.

Demand the condition of an honorable and dignified treatment, and preserve the life of the forces you have there, they are the most loyal ones. Do not sacrifice them or yourself.

They are ready to die here!

I know, but I think that I can think more calmly than you in this moment. Don't resign. Demand honorable and guaranteed conditions so that you do not become the victim of a felony, because I think that you have to preserve your life. Further, you have a duty with your companions. Don't immolate yourself! Don't step down! Don't resign!

He insisted:

You have to save such valuable men standing by you from such an unnecessary battle.

In his book gathering the conversations with Ignacio Ramonet, Fidel Castro said that he proposed Chávez "to communicate with any military with real authority among the coup promoters, so that he may state his readiness to leave the country, but not to resign".

Fidel Castro's intent, he said, was to send planes with the Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque, and diplomats accredited in

the island to go to Venezuela and bring Chávez.

Chávez, Castro says, “thought for a few seconds and finally accepted my proposal”.

Everything would be up to the enemy’s military chief.

Fidel recalls in the aforesaid book what José Vicente Rangel, Defense Minister at that time, said to Cuban journalists Rosa Miriam Elizalde and Luis Báez in their book: *Chávez nuestro* (Our Chávez):

Fidel’s phone call was decisive to avoid the immolation. It was of paramount importance. His advice allowed us to see in the darkness. It helped us a lot³⁶.

Ramonet asked Fidel Castro:

Did you encourage him to offer an armed resistance?

No, on the contrary. That is what Allende did, and in my opinion under such conditions he was right, and paid in a heroic manner with his life, as promised.

In Fidel’s words, Chávez’s choices were as follows:

- To entrench in Miraflores and resist to death;
- Get out of the Palace and attempt to meet with the people to unleash a nationwide resistance with small possibilities for success, considering the circumstances; or
- Leaving the country without resigning or stepping down so as to resume the struggle with real prospects for a rapid success.

36 Elizalde, Rosa Miriam y Báez, Luis: *Chávez nuestro* (Our Chávez), Casa Editorial Abril, La Habana.

Fidel Castro suggested him to take the third choice.

And that is what he decided to do. History teaches you so – Every popular leader ousted in such circumstances, if he does not get killed, the people claim him back and, sooner or later, gets back to power³⁷.

Fidel Castro tells that the coup's military chief he had suggested Chávez to talk to “rejected the formula” proposed, that is, the dispatch of two flights to pick up Chávez. Instead, he adds, the military informed that Chávez would be submitted to a “Court Martial”.

The Cuban leader failed to identify such “coup's military chief”.

He does recall that he had agreed with Chávez to talk again in two hours. But they ended up losing contact.

A resignation subjected to four conditions

The rebels took *Fuerte Tiuna*, the military garrison facilities located in South Caracas, the headquarters of the troops that are supposed to defend the capital city and the seat of the Defense Ministry.

From the fifth floor of the Ministry, the General Inspector's Office of the National Armed Force, the coup leaders demanded Chavez's resignation.

Two messengers go back and forth between the Fort and Miraflores Palace. The Minister of Infrastructure, Eliécer Hurtado

37 Ramonet, Ignacio: *Fidel Castro. Biografía a dos voces* (Fidel castro: Biography in Two Voices). Editorial Debate, Buenos Aires, 2006.

Soucre, a retired general who had been Defense Minister, and Manuel Rosendo, an active general and Head of the Joint Command of the National Armed Force³⁸.

Chávez told the intermediaries he would agree to resign should his enemies undertake to meet four conditions. Which conditions? Chávez himself listed them in an interview with María Cristina Uribe from the Colombian *TV1* Channel:

- Respect for the lives and integrity of the people.
- Respect for the Constitution.
- My resignation had to be filed, as provided for in the Constitution, before the National Assembly. They had to follow all the steps set forth therein³⁹.
- To address the nation on a TV broadcast.
- I demanded to address the nation because they had shut down the State-run TV signal. I told them: “I am not going to vanish from Venezuela without telling the people”.
- Leaving the country.

With a group of companions that were ready to come along with me.

They, in Fuerte Tiuna, accepted such conditions and let Rosendo and Hurtado Soucre know it:

Yes, Mr. President. They accept the conditions. They will fax the draft resignation letter.

38 Rosendo was highly trusted by Chávez and he pretended to be a super-revolutionary official but he finally opened up in April 11th, when he joined the coup.
39 Maniglia, Teresita. Op. Cit.

Fine, let them send it. Let us appoint some people to expedite the fulfillment of the conditions. I will resign provided that such conditions are met.

At 02:45 a.m. of Friday 12, a fax is received in Miraflores with a draft decree whereby Chávez would resign his office and remove Vice President Diosdado Cabello.

There it was, but I kept on waiting for the conditions to be met so that I could sign the resignation letter⁴⁰.

A nine-month conspiracy

“Admiral Ramírez Pérez said this was the outcome of a nine-month long military conspiracy where Army Division General Enrique Medina Gómez and General Rommel Fuenmayor were involved.”

Medina Gómez should have been in Washington where he worked as Military Attaché of Venezuela. But he showed up in Caracas as the head of one of the various military groups that got together for the coup. Later, his bonds with Isaac Pérez Recao, a young entrepreneur allegedly behind the coup according to journalist Patricia Poleo, would become public.

Rommel Fuenmayor was the chairman of the military ammunition factory and weapons parts, CAVIM. His sister Gladys was married to Francisco Arias Cárdenas, one of the Commanders

40 Maniglia, Teresita. Op. Cit.

of the February 4th Rebellion, an opposition leader by the time when the April developments took place⁴¹.

“All the officers I mentioned before were telling about the negotiation process with the President demanding him to resign. They explained that the President had set a sole condition for the resignation, that he would be sent to Cuba and that they would protect his family.”

Journalist María Cristina Uribe asked Chávez:

What conditions failed to be met?

None was met.

“General Rommel Fuenmayor said that he himself and General Néstor González González did not agree with the President leaving the country. On the contrary, he had to be kept prisoner in Venezuela so that he could pay for his crimes.”

Ramírez Pérez threatens with a “surgical” attack against Miraflores

Chávez was still in Miraflores the evening of April 11th when journalist Ibéyise Pacheco interviewed Vice-admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, military head of the coup for *Venevisión* TV channel.

41 In 1992, Fuenmayor and Arias fought in opposite sides. One was the chief of the uprising in Zulia state, while the other was a member of CAP's Military House. On the night of April 11th, 2002, Arias was present on the 5th floor of the Ministry of Defense, sharing with the rebelled military officers, although at a given moment he abandoned the place. Arias ended reconciled with Chávez and accepting his leadership. He designed Arias as Venezuela's Ambassador to the United Nations and later as Deputy Foreign Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean.

The interview was held in the same office located between Chacao and Bello Campo, in the East of Caracas, where the military pronouncement led by Ramírez Pérez had been recorded before people had got killed in downtown Caracas.

The future *de facto* Defense Minister disclosed, among other things, that the military group had issued the statement before the first casualty had occurred.

A detail went unnoticed: In their statement they talked about casualties and snipers, when such events were yet to occur. Five months later, Otto Neustaldt, former CNN correspondent, confirmed and elaborated on details about this⁴².

Ramírez Pérez said as follows:

I have just contacted the Commander of the Army. The President is in Miraflores. He has a group of armed people protecting him. He has snipers in rooftops. They are trying to move the casualties to other streets so that they can say tomorrow that they acted in self-defense.

I understand that they want to attribute such casualties to *Bandera Roja* (an extremist opposition group) or something like that.

They want to attribute them to supposedly armed groups of the peaceful demonstration. Fortunately, we have a great weapon in the mass media. The people could watch it: Neither the Army nor the Armed Force shot a single bullet. Our weapons were the

42 See chapter Otto Neustaldt, *tired of tepid waters*.

mass media. I want to seize the opportunity to congratulate you all because you have been great actors in this.

The journalist noted that, in the demonstration, the protesters requested the military to take a stance against Chávez “to prevent casualties”.

Exactly! We were making a pronouncement before a casualty may happen. That was the decision we made and we came here to do so before the first casualty. But the President mocked at us.

Ramírez Pérez argued that Chávez’s mockery was that his TV broadcast message had been pre-recorded⁴³.

That means that he had planned everything in advance. He was actually looking for blood. It is a dreadful thing.

Our decision was to precisely prevent our Army and our Armed Forces from staining their hands with blood. I think the President expected the Army to kill all those people out there. That’s what we don’t want.

Ramírez Pérez estimated there were 300 or 400 people protecting the Palace “plus the President’s Honour Guard”.

We expect the President to talk, we hope he resigns, that he tells so to the country and that he himself take the weapons away from those Venezuelans he deceived.

43 During the national broadcast, Chávez appears at least a couple of times looking to his wristwatch and giving the exact time:

- It’s a quarter to 4:00 p.m.

And later:

- It’s 23 to 5:00 p.m.

But do you still think the President is going to avoid more bloodshed?

We are giving him a chance; otherwise we will undertake the military operation.

And do you feel you all are strong enough for such military operation?

We totally are... It is not a military operation. It is a surgical operation, because we don't want casualties. They are Venezuelan citizens who have been deceived. We will try to talk them over through the media so that they surrender their weapons. We cannot allow more casualties. Many households are mourning because of the President. This is something we cannot allow. We will make the decisions, in the course of this evening, as soon as [we know] what the President does.

A surgical operation? With a scalpel? With laser? Or F-16 fighter missiles? They failed to ask and Ramírez failed to accurately say either.

Damiani: “We know all their moves”

Around 10:00 p.m. of April 11th, generals of the National Guard Rafael Damiani Bustillos and Luis Camacho Kairuz appeared on *RCTV* channel's screen from the headquarters downtown in Quinta Crespo. They were escorted by men in fatigue.

Damiani was head of the Metropolitan Police in President Caldera's second administration and his deputy was Camacho

Kairuz, then a colonel. Both had made a separate statement against Chávez in the course of that day⁴⁴.

That evening, they were interviewed by Miguel Ángel Rodríguez who asked them for a balance of the situation nationwide. Camacho reported that the situation was normal, save for “small outbreaks of violence that were being dominated in *23 de Enero* (a working-class sector in West Caracas).”

The Metropolitan Police has been briefed to go there and appeal to those persons insisting in breaking the public peace and order so that they calm down.

The appeal to peace referred to by Camacho Kairuz was actually “Fire at Will”. Noticeably, euphemisms are not an asset used solely by diplomats and politicians. Militaries can also learn rhetorical skills.

Who are those people? Civilians?

They are groups of civilians supporting what until a few minutes ago was the National Government. This is the reason for our visit here. We need to start right away to organize the Transition *Junta*, the Government *Junta*.

Distinguished Generals, what have you heard from the Honor Guard and the military officers in Miraflores?

Damiani took the floor:

⁴⁴ Before going to RCTV, Camacho Kairuz resigned to his post of Deputy Minister for Citizens Security “tired of being led by a group of naïve charlatans”. He did so following the pronouncement of the second commanding chief of the National Guard: General Carlos Alfonso Martínez, General Inspector of that component.

We came to this TV station because besides the Honor Guard, there are a few armored units which departed unauthorized from the General Headquarters of the Army in *Fuerte Tiuna*. We have plotted⁴⁵ their movements during the afternoon and we know where they are located now.

Damiani addressed to General Jorge García Carneiro who had moved tanks to safeguard Miraflores following Chávez's orders:

Do not turn this situation into bloodshed because in the National Guard and in the other forces we have kept peace and tranquility. We are acting in a very responsible manner trying to prevent a blood bath among brothers.

He also addressed to the Head of the Honor Guard and the Commander of La Carlota air base in Caracas:

We have been taking over all the positions in those places.

Rather more severe, Damiani said:

I tell the so called Bolivarian Circles that you are absolutely identified, and we know where you are now. Same applies to Caracas Mayor Freddy Bernal.

He stressed that "we have analyzed the situation long ago". So, it was not a spontaneous rise.

Damiani made a call to the unit Commanders to subordinate to the Head of the Army Efraín Vázquez Velazco.

"This is a plan we have devised long ago", he insisted. "We know all the positions" of the pro Government forces, he insisted.

45 Tracked, overseen.

I tell my dear Metropolitan Police, with which we have kept contact over the phone, “you have already been briefed.”

What information do you have on the whereabouts of President Chávez at this very moment, 10:15 p.m.?

Camacho answered:

The President has not come out to face this. We believe he won't. Who is he going to face? Of course, he has to face the people, but who will support him? The National Armed Force is not standing by the President. Nor are the people. The most reasonable thing for the President and his Cabinet is to file their resignation or to flee the country.

He advocated a peaceful yet forced transition.

We are not to wait until they decide. We will do it this week.

Damiani took the floor to ask “the friends from the DISIP” (the political police) to go back to their quarters “we will provide them with security there.” He briefed the municipal police corps to remain alert.

When the order is issued we will begin patrolling to prevent public unrest.

Camacho called Garcia Carneiro to his senses. He said he was his friend and “an honest decent man.”

Please, Garcia, go back to the quarters of your unit. It makes no sense that you put Venezuela under such stress and to take the risk of bloodshed. We don't want that. It has to be a peaceful transition

and we are going to make it. Please, Jorge, you have the support of the whole Armed Force.

He made the same call to the Commander of the National Guard, General Eugenio Gutiérrez “who is also in Miraflores, he is probably misinformed and ignores what is happening”.

The whole country is under the National Armed Force’s control. There is no resistance whatsoever. The Government has declined to perform its functions.

“Forget about my resignation”

There was surprise in Miraflores when the conditions previously accepted to prepare the presidential resignation letter were rejected by the coup generals.

Chávez told so to María Cristina Uribe:

There was a moment when the coup command said they didn’t accept the conditions.

The President had telephoned Baltazar Porras, president of the Episcopal Conference, so that he could help guarantee the fulfillment of the conditions. He could not talk with the Apostolic Nuncio, André Dupuy who, as Baltazar Porras wrote in his memories, was in France because of his father’s illness⁴⁶.

Chávez recalled:

The idea was to appoint a commission to check compliance with the conditions so as to expedite the resignation, but within the Constitution.

46 Porras, Baltazar: Op. Cit.

He added:

When they sent the message saying that they hadn't accepted the conditions, that I must appear there, I decided: "Well, that's fine. I will go there, but from the moment I leave I am a prisoner. I deem myself a prisoner, but I won't resign. Forget about the resignation."

Chávez also talked about those events in a statement he made before a commission of the Prosecutor General's Office of the Republic that interviewed him on May 4th, 2002.

He said that at a particular time of the evening of April 11th, a group of unsubordinated generals visited Miraflores, including Rafael Damiani Bustillos, Luis Camacho Kairuz, of the National Guard and another one named Narváez.

Chávez told that they addressed to him respectfully as follows:

You are the President of the Republic. We want to respect your office and make things easy. But there is a conflict in *Fuerte Tiuna*. Some say yes, some say no⁴⁷.

Chávez revealed that the group of generals went there "with the intention of persuading me to accept to take a helicopter that they would dispatch to Miraflores to take me to Maiquetía."

His answer?

No, buddies. Not in that way. I want you to come to an agreement among yourselves. I cannot leave as if nothing has happened. I have a number of conditions. I ask you to go to *Fuerte Tiuna* and

⁴⁷ Report of the interview published in *Quinto Día*, July 9-16, 2006.

try to talk over those gentlemen there to cut the deal we have been talking about.

The generals left for *Fuerte Tiuna* but they failed to persuade their companions to respect Chávez's conditions.

So they called back again and said that there were no terms. They said that if in ten minutes I had not left for the Fort they had a column of tanks ready to bomb Miraflores and that airfighters would take off to join the attack.

Faced with this ultimatum, Chávez decides to go to *Fuerte Tiuna* "to see how that would end, but with the decision of preventing a confrontation."

The President had been pondering to go to the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade in Maracay, commanded by General Raúl Isaías Baduel.

According to Chávez's statement before the Prosecutor General's Office, Baduel had told him:

I do not accept that you give me orders against the Constitution. I will remain in rebellion here.

And Chávez told him:

Be careful. I am not asking you to accept my decision. I accept whatever you decide.

In his statement, Chávez said that "other officers in some areas of Venezuela began to send their messages, one or two."

However, I decided to go to *Fuerte Tiuna*. We left [Miraflores] in that situation.

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Freddy Bernal, then Mayor of Caracas, told the Brazilian journal *Hora do Povo*, that Diosdado Cabello, the Vice President, had informed him over the phone at 02:00 a.m. as follows:

Freddy, the last loyal tanks have left Miraflores. The Government has been ousted⁴⁸.

With this information in mind, Bernal decided to leave the “safe place” to go to Miraflores and talk to Chávez.

Bernal described his conversation with the President as follows:

Freddy, they have ousted us. They betrayed me. I have three options: Staying in Miraflores with 400 troops. They are going to kill us all, as they did with Allende. I can go to Maracay, but I am not going to have the Armed Force confront the Armed Force or the People against the People. Upon how many thousands of casualties we are going to consolidate this? I’m not doing that. They gave me time till 04:00 a.m. Let them fetch me, let them oust me. You, what are you going to do?

Mr. President I am going to fight for this revolution. We are a legitimate government, we have the support of the people and we are not surrendering the government to the fascists. These people deserve a response. President, they are taking you to prison, and we are going to fight.

Be careful. They want to kill you. If they catch you, they won’t forgive you. You are a young man. We need leaders. We cannot sacrifice them. The revolution goes on. See you. May God bless you!

48 *Hora do povo* (The People’s Hour, Brazil), 06-07-2002.

CHAPTER IV: THE EVENING OF APRIL 11TH

Hugo Chávez left the Palace wearing his military uniform, amidst dramatically sad scenes filled with the solidarity by officials and political leaders standing by him that evening in Miraflores. They all chanted the National Anthem with their eyes bursting in tears.

Chávez took the rear seat of one of the cars of his convoy. In the front seat next to the driver was General Rosendo. In the rear seat, next to the right window was sitting General Hurtado Soucre, and Major Jesús Suárez Chourio, head of his personal escort guards, was sitting next to the left window. Chávez was sitting between them.

It was 03:55 a.m. when Chávez decided to submit himself to his adversaries, Carmona had already spent around four hours in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

This is the timeline:

- Carmona arrived in *Fuerte Tiuna* at 11:45 p.m., or as per his own account, a bit later than 12:30 a.m. At 02:43 a.m. a draft resignation letter arrived by fax to Miraflores which Chávez had to sign.
- At 03:35 a.m., the General Inspector of the National Armed Force, General in Chief Lucas Rincón announced the resignation of the President “which he accepted”.
- Half an hour later, close to 04:00 a.m. Chávez arrived to *Fuerte Tiuna*.

However, Carmona, changing the order of the developments, would say later:

I was called to take the office of the Presidency for the transition term **after** the resignation of the President have gone public in the voice of the highest spokesperson of the National Armed Force (*our boldface*)⁴⁹.

Bishops to *Fuerte Tiuna*, not to Miraflores

In the basement of the headquarters of the Army, in *Fuerte Tiuna*, Chávez was being expected by the President and the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference, Monseigneurs Baltazar Porras and José Luis Azuaje, respectively.

The presence of the Bishops there called Chávez's attention.

I had called them earlier to the Palace and they failed to show up⁵⁰.

Baltazar Porras confirms that Chávez called him to ask him to go to Miraflores in his capacity as a priest to serve as a guarantor of the terms of his resignation initially agreed to with the rebel generals. He told him he would go, but he did not.

To explain why he refrained from attending the Palace, Porras argued that the Episcopal Conference had available "one very small car" only and they were told from Miraflores that they could not send another car to pick him up.

49 Carmona Estanga, Pedro: *Asumo mi responsabilidad ante la historia* (I assume my responsibility before history), Caracas, 04-22-2002. Available at <http://www.analitica.com/va/politica/opinion/8684629.asp>.

50 Panorama, 04-12-2002.

Any lost bullet could easily go through the weak body of the car⁵¹.

He further said that he had entered into contact with General Néstor González González who, on behalf of the Commander of the Army, Efraín Vásquez Velazco, told him that going to Miraflores was “inconvenient”.

The general put forward “personal security reasons.”

And because of the risk of being taken as a hostage.

Porras tells he went instead to the headquarters of *Televen* TV Station in El Marqués, in East Caracas by instruction of González González. He went with the “very small car” and seemingly without fear of being reached by any lost bullet.

González González had told him that they, the leaders of the coup, had agreed with Chávez to meet there.

The bishop affirms that he communicated his decision to the Minister of the Interior Ramón Rodríguez Chacín who “was in agreement.”

In *Televen* Porras met with generals González González, Rommel Fuenmayor and Enrique Medina Gómez.

He witnessed there the telephone negotiations with Miraflores.

They informed the President that I was there to guarantee his life, as he had requested, but that he could not demand any terms.

Baltazar Porras narrates, and Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos also said so, as follows:

51 Porras, Baltazar: Op. Cit.

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The news came that someone, probably in Mr. José Vicente Rangel's car, was driving down the highway to *La Guaira* and was being tracked down by radar. They ordered to intercept any car using that highway.

He also recollects the stress caused by the threat of a military attack against the Palace:

When they [in Miraflores] said that they were ready to resist and that they had a tanks division loyal to the President which had already left *Fuerte Tiuna*, the generals answered that said tanks were ready to blow up Miraflores if necessary.

By that time, Chávez and his most loyal men were in the Palace. Had Bishop Baltazar Porras gone to Miraflores, as requested by the President, the threat of a military attack would have been weaker. Is that maybe the reason why González González deemed the bishop going to the Palace “inconvenient” and risky for the latter's security?

According to Porras, they suspected that Chávez was adopting a delaying tactic to wait until dawn with his followers in the Palace.

All had to be arranged as soon as possible to prevent any unexpected event.

The generals then “decided to go to Miraflores and force the President to fulfill his promise.”

They asked us to go along with them to act as safeguards, but when we were going down the corridor a phone call from the Presidential Palace said that the President had agreed to go to

Fuerte Tiuna, to the General Headquarters of the Army.

Porras tells that the military escort requested by Chávez had been denied because the Presidential Honour Guard “had enough logistics to transport him to *Fuerte Tiuna* without any problem whatsoever.”

Bishops Baltazar Porras and José Luis Azuaje left for the garrison in one of the automobiles of the Generals’ convoy.

They found the highway blocked close to the *La Carlota* air base. Anti-Chávez militants wanted to impede Chávez to leave the country through that airport. The names of officials and pro-Chávez leaders had been written on the concrete walls fencing the airport in that part of the highway, candles had been lit in front of the long wall as well. The TV stations were broadcasting live.

“Which he accepted”

In his book *Mi testimonio ante la historia* (My Testimony before History), written during his asylum in Bogota, Pedro Carmona Estanga noted:

The provisional Government was doomed to death prior to its inauguration, from the very moment when Chávez’s leave for Cuba was denied and the significance of the verification of his letter of resignation was deemed unimportant. Maybe the arguments of legal experts about the legal and sufficient value

of the announcement made by Lucas Rincón weighed on some military and civilians⁵².

“There were some who told Vice-Admiral Ramírez that the thesis that should be used was that of the power vacuum, and he replied that in the absence of a resignation letter by the President, we were in the presence of a Coup d’état.”

Attorney at law Allan Brewer Carias, present in *Fuerte Tiuna* that early morning, is the author of the thesis whereby a written resignation signed by the President was unnecessary.

He considered that the announcement by General Lucas Rincón, General Inspector of the National Armed Force, sufficed.

It was 03:35 a.m. when Rincón said:

Venezuelan citizens, good morning. The members of the High Military Command of the Armed Force of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela lament the regrettable developments occurred in the capital city yesterday. In view of such events, the President of the Republic has been requested to resign to his office, which he accepted. The members of the High Military Command place our offices at the disposal of the new officers who may be designated by the new authorities.

Lucas Rincón closed with a call “to the glorious people of Venezuela” to keep calm and act with civility, “thus rejecting any incitement to violence and unrest.”

52 Carmona Estanga, Pedro: *Mi testimonio ante la historia* (My Testimony before History), Editorial Actum, Bogotá, 2004.

Please keep your faith in your Armed Forces. Thank you very much!

Brewer-Carías claims that the address by the military chief turned the resignation of Chávez into “a public and obvious fact”⁵³.

The power vacuum had been born out of the fact that Lucas Rincón “had omitted every allusion to the Constitution and that the Vice President should be sworn in as temporary President.”

Such omission, according to Brewer-Carías, was sufficient to consider that there was a “Government crisis caused by the absence of the officials of the Executive Branch of Government, since nothing was said about who was the Head of the Executive Branch, announcing instead that supposedly there would be new authorities.”

An unconstitutional vacuum

Juan Carlos Rey, at the time head of the Political Science Unit of the Advanced Studies Institute (IDEA, Spanish acronym) wrote about the “power vacuum” thesis as follows:

The “constitutional power vacuum” is a fallacy intending to conceal the role of the Armed Force in the ousting of the President.

Juan Carlos Rey rebuts the pretension that the Armed Forces acted as simple “notaries” and limited themselves to “certify” the resignation of the President⁵⁴.

53 Brewer-Carías, Allan: Op. Cit.

54 Rey, Juan Carlos: *Consideraciones políticas sobre un insólito golpe de Estado* (Political Considerations about an Unbelievable Coup d'État), Mimeographic material. Caracas, July, 2002.

As if they had nothing to do with the events and concealing that such Force kept the President imprisoned and that they had asked Carmona to take office as President.

The National Armed Forces -underlines the Political Scientist- did not want to be in the forefront.

It is clear though that they had the real power and that they would remain in the shadows to watch over the new Government.

Juan Carlos Rey agrees that there actually was “a power vacuum”.

There is no doubt about it, but it was not a “constitutional vacuum” which might have resulted from a lack of constitutional provisions, but an *unconstitutional vacuum* as a deliberate consequence of the fact that the military had removed and illegally arrested the President, and that the Vice President had had to go hiding so as not to follow the President’s destiny, but at the same time there was not any military leader with the capacity to take over the power.

The rules of the game changed

I asked Vice-Admiral Ramírez Perez:

Why General Lucas Rincón announced to the country the resignation of the President?

And he answered:

It was true at the time Lucas Rincón was giving the press conference and announced the resignation of the President.

Ramírez Pérez told me that General Rincón had gone to Miraflores to talk with President Chávez at the time when he was negotiating the resignation, and General Manuel Rosendo and General Eliécer Hurtado Soucre were

present. But immediately after Lucas Rincón left for the Ministry of Defense, the rules of the game had changed.

In response, Chávez refused to resign and proclaimed himself an imprisoned President.

In this manner, Lucas had told the truth when he addressed to the country.

The General-in-chief's explanation

Which he accepted.

I asked Lucas Rincón about these three words when he had become a retired General and took, upon appointment by President Chávez, the office of Minister of Interior and Justice:

General, there are people who still wonder why you announced the President's resignation.

The 11th of April is a historic milestone. A regrettable fact, even though it was the best that could actually happen because the masks came down. Every one showed what they had in the bottom of their heart. We were let down by disloyalty. Let them live with their conscience!"⁵⁵.

Were you not disloyal when you announced the resignation?

No. We talked about it over the phone two or three times. I witnessed what was happening in Miraflores, because I was there until the early hours of that morning, and I went to *Fuerte Tiuna* complying with the orders issued by the Commander-in-chief.

Are you aware that the power vacuum thesis and the versions justifying the coup are based on your announcement?

55 VTV program *En Confianza*, 09-12-2003.

No. That's a lie. The world has watched the videos showing these men playing to be heroes. Each one recognized that they had been conspiring for nine months. Every one has to check his conscience.

Is your conscience clear?

Crystal clear.

Did you talk with the President three times on April 11th?

Yes. I went to *Fuerte Tiuna* complying with an order issued by the President to go there, check the situation and report. I arrived to my office and there was a large number of civilians and military. Many of them had had a few drinks. I then realized that they were celebrating. That is why we cannot talk of a power vacuum based on what I said. No! That was intentionally planned. What happened then, was to happen.

Rincón said that the pressure on Chávez was huge and included the threat to bomb Miraflores.

They had prepared the F-16 fighters in the *Libertador* Air Base in Maracay. They didn't take off because part of the staff opposed resistance.

“General Rommel Fuenmayor was pleased to comment that he was the one who conducted the psychological operation to call President Chávez over the phone and threat him with bombing Miraflores in 15 minutes if he failed to sign the resignation.”

In Miraflores, they kept in touch with units in the interior of the country, according to Rincón, “they were ready to leave for the capital city to rescue the constitution.”

In a quick evaluation performed with the High Command, we arrived at the conclusion that there was going to be a significant bloodshed, not only among military, but also among civilians, because we saw crowds of people in the shanty towns ready to come down to the city.

In order to avoid such bloodshed, we could talk and negotiate, provided that some conditions were met...

Initially, Rincón said, the coup leaders accepted the conditions set by Chávez, and later they rejected it “because of the Machiavellian idea of some of them that Mr. President had to be incarcerated, take him to La Carlota air base and commit him to public summary trial.”

Lucas Rincón recalled the case of an officer who “was a bit more conscient” and asked his companions in the coup:

What should we do with the laws and rules?

The answer was, according to him, as follows:

There are no laws or rules here. At this moment, we are the law and the rules.

Chávez supports Lucas Rincón's conduct

President Chávez not only kept his confidence in Lucas Rincón, but he even raised the latter's responsibilities as he appointed him Minister of Defense.

Martha Harnecker, a Chilean journalist, psychologist and intellectual was displeased with this and asked Chávez during an interview in La Orchila island after his reinstatement:

Can you explain why did you appoint Minister of Defense General Ricón, the general who announced to the country that you had resigned? Nobody understands this.

There are many versions, but I can tell the truth. Maybe it's me the only one who knows it accurately. I know what led him to say that. He is not guilty but a victim of a situation I was involved in. And, therefore, that is why I understand him. Maybe nobody else understands. I would have felt badly if I had removed Rincón.

Why? Was your position ambiguous at a certain moment?

Ambiguous would not be the word I'd choose, but there was a moment where we actually began to discuss the possibility of resigning, particularly, when I noticed that we had lost almost all the military force at hand to resist and move somewhere else. Then I called José Vicente, Willian Lara, the President of the Assembly, all of whom were in the Palace and other people, other ministers, and I asked them to come in the office. We examined the Constitution and began to think of the possibility of a resignation. I told the group: "I can resign, but if four conditions are met."

He listed the same four conditions mentioned above.

Then the emissaries (General Hurtado Soucre, Infrastructure Minister and General Rosendo) left for *Fuerte Tiuna* and talked

with the coup leaders and reported that the other party had accepted the conditions.

The President confirmed that Lucas Rincón, after spending all night long at the Palace, left for *Fuerte Tiuna* with his consent “to inquire about the true intentions of those people.” Lucas Rincón called him from there and, according to Chávez, said:

Mr. President, they are demanding your resignation and they are pressing me also to resign. I have told them that I would accept your decision.

Chávez answered:

Lucas, Rosendo and Hurtado have arrived here and said that the people there have accepted my conditions for such possible resignation. Tell them that I am going to resign.

The President explained to Harnecker:

I kind of gave him a green light. He came out and said what I said. What he said was: “The President has accepted to resign and I do the same with the High Command under my commission.” So, I am fully certain that he said what I had told him over the phone.

But, as told above, the rebel generals took back the agreement about the four conditions set by the President to sign the resignation letter.

Chávez further explains:

What happened 10, 20 minutes later? Lucas gave the declaration and left, but a few minutes later we were informed that they would

not accept any condition whatsoever. I was almost certain that they were not going to accept them. It was one way of making some time. They demanded me to leave as a prisoner; otherwise they would attack the Palace. In a few minutes the situation had totally changed. And that was the outcome: I resolved to go as a prisoner.

Lucas Rincón, Chávez told, left the military headquarters that early morning “to take his family to a safe place and on Saturday he went back to *Fuerte Tiuna* and joined García Carneiro and the group of generals that were resuming control of everything. What can I charge him?

“Lieutenant Colonel, put off the uniform!”

Once in *Fuerte Tiuna*, a lift takes Chávez and his companions to a room located in the office of the General Commander of the Army, Efraín Vásquez Velazco.

Some fifty generals and admirals were present. Some greeted him. Two or three, as Chávez recalls, stared at him with hatred in their eyes.

The imprisoned president sat at a table and General Rommel Fuenmayor, who had been designated speaker of the generals, took the floor.

In the statement given later before the Public Ministry, Chávez recalled that Fuenmayor respectfully addressed to him:

Well, Mr. President. We have called you here to sign the

resignation letter. It is the most advisable thing to do for the country. We appreciate your gesture⁵⁶.

They laid a model resignation letter drafted by the legal brains of the coup, but Chávez put it away and told them:

Look, Fuenmayor, in such conditions I am not going to resign to the Presidency of the Republic. So, take away that sheet of paper.

He repeated the four conditions firstly agreed and later rejected by the generals.

Vice-Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos puts in Chávez's mouth the following answer:

I don't resign without guarantees, such as security for my family, my entourage and for myself and to let me go to Cuba with my family⁵⁷.

In his own words, Chávez says that he simply answered to the coup leaders as follows:

You have two choices: either you put me in prison or you sent me to be shot by a firing squad. It is up to you.

Vásquez Velazco answered:

You cannot leave. You are going to be committed to trial here.

That is what Carrero Cuberos stated at the Prosecutor's Office.

Some time after the constitutional thread had been restored, Chávez appointed Carrero Cuberos ambassador to Berlin.

56 President Hugo Chávez's statement before a special committee of the Prosecutor General's Office, 05-04- 2002.

57 Quoted by Vice Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos, FAN Chief of Staff.

Carrero Cuberos recalls that Chávez corrected Vásquez Velazco when the latter told him that he would remain “under the custody of the National Armed Force.”

No, I am being imprisoned by the National Armed Force.

Before Chávez arrived, as per the account of Baltazar Porras, a Divisional General of the National Guard had warned:

My opinion is that we should let the President leave the country. We are the ones who know about this type of things and how to act to detain a person. What does it mean “under custody”? You are either imprisoned or free. There is no other situation. And we don’t have a warrant supporting such situation. How are we going to justify to the people that we have detained the President? Doesn’t that mean that he is imprisoned? Furthermore, many of you don’t know what it means to look after a prisoner, especially a President⁵⁸.

That is not subject of discussion. It is decided. He doesn’t leave.

In the short time they let Chávez talk, Chávez asked the generals what they would do with the National Assembly and the Governors.

Doesn’t it seem to you that you are violating the Constitution?

Carrero Cubero talks about Chávez’s brief address:

Since he is loquacious, he spoke some three minutes and posed all the questions nobody could answer.

58 Porras, Baltazar: Op. Cit.

The President told journalist María Cristina Uribe that, amidst that situation, he heard a voice say:

We need to kill him.

According to Chávez, his arguments have made some of the present hesitate:

How come that you don't realize what you are doing? It will be dawn in a while, and there you have the country. What are you going to tell that country?

General Néstor González González told him to shut up in a very "violent" manner, Chávez described.

We don't care about what you are saying! We haven't come here to discuss anything. We know perfectly well what we are going to do. This is over.

González González said so because, as per Chávez's account, he had noticed that the President's words were impacting the group.

But before he stopped talking he said:

Well, do as you please!

Carrero Cuberos recalls having seen Vásquez Velazco go to another room to deliberate with Carlos Alfonso Martínez, Héctor Ramírez Pérez and Pedro Carmona Estanga who had been hanging around.

Chávez never happened to see Carmona there, but he had heard the Head of the Business Association was there.

The prisoner stayed with bishops Porras and Azuaje, General

Vietri Vietri, head of the Military Honor Guard and a colonel participating in the coup.

Porras asked:

How do you feel?

Fine, but very anguished by what can be unleashed here. These persons are not anticipating the consequences⁵⁹.

Carrero Cuberos was puzzled because everybody congratulated Monseigneur Porras “as a hero.”

Porras tells that Chávez asked for coffee, but he did not like it, so he put it away and lit a cigarette, something Chávez never does in public.

I am here because after three years I still do not surrender to flattering or offers or blackmails or pressures from the gross oligarchy and the domestic and international powers. Had I given up, I would have been praised: “Oh how nice is Chávez! Even his wart is beautiful!”⁶⁰.

By that time, Porras tells, Chávez was still carrying his mobile phone. It rang. It was the First Lady, Marisabel de Chávez.

Take it easy, take it easy.

Later, Marisabel called Monseigneur Luis Azuaje. Both come from the same town, Barquisimeto, State of Lara.

Take care of Hugo.

In his book, Porras writes that he had told Chávez:

It is a pity to end a page like today's, with all those deaths!

59 Panorama, 04-12-2003.

60 Panorama, 04-12-2003.

Such deaths were the works of the opposition: Bandera Roja (Red Flag extremist shock gang), Acción Democrática party and the Metropolitan Police headed by Mayor Peña.

As per the Bishop's account, it was a "long" conversation. However, Carrero Cuberos says that such conversation lasted 10 minutes and ended when the military chiefs came back. Chávez, on his part, calculated that an hour had elapsed.

When the group came back from its deliberations, a National Guard general told the President:

We cannot accept your leaving the country. How are we to explain the people that we allowed a murderer to leave? You have to go to prison for genocide, for all that bloodbath.

Chávez recalled at the Prosecutor's Office that such officer was "practically judging me."

Yes, do it. I am an imprisoned President. Don't forget that. You have imprisoned the President of the Republic. I am not signing that resignation. No matter what you do against me.

According to Carrero Cuberos, a general told Chávez about the consequences of his refusal:

We have resolved to leave you under the custody of the National Armed Force, since you don't want to resign, and we are not ready to let you leave the country.

Well, I will take on my responsibility, you take on yours.

Carrero Cuberos said at the Prosecutor's Office that had the generals accepted Chávez's leaving the country, he "would have signed, no doubt."

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According to Chávez, they insisted:

Here you are. Sign the resignation letter.

Take away that piece of paper. Don't even show it to me. Do whatever you want with me, but I am not signing it.

Chávez tells that one of the generals took the resignation letter in his hands and said:

Well, no matter if you don't sign it. Anyway, you have resigned. You know it is a lie.

In Carrero Cuberos' version, rear Admiral Daniel Comisso Urdaneta "arrogantly" told Chávez:

Lieutenant Colonel, put off that uniform!

And González González added:

Don't worry we already have some civilian clothes so that he doesn't wear the uniform anymore.

To Carrero Cuberos it was something "humiliating."

I felt shame, because it makes no sense to humiliate anybody. I bid him farewell and embraced him. I wished him good luck.

Baltazar Porras affirms that Chávez shed a tear when he bid him and Monseigneur Azuaje farewell.

The priest puts in the prisoner's mouth these words:

I ask for your forgiveness for not having found the best way for good relations with the Church. Please, bless me.

Porras thinks that it was around 06:30 a.m. of that April 12th.

Chávez was taken to a private place and there he changed his uniform for a training garment. Eyewitnesses say that the clothes

did not match the type of sport training clothes usually worn by officers. He was given the pants of a soldier in a symbolic attempt to degrade him. Some versions, which happened to become public assumptions, say that in the interim an act of violence was perpetrated against Chávez. Yet, he has denied this.

With such garment he entered a room in the Military Policy headquarters inside *Fuerte Tiuna*, where he spent the first trench of his time deprived of liberty.

When Carrero Cuberos decided to leave, he watched in an adjacent room Pedro Carmona Estanga surrounded by journalists. He was giving a press conference. Vásquez Velasco stood by him and introduced him as the President of the Transition Government.

Carrero Cuberos went to General Lucas Rincón's Office in the fifth floor of the Ministry of Defense and what he saw caught his attention:

Actor Orlando Urdaneta, drunk, intoxicated, was there next to the office, enjoying himself with the developments⁶¹.

“We have a new President”

At 06:14 a.m. of Friday April 12th, 2002, a famous T.V. host, Napoleón Bravo, presented his *Venevisión* T.V. Channel show *24 horas*, as follows:

Good morning. We have a new President.

Later, he said:

61 Taken from the aforementioned statements of Vice Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos before the Prosecutor General's Office, on 04-22-2002.

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You might be asking yourselves Chávez's resignation. Firstly, it was a letter. Let me read for you the letter he signed.

Napoleón Bravo took care not to show the text he read to the camera:

In accordance with Article 236(3) of the Constitution, I remove the Vice President of the Republic, Diosdado Cabello, and all the ministers of the Executive Cabinet. Likewise, based on Article 233 of the Constitution of the Republic, I file before the country my irrevocable resignation to the office of President of the Republic which up to this date, April 12th, 2002, I have held. Given and signed in the city of Caracas, April 12th, 2002, 191st year of the Independence and 142nd year of the Federation.

Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías.

This letter, along with all the cover pages of the printed papers and the address by Lucas Rincón announcing the resignation of Chávez left no room for doubts: The President had resigned.

It just needed to be confirmed by Chávez himself with his own voice, but such voice had been vetoed.

Around 05:00 a.m., General Efraín Vásquez Velazco, General Commander of the Army, introduced Pedro Carmona Estanga to the media as the head of the new Transition Government.

Up to that moment, they spoke of a Government *Junta* for which there were abundant names. Nobody explained when, how and why such hypothetical *junta* yielded the way to the idea of a unipersonal power or how Carmona was chosen to embody such power.

“Somebody in the Presidential Office asked:

How come a Civilian-Military Junta had not been formed?

General Efraín Vásquez Velazco and some colonels of the Army and the National Guard answered that that was what had been planned, but that -given that they had thought of invoking the OAS Democratic Charter- the recommendation at that time was not to have any military participating in a Junta because it would smell like a coup d'état, thus rendering the relations with the OAS and the UNO complicated.

This could be prevented if the military components refrain from participating in the proposed Junta, which would be composed by Efraín Vásquez Velasco, Pedro Carmona Estanga and Carlos Ortega.

Vásquez Velazco decides that the Church should occupy the seat of the Armed Force in the Government Junta and they asked Cardinal Ignacio Velasco. But he refused to take part in the Junta because the Church does not approve of such participation.”

Cardinal Velasco, aka the “Black Vulture”

The Vatican forbids priests to take on governmental responsibilities. In 1983, in the height of the Sandinista Revolution, Pope John Paul II paid a visit to Nicaragua where he scolded priest Ernesto Cardinal for his participation in the Revolutionary Government as the Minister of Culture. The image of the Polish waving his finger to the Nicaraguan who was knelt before him was recorded for the annals of history.

Two decades later, in Venezuela, Cardinal Velasco refrained from participating in a Government Junta but not from influencing in the main decisions of the movement that ousted Hugo Chávez,

including the decision about the person who would succeed him in Miraflores⁶².

According to historian and counselor Jorge Olavarría, the suggestion of making Pedro Carmona the President came from Cardinal Velasco.

62 The participation of Cardinal Velasco was in line with that of the Apostolic Nuncio, Andrés Dupuy. Six months before the coup, with the conspiracy underway at the military garrisons, the Pope's representative offered a speech during the sixth anniversary of the Military Ordinariate, where he affirmed before military officers and chaplains that "God dislikes the tepid ones" (October 31, 2001). Two weeks before, Chávez had been received in an audience by the Pope John Paul II, a visit during which the Vatican hierarchy expressed their "preoccupation" about Venezuela's situation. In January, 2002, Dupuy gave a mass to the memory of José María Escrivá de Balaguer, the Opus Dei founder, where he talked about "the bravery to which the Gospel calls us". It was not difficult to understand that he was alluding to Chávez when he said: "Whatever the political or ideological regime proposed to us by the responsible of the nation, its actions will not escape from a superior judgment, a judgment more charged of consequences than the human history: God's judgment". The successive interventions of the prelate were compiled in a book written by himself: Dupuy, André: *Palabras en tiempos difíciles* (Words in Difficult Times), Caracas, 2005.

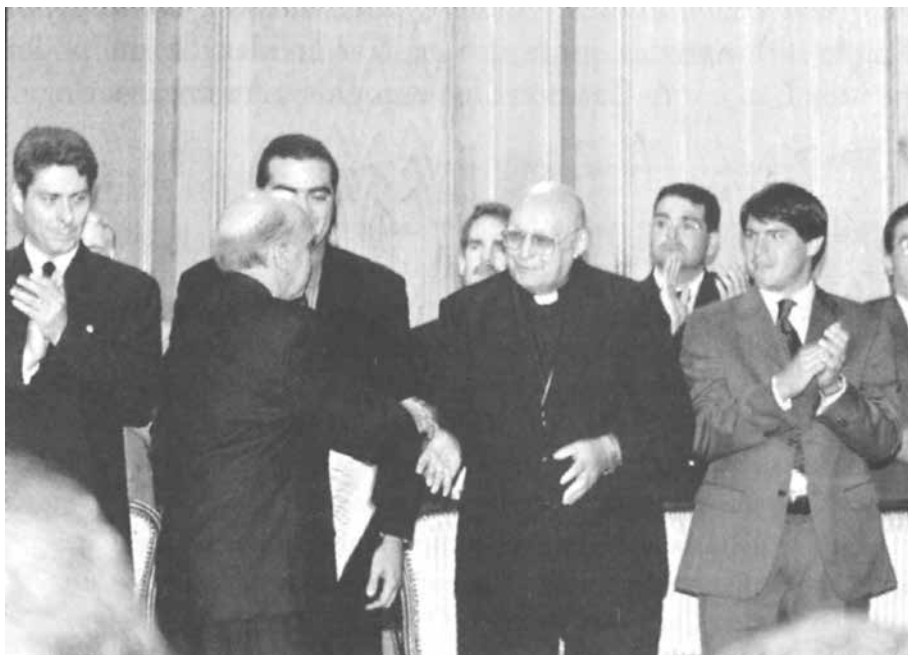


Photo: Orlando Ugueto.

The Cardinal was who endorsed Pedro Carmona, the one who sent him to the militaries. This is not widely known, but it is necessary to disclose it⁶³.

Effectively, Velasco, Archbishop of Caracas, played a role both discreet and active in the times preceding the coup d'état.

The official residence of the Archbishop, a house named *Cotoperí*, a few blocks away from *Globovision* TV Channel headquarters, was the seat of various meetings with politicians, businessmen and military. The alias used by Ignacio Velasco was the “Black Vulture”, probably inspired by the color of his cassock.

⁶³ Interview conducted by journalist José Israel González with Jorge Olavarría for Promar TV, nationally broadcasted during the interpellation of Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, on May 16, 2002, before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the coup d'état.

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“Quinta Cotoperí,” the official residence of Caracas Archbishop. There, Cardinal Ignacio Velasco was the host of several conspiratorial meetings between military officers, politicians, and businessmen, prior to the coup in 2002. For these meetings, Velasco used his code name: Zamuro Negro (Black Vulture). Photo: Enrique Hernández.

Journalist Luz Mely Reyes published a report in *Últimas Noticias* newspaper titled “*Santa Conspiración*” (Holy Conspiracy), one year after the coup, where various sources confirm Cardinal Velasco’s key role in choosing the successor of Hugo Chávez⁶⁴.

Even though he participated for months at meetings, the milestone unleashing his determination would have been, according to Reyes’s sources, the dismissal of several managers from PDVSA by the Head of State during the *Aló Presidente* presidential

64 Reyes, Luz Mely: *Santa conspiración. ¿Qué pasó? Nadie lo dice abiertamente. Eso sí, la historia empezó por lo menos seis meses antes.* (Saint Conspiracy (What happened? Nobody tells it openly. But, the truth is that it began at least six months before), *Últimas Noticias*, 04-11-2003.

T.V. program, broadcast on April 7th, 2002, in response to the shutdown of key activities in the oil industry.

As per the journalist's account:

"Black Vulture" told the party leaders that in view of the violation of the democratic rules it became necessary to oust this Government, establish a transitional one with a Council of State and asked for a confidence vote to decide who would head the transition.

In an interview with that paper, quoted in the report, Cardinal Velasco confirmed the meetings both in his residence in La Florida, Caracas, and at a luxurious mansion in Baruta municipality, but he assured that civilians and militaries attended such meetings to ask for his guidance only "about how to act vis-à-vis the situation of the country."

A source pointed out that in view that the groups involved failed to reach an agreement about who would head the transition (they mentioned Adán Celis, Enrique Tejera París and Cecilia Sosa Gómez), they asked the Church to participate.

Velasco told Últimas Noticias he just suggested not to appoint anyone of the old Venezuelan political parties.

He advised not to use violence and reminded of the need that regardless of the outcome, it was necessary to think of the neediest.

As per the priest's account, the military came to his house without uniform:

I learned later that they were officers.

One of those persons was General Néstor González González.

In his testimonial book, maybe in response to the report by Luz Mely Reyes, Carmona attempts to detach the Cardinal from his election:

I lack the elements to assume that my name has been suggested by Cardinal Ignacio Velasco, because even though I held meetings with him together with many national leaders to follow up the crisis, I deem it improbable that in such complex moments he has issued opinions in this connection.

In his book, Carmona, meandering, claims to ignore if names other than his were considered, and he adds further: “No wonder that amidst the deliberations it has happened that way.” He then mentioned Enrique Tejera París, Adán Celis, Alejandro Armas and Iván Rincón, president of the Supreme Court of Justice, and quotes as a source for such names General Efraín Vásquez Velasco, General Commander of the Army.

A vote amongst generals

But, why had the generals appointed Carmona alone and not as a part of a Government *Junta*? The refusal by Cardinal Velasco not to be a part of a triumvirate in view that the Commander of the Army had declined crushed that choice.

“Then a meeting of militaries of the Army was held at their General Command Headquarters concluding in relation to Pedro Carmona and Carlos Ortega:

CHAPTER IV: THE EVENING OF APRIL 11TH

A Junta made up by two is not possible. We need to decide and count.

Who votes for Ortega?

And nobody raised his hand.

Who votes for Carmona?

More or less half of them raised their hands.

Then, they sent for Carmona to appoint him President of the transition.

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CHAPTER V:

FRIDAY APRIL 12TH

A do-it-yourself government

Hello, cos!

The clock showed the time was 04:30 a.m. The whole nation was forced to spend hours in suspense, but most were worn out and fell asleep. That early morning of that Friday felt like it was Sunday. The political polarization, which is really a social polarization, is also portrayed in the realm of Morpheus. In the shantytowns, it is mostly a sad sleep, mixed with distress, bewilderment and fatigue. In the suburbs it is, generally, a pleasant light sleep, satisfied for the goal achieved at the expense of a few casualties and wounded people, but achieved at last almost effortlessly. But all what seemed invincible, all which was bragged about had crumbled down as a house of cards. The main avenue in *La Lagunita* (an elegant and expensive country club residential area) is deserted and quiet. There still is one hour left before the birds start singing. Only the canned whispers of TV sets that were not turned off the night before break the silence. Suddenly, silence is broken by a phone that rings loud.

Hello! Who calls at this time?

Hello, cos! It's me.

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“In the early hours of the morning of April 12th, at 04:30 a.m., I received a telephone call at my place, from a sister of Pedro Carmona, who is my cousin, and she asked me to go to the Palace of Miraflores to help him with the situation at hand.”

María Beatriz, his wife, has also woken up. A baby, a little older than one year, pleasantly sleeps in her cradle. Luckily, she is not awoken by the phone call, and neither is she aware of the developments taking place among adults in the last days and hours.

Rafael Arreaza Padilla and Pedro Carmona Estanga's mothers are relatives. Both have also the second family name Sigurani: Élide Padilla Sigurani –mother of Rafael Arreaza Padilla- and Elena Estanga Sigurani –mother of Pedro Carmona Estanga and of the lady that had phoned that morning.

Rigorously speaking, they are second cousins.

By April 2002, Rafael Arreaza is 41 years old, and has three university degrees (a physician, an attorney at law and political scientist), and also has governmental experience. He was the last president of the Venezuelan Social Security Institute (IVSS, Spanish acronym) of the second administration of Rafael Caldera, and he ended with such a good image that Hugo Chávez kept him in that office for some time when the latter began his administration back in 1999.

He joined Caldera's administration introduced by former *Acción Democrática* party leader and Finance Minister Luis Raúl

Matos Azócar, upon recommendation of his predecessor in the Social Security Institute, José Miguel Uzcátegui, a social Christian economist. Arreaza had earned Uzcátegui's trust and firstly appointed him a director and then Vice President of the institute so as to later propose him to Caldera as his successor when he was designated Ambassador to Madrid. Uzcátegui would feel betrayed later, when he read the statements of his successor claiming to have received the institute in pretty bad conditions.

During his management, Arreaza developed excellent relations to the Retiree and Pensioners Committee to the extent that the “seniors” – as they are colloquially called- even proposed Chávez to keep him indefinitely in that office.

In July 1999, he came back to the political arena as a candidate for the Constituent Assembly. He was backed by the UDH, the United for Human Rights party, founded by Edgar Silva, a leader of the aforementioned Retirees Committee, who also aspired to be elected a representative to the Constituent Assembly. The landslide vote for Chávez's candidates frustrated such aspirations.

Notwithstanding, the core demand of the Committee did penetrate the Constituent Assembly – the rule providing that pensions should not be lower than the minimum wage was carved in the stone of the 1999 Constitution.

“I leave immediately for Miraflores and by the time I arrived, Pedro Carmona was arriving. Time: 06:30 a.m.”

The arrival to the Palace

Rafael Arreaza and Pedro Carmona disagree as to the time of their arrival to Miraflores.

Carmona Estanga tells that Friday, April 12th, he left *Fuerte Tiuna* heading for *Santa Eduvigis*, his place of residence, with the desire of taking a one-hour break, take a shower and change clothes, barely when the sun began to rise in the horizon.

He was transported in a very big SUV with eight persons on board, among them, Allan Brewer-Carías and a civilian bodyguard, named Marcelo Sanabria, the same who showed up in *Fuerte Tiuna* in the early hours that day with a bullet-proof vest and a huge M-16 rifle providing the scene with a cinematographic spirit.

A version –mentioned and challenged by Carmona himself in his book- reads that at those early hours he went to visit former President Rafael Caldera, in *Tinajero*, Caldera's residence in Los Chorro, east Caracas. Noticeably, Carmona would borrow a few officials of Caldera's last administration (1994-1999).

At home, several phone calls delayed his plans. As per his account, at 08:00 a.m. an Army Colonel of his maximum trust, Gustavo Díaz Vivas, whom he had chosen to be his deputy chief of the Honor Guard, picked him up. The colonel's late father, rear Admiral Manuel Díaz Ugueto, was a great friend of Carmona. A convoy of cars and bodyguards –“assigned by Miraflores”, as he points out in his book- waited for him over half an hour.

One of the phone calls that delayed him was former President Carlos Andrés Pérez's, an archenemy of Chávez, who recommended him from the exile as follows:

Change everybody in the Palace guard⁶⁵.

Carmona estimates that he arrived in Miraflores before 09:00 a.m.

The Honor Guard Battalion, including Lieutenant Colonel (Jesús) Morao, paid the military honors to me, with the martial band and the national flag, with the voice "Watch Mr. President of the Republic". The same happened the morning of Saturday 13th. The Guard had acknowledged this way that I was the President of the Transition Government notwithstanding their treacherous counterstrike afterwards.

A tactical error

As to the attitude in those hours of the Military House (to which the Honour Guard Battalion is subordinated) I asked the officer holding the second most important position in its line of command. Jesús Morao Gardona was the head of the Honor Guard by April 2002 when I interviewed him during a special broadcast of the TV show *En Confianza*. By that time he had already become a brigade general.

How come that you provided Carmona with an escort and a convoy?

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There is a reason for that. We actually did provide security but for the purposes of knowing where Carmona was, his family, the house he was dwelling. All for purposes of knowing his moves⁶⁶.

I asked him about rear Admiral Carlos Molina Tamayo, designated by Carmona as the new head of the Military House, who appeared in uniform on April 12th, *de facto* reinstated to active service, from which Chávez had removed him.

I talked to Carlos Molina Tamayo and the whole group of professionals he had brought, the so-called Uope.

Morao Gardona was referring to the members of the Navy Special Operations Unit (UOPE, Spanish acronym), which was then raised to the category of Command, and later a Regiment, and recently turned into the VIII *Generalísimo Francisco de Miranda* Special Operations Brigade (BRIOPEM 8, Spanish acronym), which is a group of troops trained for combat missions under extreme conditions.

They are famous because of their toughness, coldness and severe training, including a survival course in inhospitable places, scuba diving and handling of all types of weapons. Chávez's then Minister of Interior, Navy Captain Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, is one of the UOPE founders. According to Morao Gardona, rear Admiral Molina Tamayo used Navy Special operations troops as a

⁶⁶ VTV program *En Confianza*, broadcasted on April 12, 2006 from the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade, in Maracay. By then, Morao Gardona was the commander of that brigade. General Raúl Isaías Baduel, by then Head of the Army, was also invited to this program. As the previous chief of the 42nd Brigade, Baduel had become a reference of the military resistance against Carmona.

security apparatus in Miraflores⁶⁷.

And did he take office of the Military House?

He did because the then Head of the Military House, Brigade General (José Aquiles) Vietri Vietri handed him over the office. I was present thereat.

And you remained as the Commander of the Honor Guard?

Fortunately I did. That was a tactical error they made.

Letting you holding that position?

Not only me, but my unit commanders.

Otherwise, Morao Gardona comments, “we wouldn’t have been able to plan all the actions that were executed to support the garrisons that never recognized Carmona as President.”

⁶⁷ Roberto Carlos González, UOPE member and by then a 3rd Sergeant Major, asserts that 95% of his unit’s members were not involved in the coup. He points out that Morao Gardona probably talked to Molina Tamayo, to Lieutenant Commander José Reinaldo Domínguez Moreno and Lieutenant De Moura Brito, the only members in his unit who, according to González, were accompanying Carmona’s Military House. González accounts that other five UOPE members, including him, were mobilized by helicopter from their base in Turiamo to Maiquetía at 8:00 p.m. in April 11th, following orders of the unit commander, Lieutenant Commander Juan Carlos Texeira, with the mission of providing security to Vice Admiral Vicente José Quevedo Moreno, General Inspector of the Army, during his trip from Maiquetía to the Navy headquarters, at San Bernardino. Once accomplished the mission, the five commanders slept at the post of command and, the following day, according to González, Lieutenant Commander De Moura Brito informed them that they shall go to Miraflores in order to meet his commander, Captain Texeira. González says that, once in the Presidential Palace prevailed confusion among them due to the lack of precise orders. The sergeant tells that by the night of April 12th, he and his fellow officers got into a vehicle of the presidential parade that took Carmona to his house and on his way returning to Miraflores, the vehicle left them at the Navy headquarters. The other UOPE members mobilized to Caracas were: Lieutenant Commander Nelson Hurtado Villegas, 1st class Sergeant Iván Enrique Tesara, 1st Sergeant César Corniel Aponte and 1st class Sergeant Eglis Ulises Rodríguez, recalls González.

Free access to the Palace

Along with Rafael Arreaza and some others, Pedro Carmona entered the President's Office through the Golden Gate – an access reserved to the presidents of the Republic only.

“I entered the Palace with Carmona and we found all doors open.”

Carmona perceived an atmosphere marked by a “tense calm and total inactivity as a result of the hurried decisions made the night before when Chavez and the Government abandoned the Palace.”

“Daniel Romero and Pedro Carmona's PA in Fedecamaras (the business association), rear Admiral Carlos Molina Tamayo and a National Guard colonel named Carrasquero were there.”

There was a minimum administrative staff and “the senior officials, as it may be imagined, did not show up,” tells Carmona.

“They briefed him (Carmona) about the situation (in Miraflores) and told him that only one telephone was working, and that the computers were inactive.”

Until that moment, the Government was made by three people: Carmona, Molina Tamayo and Colonel Díaz Vivas.

I promptly asked José Gregorio Vásquez, who was since early hours in the Palace and who had been introduced to me by a friend, to cooperate in the Deputy Ministry Office. Later, I asked Juan F. Mejía to join me to take the office of the Private Secretary of the Presidency.

José Gregorio Vásquez claims to have been the third person in arriving in Miraflores after Daniel Romero and Juan F. Mejías.

In an account titled *Mi paso por un gobierno breve* (My role in a brief government), Vásquez affirmed that he arrived by himself and he was let in as he said at the gates that he was “another common citizen” who had gone to “help Pedro Carmona Estanga”⁶⁸.

Three years later, when he appeared before the 25th Control Court to hear the charges of the Prosecutor as one of the co-drafters of the April 12th, 2002 decree, he told a different version:

I did not go (to Miraflores) as a nosy bystander. I was asked to go there⁶⁹.

“A few minutes later, Vice-Admiral Ramírez Pérez arrived. Other Rear Admirals, the Brigade General of the Air Force Pedro Pereira, the Divisional General of the National Guard Alfonso Martínez arrived as well, and they reported to Carmona that President Chávez was locked in a room at the Army General Headquarters.”

In the *Fuerte Tiuna* room, first stopover of his journey as a prisoner, Chávez thought about the developments. The

68 Vásquez, José Gregorio: Op. Cit.

69 El Universal, 10-26-2005.

paraphernalia of power had abandoned him. He was now a man alone and incommunicado, deprived of his liberty. Once again, his political decisions had reduced him to prison. After the 1992 rebellion he spent two years in prison, in San Carlos garrison and then in Yare prison, before Caldera, who became President surfing the wave of the February 4th developments, used the presidential pardon to dismiss the cases against the military committed to trial.

How many years in prison awaited him now? Would he survive this new setback? Will his enemies choose to kill him, thus forcing the “absolute absence of the President” provided for in the Constitution?

He lights a cigarette. He eats crackers and marmalade. He drinks coffee and water. He finally yields and falls asleep⁷⁰.

Pressures for stars and offices

“From that moment on many military officers began to arrive to the Palace, among them, the Army General Henry Lugo Peña, and colonel and lawyer Julio Rodríguez Salas, also of the army, who demanded immediately the second star to Lugo Peña –corresponding to division general – and his appointment as General Commander of the Army because he had risked his life. Further, he ranked first in his promotion to general.”

In his book, Carmona mentions the episode led by a “Brigade General” without saying the name of Lugo Peña:

He spoke bluntly of his aspiration to head the General Command of the Army. He told me that his promotion to divisional general

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had been postponed by Chávez despite his merits and that he had fought against the evil situation prevailing in the National Armed Force. So far, everything was understandable. But then he threatened that should he not be designated to such position, he would take a stance contrary to the Transition Government.

A threat that, according to Carmona, he rejected for deeming it “inacceptable.”

“The other one, Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas, demanded his immediate promotion to Brigade General because his participation in the developments was decisive.”

Amid the shadows of anonymity, Rodríguez Salas had a role of paramount importance in the times preceding the coup as he leaked to the press data about unrest in the National Armed Force, and later in the execution of the coup, in drafting the April 12th decree and finally in the negotiations to push Chávez’s resignation. His hand wrote the text faxed the night before to Miraflores for Chávez to sign.

“Carmona tells them that he is not knowledgeable in military matters and asked them to address to the Minister of Defense he had appointed, Ramírez Pérez who, in turn, tells them:

The time is not proper for these matters.”

That was the first sign of insubordination felt by Carmona. The first token, too, of the size of the challenge to be faced by his minister of Defense, Ramírez Pérez, to impose his leadership in the garrisons. After defeating Chávez, he had now to defeat the ambition and indiscipline of his own companions.

In fact, it was nothing personal against him. The Army did not want to subordinate to any man of the Navy or any other force but the Army itself. If the Army was appointing the president, how come it could not appoint the Defense Minister? Appointing Ramírez Pérez was another tactical error, invisible in the eyes blinded by power.

“Military officers and civilians continued to show up asking for soft, cushy jobs and offices. I had the chance to see discussions among persons who proposed themselves to the office of minister or ambassador.

It seemed an open-air fair where people scrambled for offices.

General Guaicaipuro Lameda also showed up and offered to chair PDVSA.”

Guaicaipuro Lameda had been promoted by Chávez to Brigade General, just like Néstor González González, after several years held back in the rank of colonels. Later, Lameda was appointed President of the State-run oil corporation PDVSA, but he quickly was possessed by the neoliberal and transnational vision prevailing among his managerial team.

“It became necessary to control the access gates to Miraflores because they were open and access was not restricted.”

Revision of the minimum wage

At 10:30 a.m. of Friday April 12, Carmona receives in Miraflores the top leaders of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV, Spanish acronym) with whom he had brokered an alliance to oust Chávez and become the “first businessman president”, as assessed by *El Universal* newspaper.

The alliance would involve the presence of the CTV leader Carlos Ortega in the proposed Government *Junta*. But the *Junta* was stillborn.

In his book, Carmona claims that in the night of April 11th, already surrounded by militaries in *Fuerte Tiuna*, he tried to contact Ortega several times over the phone. He had let Ortega with other opposition leaders in *Venevisión* TV Channel Station in *Las Palmas*, Caracas, but the unionist never called him back⁷¹.

71 Besides Carmona and Ortega, that gathering in *Venevisión* was also attended by *Venevisión*’s owner Gustavo Cisneros, Rafael Poleo, Baltazar Porras, Luis Miquilena and other figures, who were following the events broadcasted by TV. Carmona abandoned the place explaining that he would go to have a rest at the Four Season Hotel as his house was not secure. However, those who remained at *Venevisión* were surprised to see him later in *Fuerte Tiuna*, praised as the new President by the military. In his authorized biography, Gustavo Cisneros, un empresario global, Editorial Planeta, 2004 (Gustavo Cisneros, a global businessman), Pablo Bachelet describes as something normal the fact that politicians, businessmen, union leaders and intellectuals were gathered in *Venevisión* during the crisis. He also points out that Carmona presence at the military facility surprised Cisneros. Another author, Robert Carmona Borjas, suggests the contrary (*Más allá de la génesis del 11 de abril, vivencias de un testigo de excepción*, Libros de El Nacional, Caracas, 2009 – Beyond the April 11’s genesis, experiences of an exceptional witness).

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They met once again, less than 12 hours later, but with Carmona as acting President and hosting Ortega who had been reduced to the condition of visitor of the Palace.

The pictures portraying them both hand in hand, in the same political hierarchy, including priest Luis Ugalde, rector of the Andrés Bello Catholic University, on the occasion of the *La Esmeralda* Pact were history⁷².



“ThePact,” at Quinta La Esmeralda. Photo: Orlando Ugueto.

Noticeably, Ortega is uneasy in Miraflores. The picture taken by Ernesto Morgado accompanying the news printed by *El Nacional*

⁷² Pact or “democratic agreement” signed at La Esmeralda mansion by CTV and Fedecámaras, with the blessing of the Catholic Church, on 03-05-2002.

newspaper on that meeting catches the detail. He is sitting, cross-legged, with his right hand covering his mouth and nose and his index finger extended to his left eyebrow, his head leaning forward and his eyes looking at a certain point in the President's Office, totally absent-minded from what Carmona talks with Manuel Cova, Secretary-General of the CTV, who sits between them.

The morning after, on Saturday 13th, Carmona would call again Manuel Cova to Miraflores to offer him the Vice President's Office.

Seemingly, this was not addressed on Friday.

According to Carmona, at that first meeting they exchanged views about the national situation, especially labor issues, "including the cease of the strike which was in force since April 9th", whose purpose had been served with the ousting of Chávez.

Carmona writes:

I ratified that the decisions concerning the minimum salary adopted by Chávez's administration would not be amended.

However, his labor minister, César Carvallo, stated on Friday 12th in *Union Radio* station that the increase that had been decreed by Chávez was a mere "announcement" and was not reflected in any decree whatsoever:

The most responsible thing to do is to evaluate the studies performed by the preceding administration to determine the viability of such increase⁷³.

73 El Nacional, 04-13-2002.

That same line was published by *El Nacional* newspaper about the Carmona-CTV meeting: “New Government to revise salary increase.”

The minimum salary increase to Bs. 190,080.00, the paper reported, “will have to be revised and reconsidered” and is a “top item in Pedro Carmona Estanga’s agenda.”

In this manner, the first message received by the working class from the new Government was that their most recent achievement would be submitted to revision. Nobody seems to have noticed the absurdity of this.

At the meeting, the CTV proposed the reactivation of the Three-Party Committee (Government, *Fedecámaras* and CTV) which, according to the Labor Law –drafted by President Caldera- is a body which has to be compulsorily consulted to fix the minimum salary.

Chávez never recognized it. He argued that in 1997 such Committee became illegitimate as it approved of the elimination of retroactivity in the calculation of the severance pay of workers. Minimum salary increases decreed by Chávez always amounted over and above the inflation rate –something unconceivable for the neoliberal dogma- and they were decreed in a unilateral manner without consulting with the business associations or with the unions. The CTV aspired to revert such practice now that Carmona was in charge.

At the end of the meeting, Ortega told the reporters:

We are not governmental or pro-Government agents.

And he demanded the immediate reinstatement of the Three-Party Committee.

The CTV president backed, on anticipated basis, the dissolution of the National Assembly:

It is necessary to integrate a plural group to provide viability to the new national country⁷⁴.

In his book, Carmona tells how, “at the end of the meeting, in a brief separate talk”, Carlos Ortega proposed him to appoint León Arismendi as labor minister. León Arismendi was legal counsel of the CTV and had been deputy minister when Teodoro Petkoff was Planning Minister during the second term of Rafael Caldera⁷⁵.

I told Ortega that Arismendi was a valuable man and close to the labor sector and that I deemed him a fit man for something far more important: the Ministry of Planning and Development.

For the Ministry of Labor, Carmona had another candidate: César Augusto Carvallo, former deputy minister in that area

74 El Universal, 04-13-2002.

75 Arismendi, who was a legal advisor for the National Union of Media Workers (SNTM) accompanied the workers in their struggle against the illegal closing or lock out of El Nuevo País by its editor Rafael Poleo, at the end of 1994. Poleo counted on the support of the Caldera’s administration Minister of Work, Juan Nepomuceno Garrido, who was faced by Arismendi. Later on, when Caldera named Teodoro Petkoff as his Cordiplan Minister, the latter named Arismendi as his Deputy Minister. Nevertheless, it was a real surprise to find him later as the Planning Minister of Carmona. Arismendi has said to his friends that he learned of his promotion through media reports. In an interview with Petkoff, he told me that Carmona didn’t consult Arismendi about this designation. “That is difficult to believe”, I told him. He replied: “Difficult, but it was just like that”. In rigor, no picture shows Arismendi in Miraflores during the coup hours.

during Caldera's administration. Carmona pondered his good ties with the labor sector, "all of which Ortega fully consented."

Carvallo is a professor of Labor Law at the Andrés Bello Catholic University, and like the *de facto* Foreign Minister, José Rodríguez Iturbe, is an *Opus Dei* member.

After the meeting in Miraflores, Ortega took a plane and went home, in Punto Fijo, State of Falcon. He no longer felt he was a protagonist of what was happening.

The parties seek their share

The rumors about the resolution of the new Government to dissolve the National Assembly rapidly mushroomed in the political world that morning of April 12th, 2002.

The issue caused mixed reactions in the realm of the political parties.

Acción Democrática social democrat party, second largest parliamentary group was split in two trends. One vowed for the dissolution of the Parliament was led by Rafael Marín Jaén, Secretary General and Carlos Ortega, CTV President. The moderate one was led by Henry Ramos Allup, head of the parliamentary group of the party who, despite his deep antagonism against Chávez, not only opposed the closing of the Assembly, but in general, he opposed the first actions of the new Government⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Henry Ramos Allup gave an interview to journalist Clodovaldo Hernández for the newspaper Ciudad CCS, in May 2011, where he revealed that a week before the coup the text of Carmona's decree was already known: "There hasn't been a single important event without the participation of the media owners. First, that

Both Ramos Allup and César Pérez Vivas, head of the Social Christian Party *COPEI* parliamentary group had rapidly contacted several representatives of Chávez's forces in order to talk them over to help create a majority block willing to swear Carmona in, thus ending the weak legislative majority supporting Chávez.

To the new president such option was a double-edged sword – leaving the Assembly intact involved, on the one hand, allowing the Bolivarian Constitution to remain in force, thus keeping the political leadership of Chávez's followers many of whom were representatives at the Assembly. On the other hand, it involved to submit the *de facto* government to an unstable parliamentary majority, which at any moment could crumble down along with that tree that had been born with twisted stem.

“Immediately afterwards, Rafael Marín, then Secretary General of Acción Democrática party, showed up. He was aware of the decree and of the formation of a National Consultation Council which was to supersede the National Assembly.

He looked very calmed and the only concern he showed was that AD maintained the same proportion of representatives in the Consultation Council than it had in the National Assembly, and he demanded Carmona so.

I felt that all the political parties present in Miraflores did not care about

famous meeting where the three big powers raised their hands: Fedecámaras, CTV and the Church, at the Esmeralda mansion; then, the Carmonazo. It's not true that the decree fell from the sky; all of us have seen it a week before. We tried to modify certain things but it was impossible. In April 12th, Cardinal (Ignacio Velasco) called me to go to Miraflores and I said him: “I don't want to go and those who are there don't want me to go either”. They asked me if I wanted to talk to Carmona and I replied: “I don't talk to that asshole. It happened what it was going to happen, that was unsustainable” (<http://www.ciudadccs.info/?p=151024>)

the dissolution of the Assembly as long as they could keep the proportion of seats in the Consultation Council.”

Carmona wrote in his book about that meeting with Rafael Marín, but as per his account, it was held the morning of Saturday April 13th. He claims to have rejected Rafael Marín’s demand even though he failed to describe the latter’s reaction.

The president of the Episcopal Conference, Baltazar Porras, also showed up in Miraflores to speak for the political parties on April 12th. He arrived along with Monseigneur José Luis Azuaje, Secretary-General of the Conference.

Both conveyed to Carmona the message of nine representatives they had just talked to in the old seat of the Catholic hierarchy in Montalban. According to Porras, the representatives claimed that they represented all political parties, those supporting Chávez’s government and the opposition.

In his *Memorias de un Obispo* (A Bishop’s memoirs), Baltazar Porras refrains from giving names or parties. He simply attributed to COPEI’s César Pérez Vivas, the version whereby there was a “qualified majority willing to swear in Dr. Carmona as interim or acting president in the absence of the highest authority, should he personally appear before the National Assembly”⁷⁷.

By the time Carmona receives Baltazar Porras, Carlos Ortega and his CTV colleagues still were in the President’s Office along with many other visitors.

⁷⁷ Porras, Baltazar: Op. Cit.

We could barely greet Dr. Carmona and tell him that a group of representatives wanted to talk with him so as to propose a constitutional expedited solution to the power vacuum. He told us not to worry, that everything was working well and that in the afternoon there would be important announcements in a public event that was being called. After we told the representatives about that conversation, we got back to the Episcopal Conference.

The representatives Porras had talked with had also attended to Miraflores in the morning with the idea of directly talking to Carmona, but they were less lucky than the priest, because they hardly got the promise of an appointment for 03:00 p.m.

When they arrived again to the Palace, the Head of the Military House, Molina Tamayo was the one in charge of giving them the shocking news:

The President asked me to tell you that he will only be able to meet with you after he swears office today⁷⁸.

On his part, Carmona tells that the afternoon of Friday 12th, he learnt that a group of representatives “had wanted to see me, minutes before the ceremony.”

Unaware of their urgency, I suggested that we proceed immediately after the event that would take place in Ayacucho

78 The legislators group was composed of César Pérez Vivas, Carlos Casanova, Vestalia Araujo, Juan José Caldera, Liliana Hernández, Freddy Lepage, Luis Longart, Elías Mata and Timoteo Zambrano, according to the statement of journalist Patricia Poleo during her interpellation before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly, investigating the coup.

hall. I never underestimated the importance of that meeting, there was just a physical limitation of time.

Alfonso Marquina, deputy Head of the AD parliamentary group, said to his colleagues of the Political Committee of the Assembly that investigated the coup that the group left Miraflores approximately at 04:00 p.m., under this premise:

We are not staying to endorse the issuance of a decree that is unconstitutional, challenged and disapproved of by the truly democratic forces.

The representatives did not find unconstitutional the violation of the succession mechanism set forth in the Constitution, but their being deprived from their offices.

Carmona was between the dissolution of the Assembly and the legitimation offer given by the representatives.

They deem themselves fit to co-opt sufficient pro-Chávez votes for a new majority. That scenario, however, “did not happen to be but an assumption,” according to Carmona.

Had Luis Miquilena and other parliamentary leaders been able to add the votes required to reach that majority, how come that that has not happened so far, a circumstance which could have changed history and would have saved the nation so much suffering? Should that have been the case, how come that when I talked to him over the phone and posed him the question, he just gave elusive answers?

Aznar and Carmona talk over Eduardo Fernández's phone

On April 12th, by noon, someone from the Miraflores Palace phones former presidential candidate Eduardo Fernández and tells him:

There is much of confusion here. Come over to help guide this⁷⁹.

Fernández is a leader of Copei Social Christian party who ran for president against Carlos Andrés Pérez in the 1988 elections and looked like a possible winner for 1993.

His solidarity to Pérez on February 4th, 1992 cost him the presidential nomination of his party, which nominated Oswaldo Álvarez Paz instead after an open register primary elections. Ever since, Eduardo Fernández runs an ideological training center in Caracas, called IFEDEC.

The TV Cameras shot him on April 12th as he shared among smiles in Miraflores with Carmona, other politicians, priests and businessmen.

“At noon, Eduardo Fernández showed up with his mobile in hand shouting at me:

I got Aznar waiting here!

He pushed the doors into the Office. He gave the phone to Carmona and stayed inside for a while.”

79 Villegas Poljak, Ernesto. *Me fui antes de la juramentación* (I left before the presidential oath), interview with Eduardo Fernández, El Universal, 04-24-2002.

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José María Aznar, then President of the Spanish Government, headed the right-wing Popular Party, ideologically related to COPEI party and with the same international lines.

Besides talking with him over the phone, Aznar comforted Carmona with a communiqué issued by the European Union – whose pro tempore presidency was held by Spain- drafted in a manner that granted legitimacy and recognition of his *de facto* Government as it charged Chávez, in turn, with the responsibility for the developments of the day before, April 11th. On Friday 12th, the governments of Madrid and Washington issued a similar joint statement⁸⁰.

One year earlier, in May 2001, the Spanish Superior School of the Armed Forces (ESFAS, Spanish acronym) had included in their Staff Course the “Balboa” Specific Operating Planning Exercise which provided for an imaginary military multinational operation in a “Brown Country” with a historic and economic description which fitted Venezuela’s, including the same geographic coordinates. A Venezuelan air force officer participating that year in such course handed in a copy of the document to his superiors in the National Armed Force in Caracas⁸¹.

80 Fernández, José Manuel: *España sí participó en el golpe de Estado en Venezuela* (Spain did participate in Venezuela’s coup d’état). Report for the Spanish political party Izquierda Unida, available at www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a10865.html, 11-26-2004.

81 The documents related to the Balboa Plan were included by General Melvin López Hidalgo, secretary of the Defense Council of the Nation, in a presentation untitled *Indicios y evidencias sobre la participación de EE.UU en el golpe de Estado del 2002* (Indications and evidence about U.S. participation in the 2002 coup d’état), available at: Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *Operación Balboa* (Balboa

One day after the Aznar-Carmona phone talk, the Spanish ambassador to Caracas, Manuel Viturro, together with the U.S. ambassador, Charles Shapiro, met with Carmona. They are the only two diplomats visiting the *de facto* president who had just dissolved the branches of government and suspended the Constitution the day before.

A couple of years later, Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos of the social democrat Spanish Workers Socialist Party (PSOE), said:

In the preceding administration, a thing unheard of in the history of the Spanish democracy, the Spanish ambassador was briefed to support the coup, something that is not going to happen again in the future because we respect the popular will⁸².

By April 2002, the Venezuelan ambassador to Madrid was the retired general Raúl Salazar, who was the first Defense Minister of Hugo Chávez's government.

Witnesses to the developments inside *Fuerte Tiuna* indicate that during the hours of the coup Raúl Salazar kept permanent telephone contact with General Efraín Vásquez Velasco, general commander of the Army and his former subordinate.

Salazar came back to Venezuela and ever since is part of the ranks opposing Hugo Chávez.

Operation), weekly Quinto Día, edition 390, April 30-May 7, 2004.

82 Statements during the program *59 segundos* (59 Seconds) of Televisión Española and broadcasted to the world by the news agency Europa Press, on Tuesday November 23, 2004.

Fernández: “I left prior to the swear-in ceremony”

One of my last interviews for *El Universal* newspaper was with Eduardo Fernández, ten days after the coup. The questions denote the level of my contradictions with the editorial line of that newspaper. I resigned shortly after, in the first week of May, 2002.

Fernández failed to identify the friend who requested his presence in Miraflores on April 12.

I had understood the President had resigned and, therefore, there was a chance for a constitutional solution.

But nowhere in the Constitution reads that someone out of the succession line can arrive to hold the President’s Office.

My proposal, unfortunately, did not materialize. I always proposed that the President had to rectify or leave, and that the solution needed to be democratic, institutional and popular, because we cannot go back to the old practice of coup d’états.

... which actually happened.

... which was what was actually taking place.

Fernández recalled his opposition to the coup attempt led by Chávez in 1992.

Despite I had opposed Carlos Andrés Pérez like no one else, I opposed that he were ousted by a military coup, in the dark of the night, as I oppose today.

Fernández said he had made the following proposal to the decision-makers in Miraflores on April 12th:

Talk with Chávez and ask him to render a final service to the country. Ask him to remove Diosdado Cabello and designate a Vice President trusted by the country.

For the office of Vice President, Fernández suggested the name of Pedro Carmona.

Who did you propose this to?

Everyone willing to lend ears to me. The Vice President did not have to be Carmona. I recommended him because I had a good opinion about him, and I still do. He is a well-intentioned man, a righteous man, someone I deemed not prone to extremisms.

He issued a decree dissolving the public branches of government.

I cannot understand what happened in those last moments. Carmona will explain it. I will not incur in the inelegancy of those who flattered him first and then give him the cold shoulder. I made an effort to influence in the sense of getting the constituting record to reflect the facts: Chávez's resignation, the removal of the Vice President and that the new President swears in before the Assembly...

A body that was required to approve of the resignation of the President, according to the Constitution, for such resignation to be valid.

Of course. They told me Chávez had resigned before the High Command, but that body is not the appropriate authority to accept

it. The origin of this institutional disorder dates back to February 4th, 1992. Coups are a primitive, wild and barbaric remedy.

Even if they are practiced by enlightened and powerful elites.

Regardless if it is a left-wing or a right-wing coup. I said so back then, and I say it once again now – it is not bullets but ballots what changes governments. With abidance by the constitutional mechanisms. What had to be the role of the military? Just telling him: “Mr. President, we cannot accept orders to shoot the people. Listen to the voice of the country asking you to leave.” He resigns, he designates a Vice President who is sworn by the Assembly as President for 30 days, subject to a 30-day extension, to call for elections.

To Eduardo Fernández, in this manner “no suspicion would rise that we were implementing a dictatorship.”

I cannot thank enough the person who ended up reading the decree, Daniel Romero, who told me: “Doctor, don’t waste your time, everything is ready.” Then, I said: “If it is so, then I leave.” Someone told me: “But he will be sworn in later.” And I said “I prefer not to be present.”

Isn’t social Christianity not adversely affected by your outstanding presence in the interim Government?

No. José Curiel (Secretary-General of Copei, who signed the April 12th decree in representation of the political parties) is a well-intentioned man. Had I known he was there, I would have

invited to leave with me, considering the way how everything began. He will have to explain what led him to sign that.

The participation of the mayors from *Primero Justicia* party in the detention of pro Chávez officials was shockingly surprising⁸³.

I hope they give satisfactory explanations, but it seemed to me objectionable both in the case of the Interior Minister Ramón Rodríguez Chacín and the case of Tarek William Saab, who is not my cup of tea, but abusing their rights and the parliamentary immunity is not justifiable.

Eduardo Fernández said nothing about Aznar's phone call. And I knew nothing about that call then, so I couldn't pose any question about it.

The Prosecutor General denounces the coup and is censored

The journalists arrived to the seat of the Public Ministry in Urdaneta Avenue, Caracas, on Friday 12, before noon. According to rumors, the Prosecutor General, Isaías Rodríguez, will announce his resignation to his office.

Rodríguez is an emblematic figure in the V Republic: Vice President of the Constituent Assembly, first Vice President of Chávez later, and Prosecutor General at this time.

⁸³ Henrique Capriles Radonsky and Leopoldo López, mayors of Baruta and Chacao municipalities, both in the so-called Great Caracas, appeared together, leading the agents of their respective police corps, and carrying out the illegal detention of the Minister of Interior and Justice, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín.

His press team, led by Alexander Duarte and Yeneiza Delgado, do not deny the resignation. They let the rumor spread instead. The media desiring such resignation deem the rumor truthful.

Before coming down to the press conference room, Rodríguez receives a call from Elsie Rosales, a professor of Criminal Law at the Central University of Venezuela:

The latest developments violate the Constitutional rule of law of which, you Doctor, is the last hope.

Rodríguez came down without notes. His words came out as if he were in a classroom.

The Public Ministry has three prosecutors in *Fuerte Tiuna* at this time. The purpose is to interview the President or ex President Chávez, as you may wish to call him. Why interviewing him? First of all, because we have information disclosed by the military prosecutors who interviewed him according to which the President has not resigned. If the President effectively has not resigned, if written proof expressing such resignation is not showed to us, then President Chávez keeps being the President of the Republic.

It was the first voice on TV breaking the consensus around the resignation.

Furthermore, there is a more significant fact. If he is deprived from liberty, what was his crime? The crime of resigning? Is resigning a crime should that be the situation. And if he resigned and that is a crime, why is he incommunicado and why has the Public Ministry not been allowed to interview him through the director of

Fundamental Rights and the prosecutors accompanying her?

He placed the succession mechanism provided for in the Constitution in the spotlight:

On the other hand, the President is substituted by the Vice President. There is no proof that the Vice President has resigned as well or that the Vice President has been removed.

Conclusion:

This means that the developments in Venezuela violate the Washington Protocol and the Inter American Democratic Charter. That is, there is no doubt whatsoever that the constitutional rule of law has been totally violated and that we face a situation that cannot be deemed but as a coup d'état.

Only three minutes of his address were aired. Someone said:

Cut! Take it away!

For one hour he was speaking unaware that he was no longer aired. In the part that was censored a reporter asked him:

Are you aware that your statement can be a spark that can set fire throughout the country? That the followers of the President may believe that there is a coup d'état and that his exit was not voluntary, and feel, therefore, that it is legitimate for them to take the streets and (the country) catches more fire than yesterday?

I have the responsibility of showing the facts the way they are, and not in the express spirit of returning to the previous state of affairs. I want them to clarify whether it is a coup d'Etat or not. They have to tell us this is a coup d'état and then we will take on

the consequences. Then, the country and the world can see it is a coup. Let them not disguise it, let them not make it up. It is serious because they claimed there were no institutions here, there were no rights here, there was no rule of law here, there were no constitutional rules here. Do they exist today? Are they in force now?⁸⁴

In his book *Abril comienza en octubre* (April begins in October), Rodríguez tells that after the press conference he was phoned by Luis Miquilena, his former chief of the MVR party and in the Constituent Assembly, who the day before, on April 11th, had sealed his rupture with Chávez's government accusing him of having his "hands stained in blood."

Isaías, I stand by you. I did not know that Hugo was being held prisoner. You can count on me. I will call you again.

According to Rodríguez, that was the sentence uttered by Miquilena.

I still await that other call⁸⁵.

"This is a coup d'état"

In the morning of April 12, a scene similar to the one that took place at the Prosecutor General's Office was developing in

84 *Los documentos de abril. Antejudio, sentencia y revisión sobre los hechos del 11 de abril de 2002* (The April's documents. Preliminary Hearing, Sentence and Examination about the fact of April 11th, 2002). Edited by the Prosecutor General's Office, Caracas, 2005.

85 Rodríguez, Isaías: *Abril comienza en octubre* (April begins in October), Caracas, 2005.

San Cristóbal, capital city of the borderline State of Táchira, 841 km away from Caracas. The journalists convened to the official residence of the Governor were surprised as they noticed that the pro Chávez Governor Ronald Blanco La Cruz⁸⁶ did not call them to announce his resignation as promised by the rumors. Based on them, the private TV stations had brought microwave equipment to broadcast live.

Blanco La Cruz disappointed them as soon as he opened his mouth to say:

The authority has been usurped⁸⁷.

He explained that the only legal way to appoint a temporary President is to have the holder of that office resign first, and therefore, he invited the people and the media to ask “that illegal *junta*” to show the alleged resignation letter signed by Chávez.

It is important because if there is no resignation letter, the President is Hugo Chávez.

Ronald Blanco claimed to deeply love Chávez.

I am a part of the process he began and I express my solidarity to him wherever he is.

He stated that, in any case, a temporary President required to be appointed by the National Assembly “and not by a general who was with Chávez and when things turned rather difficult joined the best bidder.”

86 Retired Captain of the Army; one of the officials who rebelled under Chávez’ command on February 4th, 1992.

87 Blanco La Cruz, Ronald: *Esto es un golpe de Estado* (This is a coup d’état). Ediciones Nuevo Tiempo, 2006.

Venezuela: this is a coup d'état. In my capacity as Governor of Tachira State and I call the people so that they know the truth.

He defended Chávez's innocence in relation to the casualties of the day before.

Who is guilty, then? Riposted a journalist.

The responsible is Pedro Carmona. He has caused all those deaths. And we see now how he violates the Constitution.

At that point the reporter of *Venevisión* TV station withdrew her microphone. Blanco La Cruz reproached her:

Don't go! Let me finish my statements.

Later he clarified that he would not resign as the "civil society" was demanding.

I am the Governor until the sovereign people say otherwise. If it is by force, I call that unconstitutional *junta* to come to Táchira and take me to prison as they did to Chávez and to take me there where my brother is, the leader of this process, the one who awakened the hope of the people.

Almost nothing or nothing of the 12 minutes that lasted the press conference was broadcast live by TV channels and radio stations. In the best case, just enough to let the public know his refusal to resign.

Outside an emboldened mob, led by regional personalities of AD, COPEI and *Primero Justicia* parties firstly surrounded and later broke into the residence. The Governor was compelled to come out by the regional chief of the National Guard who was

involved in the conspiracy. As he was taken out amidst blows and pushes, Blanco La Cruz reaffirmed his position (“this is a coup d’état”) before being taken to the headquarters of the Regional Command of the National Guard. Once there, they released him.

Whether the forced evacuation of Blanco La Cruz as he denounced the coup was a live broadcast or recorded remains unclear. The scene was presented by journalist Ana Vaccarella during an interview with Ramón Escovar Salom, a former markedly anti-Chávez Prosecutor General. Like other Constitutional Law theoreticians, the illustrious counselor forgot the Rule of Law and the Human Rights and overreacted, instead, with his bowels: “It is necessary to reduce him by force and arrest him!”

The time of the decree

“Either I dissolve it or it dissolves me”

“As from 2:00 p.m. doctors Cecilia Sosa Gómez, Nelson Socorro and Gustavo Linarez Benzo came to the President’s Office and told me that they wanted to talk with Carmona.

When I inquired about the purpose of their visit so that I could inform Carmona, they told me that they had serious questions about the decree⁸⁸ and they asked me if I had read it.

I told them I knew nothing about the decree and they showed it to me.

As soon as I read it, I immediately say that it was an outrage, legally

⁸⁸ Perhaps he disagreed and probably he said so to Carmona inside the Palace, before the presidential oath. But lawyer Gustavo Linares Benzo defended the decree in *El Universal* on Saturday April 13th, 2002. His statement was published by journalist Giuliana Chiape in a box untitled *Doctrina del Estado de Necesidad justifica acciones* (Doctrine of the State of Necessity Justifies Actions).

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speaking, because you cannot dissolve with a decree offices elected by ballots.

I asked for a copy of the decree to make sure with Carmona if that was the right version. When he saw it he told me at once:

Yes, that is the decree.

I told him then:

Look, there are Magistrates and lawyers outside with very serious criticisms, which I share, about that draft decree.

He tells me:

Well, let them come in.

When Cecilia Sosa begins to talk about the unconstitutionality of the decree I make the following comment:

You cannot dissolve the Assembly because its members were elected by ballots. Further, it is a political mistake for a transition government to fight all the political parties represented at the Assembly and fight all governors.

Carmona says:

The thing is that Allan says that if we do not dissolve the Assembly immediately, sooner or later that Assembly is going to dissolve me.

Someone said that the Supreme Court of Justice could be dissolved without any problems, as well as the Prosecutor General's Office, The State Attorney's Office and the People Attorney's Office, because they could be temporarily designated until a new Assembly designates such offices in a legal manner."

In his statement, Rafael Arreaza failed to identify that "someone" who proposed such a thing.

Pedro Carmona, in contrast, discloses the full name: He says Cecilia Sosa Gómez, former president of the Supreme Court of Justice, went there to propose the creation of a "broader" Government *Junta*.

I told her that possibility was a valid one, but that same was not taken into account by those who had entrusted me with the creation of a transition Government, because the military preferred not to be directly involved in conducting the high Government.

The draft decree read by Sosa Gómez, Carmona writes, “provided for the preservation of the Supreme Court of Justice, despite its disastrous actions, given the advisability that one of the branches of government remained active and helped the transition.”

With the respect such distinguished law expert deserves, her reaction vis-à-vis such option was decisive. She said that if there was a branch of government deserving to be dissolved because of its outrages and the illegal way how it was made up that branch was the Supreme Court. The weight of her reasons was convincing and that drove the amendment of the draft decree to also provide for the temporary suspension of the Court until it were appointed by the resulting Legislative branch of government.

Carmona crowned the story with this sentence:

That is the way history is written.

Faced with the publication of this version –which was used as a fundamental evidence for the Prosecutor General’s Office to charge the crime of conspiracy to violently change the Constitution- Sosa Gómez sued Carmona for aggravated continuous libel, arguing that she never drafted anything or talked with him with the capacity of an adviser:

Doctor Carmona was coward enough to state in his book that I had advised him in his decree. That, Mr. Carmona, a woman of character like me does not forgive⁸⁹.

Fuenteovejuna's orphan decree

Victory knows many fathers and defeat is orphan. Had Carmona's government consolidated, the fatherhood of the decree would be disputed by many. But the attempt failed and the child is orphan. A denied child, engendered by the wind.

Pedro Carmona's version from his asylum in Bogota is ambiguous. He gets a number of people involved in drafting the decree, but he himself absolved them. Instead of saying "I did it", he builds a lawyers' *Fuenteovejuna*, the same way he makes up a military *Fuenteovejuna* where everybody and nobody are responsible for what happened.

In his book, Carmona tells that it was not an easy task to draft the text and adds that same didn't have "exclusive authorships":

Many opinions were received. Civilian and military jurists were heard, among them doctors Allan Brewer-Carías, Carlos Ayala Corao, Cecilia Sosa, Daniel Romero, Juan Rafalli, Gustavo Linares Benzo, José Gregorio Vásquez, colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas and a large number of political actors, but it cannot be said that their opinions were fully reflected or that the draft of the decree can be attributed to them. Among them, Daniel Romero was the rapporteur⁹⁰.

89 Agencia Bolivariana de Noticias (Bolivarian News Agency), 02-17-2005.

90 Carmona Estanga, Pedro: Op. Cit.

José Gregorio Vásquez talks about this with disappointment:

It keeps notoriously catching my attention the fact that many of the most important drafters of said record deny today any participation whatsoever. Let them live with their conscience⁹¹.

At Jorge Olavarría's office

A necessary flashback. Like in films, we go back to Wednesday April 10th. The clock strikes 06:00 p.m. We are 24 hours away from the developments of Thursday and 48 hours from the Carmona decree. In his office in *Centro Comercial La Pirámide, Prados del Este*, Jorge Olavarría, a lawyer and a historian, welcomes Allan Brewer-Carías. They are both experts in Constitutional Law and he is one of the few anti-Chávez politicians voted to the Constituent Assembly which drafted the 1999 Constitution.

Olavarría also hosted José Gregorio Vásquez and Daniel Romero, two much younger and less renowned attorneys at law. They brought the draft record that two days later Daniel Romero would read in front of the TV cameras. Olavarría and Brewer-Carías had the privilege of learning its content in beforehand.

Brewer-Carías has written two books on this topic: *La crisis de la democracia venezolana. La Carta Democrática Interamericana y los sucesos de abril de 2002*. (The crisis of Venezuelan democracy. The Inter American Democratic Charter and the developments of April 2002) and *En mi propia defensa* (In my own defense)

91 Vásquez, José Gregorio: Op. Cit.

(Editorial Jurídica Venezolana, Colección Opiniones y Alegatos Jurídicos, Caracas, 2006).

In the latter he talks about the meeting at Olavarria's office:

After hearing the other two lawyers I was surprised by the contents of the document. However, since they were persons I did not know and to whom I attributed no special influence on any circle, my reaction was not to provide any importance to that document, but deeming it another episode in the atmosphere of rumors and irrelevant initiatives which for some time were disturbing the country's life⁹².

Some time later, in an interview with journalist José Israel González, broadcast by *Promar TV* station in Barquisimeto, State of Lara, Jorge Olavarria told that the meeting at his office took place upon request of "someone" whose identity he refrained from disclosing.

Who was that "someone". Why a man renowned for his clarity conceals that "someone"? He took such mystery to his grave on April 18th, 2005, and now only anyone of such visitors he entertained in his office can shed light on this matter.

In the interview, Olavarria said:

Effectively, Wednesday 10, prior to the demonstration of April 11th, one person whose name I am not going to disclose asked me to talk with two lawyers I didn't know, doctors Daniel Romero and

92 Brewer-Carías, Allan Randolph: *En mi propia defensa* (In my own defense), Editorial Jurídica Venezolana, colección Opiniones y Alegatos Jurídicos, Caracas, 2006.

(the other one) I can't recall (I got his name written somewhere) and Dr. Brewer-Carías who is my old friend.

Olavarría said he didn't know Daniel Romero, who was anonymous until April 12th, 2002, when he entered history as the man who, smiley, read the Carmona decree⁹³:

I had never seen him before. I suspected he was into a matter related to the possibility of breaking the constitutional order, as many other possibilities. (They) came to talk with me especially in connection with an article I wrote for *El Nacional* in February titled: "The right to rebellion." That article impacted many people and later I published another article titled: "Article 350" where I laid the ethical, philosophical and juridical ground to exercise the right to rebellion.

Olavarría was in the party of taking on the coup d'état with full responsibility, derogate the 1999 Charter and declare that the 1961 Constitution was in force, as he himself wrote in *El Nacional* newspaper on April the 13th, 2002.

He did not reject the coup itself, but, on the contrary, the ambiguous form enshrined in the decree that partially recognized the Bolivarian Constitution which he deemed a "serious and unnecessary mistake with catastrophic consequences"⁹⁴.

93 The highlight of Daniel Romero's CV is his position as Secretary of the former President CAP. He was a lawyer, but also the owner of stallions.

94 Olavarría, Jorge: ¿Hacia dónde vamos? (Where are we going?), *El Nacional*, 04-13-2002

Lawyers in *Fuerte Tiuna*

Like all Venezuelans, Allan Brewer-Carías stayed awake beyond the midnight of April 11th, 2002.

At such time you call no one, save for emergencies.

The phone rang.

The clock strikes 01:00 a.m. It seemed that it still was Thursday but it was Friday 12th.

Hello!

Brewer-Carías is a renowned university professor, with many books written, graduated as a lawyer 40 years earlier in the Central University of Venezuela. He stayed briefly in the Executive Power, when historian Ramón J. Velásquez appointed him State Minister for Decentralization during the temporary Government that superseded Carlos Andrés Pérez the last nine months of 1993. In 1999, as noted above, he became an opposition member of the Constituent Assembly. His law firm has drafted several State constitutions in Venezuela. Among his peers in the firm stand out, *inter alia*, the Social Christian leader José Rodríguez Iturbe, future foreign minister of the *de facto* Government.

Hello, Allan?

It was a voice he was acquainted with – Pedro Carmona Estanga's voice.

With the trust conceivable among friends or companions of the same cause only, Carmona asked him to go to the Army General Command headquarters in *Fuerte Tiuna*. The reason? The draft

record with which the Government he would preside with the blessings of the generals. Hugo Chávez is still in Miraflores, he still has not given in. His resignation is barely a rumor. It is still four hours before General Lucas Rincón announce it to the country. In politics, like in soccer, it is also possible to play offside, despite the risks.

I am sending my driver for you.

Around 02:00 a.m. the lawyer is already in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

They led me into a lift, I don't know exactly to which floor, and into a small office where Dr. Carmona was. I greeted him and he requested me to analyze a document he had been given when he arrived⁹⁵.

Once again, he saw his colleagues Daniel Romero and José Gregorio Vásquez who were fine-tuning the same draft document they had produced in Olavarriá's office on Wednesday, 32 hours earlier.

That is Brewer-Carías' version. But there is another one.

In a number of articles published in *El Nuevo País* newspaper, journalist Patricia Poleo told before anyone else some internal details of the coup. The columnist was not in *Fuerte Tiuna*, but she has a close relation to the most radical military and political sectors against Hugo Chávez.

As per her account, while Carmona was in one of the offices of the Army General Command, Brewer-Carías was in the

95 Brewer-Carías, Alan R., Op. Cit.

opposite office “drafting with his own hand what later would be the constituting decree” in the company of Isaac Pérez Recao, a businessman who so far had remained unknown and who, according to herself, allegedly oiled the gears for the coup⁹⁶.

Poleo attributes to Brewer-Carías the following words:

The resignation doesn't matter. Lucas is going to announce it on TV and that is more than enough.

The announcement by the General Inspector of the National Armed Force, General Lucas Rincón Romero took place almost one and a half hour after Brewer-Carías arrived in *Fuerte Tiuna*, at 03:25 a.m.

In his defense, Brewer-Carías highlights that the journalist wasn't there and when she went to make her statement before the Prosecutor General's Office she contributed no data about sources confirming her version either.

Teodoro Petkoff, editor of the evening newspaper *Tal Cual*, contributed before Poleo did to the association of Brewer-Carías with the decree. He did so after Carmona was sworn in on April 12th, when he challenged in a *Televen* TV station program the dictatorial nature of his Government as he noted:

Brewer has to explain such decree before the OAS⁹⁷.

Later, Petkoff took his words back when he declared as a witness before the Prosecutor General's Office where he attributed them to a “flippancy” on his part⁹⁸.

96 El Nuevo País, 04-14-2002.

97 Televen, 04-12-2002.

98 Brewer-Carías, Alan R., Op. Cit.

According to Brewer-Carías' version, he went to *Fuerte Tiuna* upon Carmona's request to give a "legal opinion" about a document drafted by third parties.

In his book he says his opinion was negative because the draft involved a breach of the legal system, contrary to the Inter American Democratic Charter, which was invoked by the text itself.

Brewer-Carías says that he tried to express his adverse opinion to Carmona that very early morning, but he couldn't do it.

It was unexplainable to me that Dr. Carmona had not made an effort or has not taken the lead to hear the opinion he had requested me to give. I had no occasion or opportunity to talk with him in private because there were many officers and persons surrounding him, and pose my comments and warning about the document which he consulted with me.

At a certain time that early morning, once the goal of ousting Hugo Chávez was attained and he became a prisoner in *Fuerte Tiuna*, the military and civilians who were at the Army General Command began to go home and Brewer-Carías set aside his juridical-political concerns.

The truth is that my immediate concern was that I had no car to leave that place.

He asked for help to Carmona's assistants who, according to his account, put him in a van that would take Pedro Carmona, already chosen by the generals as president. Other six people were

on board, which, in Brewer-Carías' version, inhibited him from addressing such thorny issue.

That is the reason why I couldn't talk to him.

Neither he nor any other person who has written about it explain if the draft decree referred to the deaths of the day after, as the document disclosed on April 12th did.

Without those casualties, had there been a decree anyway? And had there been a decree, what was it based on?

“Bye Hugo”

In the early hours of Friday April 12, Editor Teodoro Petkoff writes the editorial note of *Tal Cual*, the evening tabloid he founded. Similarly to the first edition of the paper when the headline read: “Hi Hugo”, on the April 12th edition the headline read: “Bye Hugo.”

In the note, after giving his own account of the April 11th developments, Petkoff shows his agreement with obviating the presidential succession mechanism provided under the Constitution –“we'll see later how to solve the problem of the forms”-, in the understanding that Chávez would be superseded by a Junta:

There is no way to institutionally solve the political change occurred. Vice President, President of the Assembly, President of the Supreme Court do not outlive the collapse of the *chavetazo* (pejorative form to refer to the ousting of Chávez). That institutional line of command died with the regime. We will see later how to

solve the problem of the forms, but the Government Junta has a single and fundamental goal: leading the Venezuelan people to promptly decide the government they want in order to restore the democratic continuity that rests on the people's will⁹⁹.

His lack of concern for formalities which hours later smashed against the crowning of Carmona, a resurrection of medieval absolutism unheard of which led Petkoff to distance himself in an interview in *Televen* TV station. He described the situation as a coup d'état and branded dictatorial the powers taken on by Carmona. Even though he took a different stance, Petkoff was breaking with the legitimizing consensus about the *de facto* Government, as earlier did the then removed Prosecutor General Isaías Rodríguez.

I invited Petkoff to the TV interview show "En Confianza" where I read the paragraph quoted above from his editorial note of April 12th, 2002¹⁰⁰.

Yes. That editorial note was written the morning of Friday 12. That is to say, when every Venezuelan had learned that Chávez had resigned. That is what the Chief of the National Armed Force had informed: "which he accepted." That note is a political analysis. By the way, I wrote then "Chávez made all the mistakes." One week later Chávez invited me to talk and I told him the same: "Hugo, you committed all the typical mistakes of the far left to create the conditions leading to your ousting. You have just come back to

99 Tal Cual, 04-12-2002

100 VTV, 05-08-2006

office; try not to keep on making the same mistakes.” I couldn’t imagine what followed Chávez’s ousting.

Did you believe that a Government Junta was going to be set up?

I don’t know what was going to be set up.

Here reads: “The Government Junta has a single and...”

That’s right. One imagined that something had to happen.

But that was outside the Constitution. The constitutional procedure was that the Vice President should have taken office.

Of course, but the line of command was so closely linked to the President that it was unreal to imagine that this could be upheld. Then, within the Constitution, with the Assembly in force, the Assembly had to solve the problem. There was a good number of representatives willing to participate in a juridical reshuffle. But the important thing is that when the coup takes place many people were in the hiding, I came up and said: “this is an unacceptable coup d’état.”

During the interview I showed Petkoff the back page of *Tal Cual* of April 12th, with a picture of mayor of Libertador Municipality of Caracas, Freddy Bernal under the headline: “Where is Bernal?”

This is astonishing because your paper here instigates persecutions. Petkoff took the paper in his hands and checked it carefully.

No. This isn’t mine. This is another thing.

Why had Bernal to be persecuted?

No, here reads: “So far, no one knows the whereabouts of mayor of Libertador Municipality, Freddy Bernal. It was learned that he had sought asylum at the Iraqi Embassy.”

Exactly.

Nay, this is a journalistic game.

A journalistic game? Why they had to look for Bernal?

No. It doesn't read here that Bernal had to be looked for. It is simply asking where he is. But, indeed, I have nothing to do with that.

In hard times is when you come to know a person.

Precisely. When nobody came out to denounce Carmona's government, I did.

And history recognizes this.

Ah, O.K. It is good that history recognizes that.

But one sees such things and says: “Well, but Petkoff here follows suit in a fascist persecution.”

No, no. Read it through, man, and you will understand what it says. You will realize I don't.

When amidst the persecutions, a person that is being hunted is placed here you are making him responsible of things and inciting his finding and incrimination.

No. This is a typical police blotter page.

That's right, police blotter.

Well, this is no incitation to anything.

Incognito in the Cuban Embassy

On Friday April 12th, I woke up a bit later than usual. Among other things, I didn't have to go to *Venezolana de Television*, the State-run TV station where for nine months I had been hosting very early in the morning the two interviews of the *En Confianza* news TV program. The headquarters in *Los Ruices*, East Caracas, was taken by the Miranda State police and its signal was blocked as promised the night before by the Governor of that State, Enrique Mendoza.

The coup had left me all of a sudden without that job on TV. With the "rubbish" (as Mendoza called it) closed its programs were also closed.

I went straight forward to the newsroom of *El Universal*, in Urdaneta Avenue, a few blocks away from Miraflores Palace.

My direct boss briefed me for the day:

Drop by the Cuban Embassy.

Three days earlier, Ruth Capriles, leader of an NGO called "*Red de Veedores de la UCAB*" (Andres Bello Catholic University Watchdogs Network) had urged a crowd in front of PDVSA building in *Chuaao*, Caracas as follows:

I have just been informed that this afternoon people carrying weapons in black cases keep on going out of the Cuban Embassy...¹⁰¹

101 Sánchez Otero, Germán: *Agresión a la embajada de Cuba. Crónica de un plan sincronizado*, Ediciones Venpres, (Aggression against Cuban Embassy. Chronicle of a synchronized plan).

Ever since, the diplomatic seat was surrounded by protesters. That morning Salvador Romaní, a prominent counterrevolutionary Cuban leader, hanged around there openly.

I got there in a taxi paid by the newspaper. I carried my tape recorder and my notebook and wore dark glasses. My face was pretty well known by those who claimed for revenge in that place.

When I approached the embassy, I noticed that the demonstration drifted towards a riot. Some young protesters, excited, pushed and hit a car with diplomatic license plates, furiously rocking it.

A few meters from that place, on the right side, I could watch the faces of Vicente Bello and Jorge Garrido, leaders of the Union both of them, a party which worked as an election campaign platform for the brother in law of the latter, Francisco Arias Cárdenas in the elections campaign when he ran for President against Hugo Chávez in year 2000. Bello used to be a partisan of Teodoro Petkoff's MAS and Garrido, a retired Army colonel, was one of the rebels of November 27th, 1992.

We came to see if it is true that Nicolás Maduro and other representatives are here. Should that be the case, we want that their rights are respected. But the Cubans gave us no information and those people outside are mad. We are leaving.

In view of their explanation, I asked them:

How about me? Is it wise for me to stay?

You'd better leave. Don't take chances.

We bid farewell. I got back in the taxi and told the driver to move.

PART II COUP AND COUNTER-COUP

In that moment the cars passing by the Embassy were stopped and checked by the fanatics who had put half their bodies through the car windows searching for hidden Chávez's supporters. I was a trophy for them.

Sir, let me advise you to engage reverse gear.

I cannot. This is a one way street.

If they see me here they can burn your car up.

Indeed? Fuck no!

As the driver handled the wheel with his left hand and engaged the gear stick with his right hand, my phone rang.

Hello?

It's me child, where are you?

My sister Asia's voice sounded worried.

She, a professional physician, worked at the People's Attorney Office as Special Health Defender, so all those days she was helping the victims of violence and trying to avoid violence outbreaks in the political demonstrations so frequent in those days.

I am at the Cuban Embassy, but I am leaving because this is turning rather dangerous.

Asia's voice seemed to break down.

Are you taking your wife and kid with you?

In less than one second I realized the misunderstanding.

No, come on sis! I am not leaving the country. I am getting away from the Embassy because there's a bunch of fascists destroying cars and hunting down Chávez's followers.

We both laughed for long, for the first time in many hours.

VTV Station workers were jobless and without solidarity

Meanwhile outside the building of VTV state-run TV station in *Los Ruices* Main Road, Caracas, a group of administrative workers, cameramen, assistants, reporters and workers in general were gathered but the police prevented them from entering their workplaces. From the cars passing by, people shouted at them:

Chavistas, killers!

Most of the workers wanted information about their labor destiny. Some intended to hand over the cameras and microphones and batteries they carried home the night before as they could not make it back to the office due to the troublesome night before. Others had their cars and personal properties locked inside.

I was back in the newsroom of *El Universal* when my mobile rang again. It was Maria Silva, then producer of the *En Confianza* TV program, who told me about the situation at the channel. I felt a bit guilty for not being there with my companions in that situation and I tried to do something for them. I tried to contact the authorities of the journalists association who should defend the press workers in precisely such circumstances.

I told a workmate who was a member of the Board of Directors of one of the journalists associations and explained what was

happening at the headquarters of VTV and requested the presence of one of the association leaders in the facilities.

Unfortunately, they cannot make it to Channel 8 because they are looking after the wake and funeral of Tortoza.

Her response was like a cold shower.

Months later, I met Mrs. Ana Rosa Cruz de Tortoza with whom I befriended. She was Tortoza's mother and I interviewed her on her son. She, like Tortoza's brothers, denied to have received any help whatsoever from the colleagues association when Jorge Tortoza was buried.

From the gates of VTV, journalist María Teresa Gutiérrez, anchor of the TV program *Opinión en la noticia* called the director of the private *Globovision* TV station, Alberto Federico Ravell.

Under the Jaime Lusinchi's administration, Ravell was president of VTV channel 8 and María Teresa conveyed to him her workmates' annoyance for the coverage *Globovision* was making about the closing of VTV the night before. She also asked him to send a crew to *Los Ruices* to report the situation at the gates of the state-run TV station.

Are you going to allow this? Aren't you going to cover the closing of the channel? Aren't you going to inform that all the workers are asking the resumption of activities?

Well, what did you expect? This is something you have earned. Let me see what I can do anyway¹⁰².

102 VTV program *En Confianza*, interview with María Teresa Gutiérrez, 10-05-2004.

“My Dad has not resigned”

In the morning of Friday April 12th, a military lends a phone to prisoner Hugo Chávez so that he may talk with his family.

María Gabriela feels both surprise and relief as she hears the voice over the phone.

My dear, I haven't resigned. Talk to Fidel and tell him I am a prisoner and ask him to tell the truth to the world.

At 10:02, Havana time, one of Fidel Castro's assistants tells him that María Gabriela Chávez is calling him from Caracas.

After listening to her, he asks her:

Are you willing to tell the world with your own words?

She replied with a question:

What wouldn't I do for my father?¹⁰³

Around 11:00 a.m., Randy Alonso, anchor of the *Mesa Redonda* show of the Cuban TV interviews her over the phone.

At 12:40 her words are aired by the *Noticiero Nacional de Televisión* (National TV Newsprogram). The Cuban Government delivered to the news agencies the transcribed statements of the Venezuelan young girl. A copy of the audio was handed out to the international television correspondents in the island.

At noon the news has travelled from Caracas to Havana, from Havana to Atlanta –headquarters of CNN- and back to Venezuela.

103 Castro, Fidel: *Cien horas con Fidel. Conversaciones con Ignacio Ramonet* (One Hundred Hours with Fidel. Conversations with Ignacio Ramonet). Second edition. Reviewed and expanded with new data. State Council's Publications Office. La Habana, 2006.

Those with Cable TV and satellite subscription could hear the version of Chávez's daughter. The local TV stations which had the audio from the news agencies and TV stations associated with correspondents in Cuba refrained from disclosing it.

Carlos Parra, an outstanding stockholder of *Editorial Galac*, was listening to *RCR* radio station as he was astonished with the news in the afternoon. They broadcast María Gabriela Chávez's statement denying the resignation of her father.

Even though the *Grupo IBC* corporation owns both *RCR* and *RCTV* TV station, the latter did not include in its information offer that day such statements.

“Do you want to be a minister?”

In Miraflores, Carmona not only had to decide whether to dissolve or not the branches of government, and which ones, but also what entities would supersede the ones that in short would be dissolved. After the announcement of the decree, he would have in his hands the very personal power to do so. The first concern, as one may assume, was to appoint an Executive Cabinet. Where should his ministers come from?

“People kept on parading asking for offices and positions.

Suddenly, Pedro Carmona calls me to a corner and tells me:

Would you accept the ministry of Health? You are knowledgeable and your administration as president of the Social Security Institute was brilliant.

I replied:

I cannot refuse.”

Incredibly, despite the time they had been preparing everything, Carmona could not complete a Council of Ministers.

The intention was to make partial announcements. The first trench was to be sworn in on Saturday 13th in Miraflores, but, as we will see later, the crowds surrounding the Palace avoided this and the ceremony was transferred to *Fuerte Tiuna*, but it never took place.

The appointments announced through the media were the following:

- Foreign Minister: José “Pepe” Rodríguez Iturbe.
- Chief of Staff: Vice-Admiral (retired) Jesús Enrique Briceño.
- Minister of Interior Relations: Divisional General (National Guard) Rafael Damiani Bustillos.
- Minister of Defense: Vice-Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez.
- Finance Minister: Leopoldo Martínez.
- Labor Minister: César Augusto Carvallo.
- Agriculture Minister: Raúl de Armas.
- State Attorney: Daniel Romero.
- President of PDVSA: (Retired) General Guaicaipuro Lameda.
- Planning Minister: León Arismendi.
- Health Minister: Rafael Arreaza.
- Education Minister: Leonardo Carvajal.

- In his book, Pedro Carmona adds a few other appointments he had in mind:
 - President of the Central Bank of Venezuela: Domingo Fontiveros.
 - Energy and Mines Minister: Eduardo Preselj.
 - Infrastructure Minister: Juan Andrés Sosa Branger.
 - Social Development Fund: Maxim Ross.
 - Director of the DISIP (Police Security and Intelligence Division, the political police corps): (Retired) General Ovidio Poggioli¹⁰⁴.

104 Besides his position as the DIM director, Poggioli had been director of the Maiquetía International Airport during Chávez' administration. Two weeks after the coup, with Chávez reinstituted in his office, the National Assembly's deputies Juan Barreto and Pedro Carreño revealed in a press conference two telephone recordings of Poggioli, corresponding to April 12th, 2002, where he informs other person that on that day he would assume the direction of the DISIP and that he intended to capture pro-Chávez officials, at the embassies where they supposedly had taken asylum. "I'm going to look for José Vicente Rangel and the other son of the bitch of MAS, the Otaízas, *compadre*. Even if it is in China I'm sending people to look for that bastard; he and the other one hiding at China's Embassy. Diosdado Cabello at Cuba's (Embassy), Bernal at Libya's". The mission would be accomplished "with some commands". If true, his intentions imply a violation of the International Law. What we hear further on is thrilling: "I'm sending people to violate the Ambassador's wife" and it's understood he's talking about the Cuban Ambassador. Poggioli denied the veracity of this recording and requested a criminal investigation against the National Assembly representatives (Barreto and Carreño) for violating the Law to Protect the Privacy of Telephonic Communications. The request, filed before the Prosecutor General's Office by Poggioli's attorney, states: "My client has not participated in any way whatsoever in the conversation presented to the media, which is a deliberated and planned telephonic set up aiming to submit my client to public contempt and hatred, and it's clear that these deputies don't care at all the citizens' dignity, their reputation, honor, private life, their physical, psychological or moral integrity". The deputies revealed another recording where a voice identical to Poggioli's claims to be the one who convinced General Efraín Vázquez Velazco, Army's Commander, not to resign to his post and rather pronounce himself and disown Chávez' presidential

- Director of the CICPC (Criminal Scientific Investigation Police): Iván Simonovis¹⁰⁵.
- Director of the Central Information Office: Patricia Poleo.

Carmona dwells the opportunity in his book to deny his having offered offices to Liliana Hernández and Gerardo Blyde, at that time Members of Parliament for the *Primero Justicia* party.

The version that Hernández was going to be appointed Prosecutor General of the Republic and Blyde General Comptroller of the Republic came from a typed list corrected by hand which was found in Miraflores Palace after Chávez returned to power.

The list matches fully the version of Carmona's book and adds some other appointments that the *de facto* ruler intended to make official.

The list is attached hereto as a historic curiosity.

I asked Leonardo Carvajal, mentioned by Carmona as his Education Minister, about this in an interview for *Ultimas Noticias* daily back in 2005.

Head of the *Asamblea de Educación* (Education Assembly) NGO, Carvajal played a key role in the first street demonstrations of the Chávez's opposition in 2001 with the education as a central

authority. The man in the recording also says he has been aware of April 11 outcome "since a year ago".

105 Simonovis is one of the sheriffs sentenced to 30 years in prison for several dead and wounded of April 11th, 2002, as part of the actions required to stage the coup d'état. He was an official of the Technical and Judicial Police (PTJ) and Alfredo Peña's, secretary of Citizens security at the Metropolitan Mayoralty.

axis. The slogan of such movement initially was:

Don't mess with my children!

At last, did Pedro Carmona offer you to be Education Minister or not?

I am the only leader that on April 11th, in *El Nacional* newspaper, proposed a referendum. That shows that I was not involved in any coup. On April 12th, no member of the Education Assembly NGO, the CTV or Fedecámaras went to Miraflores. We were here in the office (in the elegant East of Caracas zone of *El Rosal*). Anguished by the atrocity of the decree, we promoted through a few entrepreneurs a meeting with him to show him his error.

In his book Carmona says that he offered you the Ministry.

On April 13th his secretary called me and offered to me the Ministry and asked me to show up there to swear in office at noon. I told him: "I would be willing to accept but I have strong criticisms against the decree." He interrupted me: "We are changing the decree this afternoon." I told him: "If I go there, will I be able to talk with Carmona?" I thought it was a chance to see him and get acquainted with the revised decree. I left for Miraflores and in two hours I couldn't see him, so I left. That night after they stopped presenting cartoons, I talked in a *Venevisión* TV program about the atrocities of that Government.

Have you seen him again?

No. I am filing this month a complaint with the Prosecutor's

Office against Carmona because I feel I was defamed by the things he wrote in his book.

Which ones?

That I accepted the Ministry in the presence of witnesses when I couldn't even see his bald.

Pedro Carmona's version is that he did that offer to Carvajal, "who accepted", the morning of Saturday April 13th.

Further he quotes these words allegedly uttered by Carvajal:

I knew you were going to offer me the Ministry of Education.

According to Carmona, Carvajal "tried later to sadly justify said decision for political reasons that I respect."

"From the moment I accepted the Ministry of Health, physicians, the Metropolitan Area Health directors began to pass by to explain the serious and precarious situation faced by the hospitals due to the lack of supplies and medicines.

I then undertook the task of contacting immediately pharmaceutical and health related companies so that they help relieve the situation. They immediately responded with donations.

I likewise called private clinics so that they attend the seriously wounded people who had no chance to be attended at the hospitals. Over 30 persons were moved to El Ávila, La Floresta, Urológico, Metropolitana and Hospital de Clínicas Caracas private clinics.

Fortunately, none of the seriously wounded patients died from lack of medical assistance. I never spoke of that. It is the first time now."

Back to the Palace

A white, bald, spectacled, mustached and white hair man with signs of little sleep in his face enters Miraflores by noon on Friday

12th of April. Allan Brewer-Carías arrived with the intention of talking with Pedro Carmona, with President Carmona. The latter was already in office as the ruler and was meeting other people, as he was told.

He then had to accept to see, for the third time in the last two days, the faces of Daniel Romero and José Gregorio Vásquez, future State Attorney and Deputy Chief of Staff, or Deputy Minister of the President's Office as it is called in Venezuela, respectively, who continued to revise the draft decree he saw in Olavarría's office and in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

Representative Leopoldo Martínez from the *Primero Justicia* party who had been chosen as Finance Minister joined them. Brewer-Carías claims to have warned the latter "about the inappropriateness of suspending the Assembly and the domestic and international reactions that might ensue."

Shortly after that, around 1:00 p.m. and since it was impossible to personally express my opinion to Carmona, I left Miraflores with a sense of frustration. I didn't come back to the Palace and, therefore, I was not in the inauguration or proclamation ceremony. I didn't countersign either such document. When I left I heard of the outrages against officials and members of parliament.

The final version of the inauguration record was ready at 2:30 p.m. It was José Gregorio Vásquez who would take it to Carmona. He read it through and said:

It's fine.

However, he took a pen and made a “couple of minor changes” in the document, as told by Vásquez himself who then proceeded to print it again and reproduce it.

As I unsuccessfully struggled with the photocopy machine, Juan Rafalli, Gustavo García and Gustavo Linares Benzo were sitting in front of a computer quickly drafting another decree. When they finished they went to talk with Carmona and presented their draft.

The letters Washington was interested in

“At around 03:15 p.m. a group of militaries ordered to throw away everything in the President’s Office.

A colonel removed off the wall the Honoris Causa Doctorate diploma of President Chávez and threw it to the floor.

Carmona came in at that moment, and the Colonel told him:

Mr. President I ordered to clean and throw away everything here.

Then Carmona told him:

Don’t throw away everything. We need to sort the political things and the administrative stuff which should keep moving forward.

Carmona asked me to please sort everything out and to deliver to him the most relevant or political compromising stuff.

I engaged then in performing this task. I called two waiters of the Military House to bring empty cases. They told me there were no cases and brought black bags the ones used for garbage collection.

I started to sort out as follows: personal stuff of the President since I found identity cards of the President, his wife, children; original birth records of his children, his clinical background and the ones of his children, diplomas, decorations, books and letters from collaborators and friends.

I sent all such personal stuff with an emissary to him in the Army General Command.

PART II COUP AND COUNTER-COUP

When the emissary came back from delivering his stuff to the President, he told me that Chávez was thankful for sending the stuff that was found there.

I continued with the sorting of documents, beginning with the administrative stuff.

I sorted the documents by state and by ministry placing everything in a piece of furniture inside the President's Office.

Then, I sorted out the political stuff and found all the letters that Fidel Castro has addressed to the President from the time before he won the elections until the most recent one related to the Costa Rica Summit that had taken place in those days.

I likewise found letters from Saddam Hussein, originals and Spanish translation, letters from Ghadaffi and other left-wing leaders.

As I read Fidel's letters, Carmona came in and read one of them and the content alarmed him.

I sorted all those letters out. I had the chance to read them all.

Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas asked me to give him the letters.

I am going to forward them to the U.S. State Department so that they declare President Chávez a terrorist, he said.

I replied to the Colonel that the letters were under my responsibility, that he should ask Carmona's permission and that he himself had to directly instruct me.

I concealed them in a drawer of the President's desk, under a stack of papers so that they could not be seen."

"I saw Carmona hesitate"

Before leaving the President's Office to Ayacucho hall to take office, Pedro Carmona decided to make a final consultation.

The clock was striking 04:00 p.m. that April 12th. The President's Office was packed with people with unhappy faces.

The cassock of Cardinal Ignacio Velasco stood out, the white

uniform of Vice-Admiral Ramírez Pérez and the beige uniform of Colonel Rodríguez Salas and the jeans worn by Rep. Alfredo Ramos, a leader of the *La Causa R* party and a member of the Board of Directors of the CTV (the right wing unions confederation) could also be distinguished among the people.

“Some jurists” Carmona fails to identify in his book were also present. Probably, they were Cecilia Sosa, Nelson Socorro and Gustavo Linares Benzo, the one Rafael Arreaza reported in his statement before Prosecutor Danilo Anderson two years later in September 2004.

Carmona addressed to the people present:

We have two choices at hand. Either we call elections following temporary suspension of the powers designated by and loyal to Chávez’s regime or place the decisions in the hands of the National Assembly.

According to Carmona, he solicited the opinion of those present “prior to proceeding with the announcements.”

The reaction, save for doubts raised by Alfredo Ramos whom Colonel Rodríguez Salas tried to persuade without an open rejection, was that at this point it was not advisable to try an alternative way and to consistently move forward with the first choice based on Articles 350 and 333 of the Constitution.

Alfredo Ramos left Miraflores before the master of ceremony called him to sign the decree, an absence that arouse bewildered murmurings in the Ayacucho hall and the hilarity among those

viewers sitting in front of their TV sets.

José Gregorio Vásquez's version of that meeting in the President's Office shows a suddenly hesitating Carmona:

I saw Carmona hesitate¹⁰⁶.

If you don't dissolve it, the Assembly will dissolve you

"Carmona ends up saying:

Let's call Allan.

Carmona takes out his phone book where I could read: "Brewer Allan" and a Movilnet telephone company number, Carmona phones and tells him:

Allan, we are gathered here with a group of lawyers who question the dissolution of the Assembly and the removal of governors and mayors by decree.

Allan answered with the same version:

The matter is, man, Carmona, that if you don't dissolve the Assembly sooner or later that Assembly is going to dissolve you.

We, the ones present there, replied that it was not like that. Carmona conveyed such comments to Allan Brewer-Carías, who according to Carmona, ends up saying:

Convince yourself, Carmona, this is the decree. Do not take even one step backwards!

We all there realized that as from that moment, Carmona who firstly had become hesitant with regard to the decree ended to become fully persuaded that he had to follow Allan Brewer-Carías' recommendation."

Even though he confirmed that Carmona phoned him at that time, Brewer-Carías denies Rafael Arreaza's version whereby

106 Vásquez, José Gregorio: Op. Cit.

Brewer-Carías had convinced the fugacious dictator to dissolve the Assembly:

The alleged statement by Mr. Arreaza is false and untrue¹⁰⁷.

On his part, and without identifying Carmona's speech partner, José Gregorio Vásquez, estimates that he talked over the phone for several minutes "in the presence of those of us who were there."

In Brewer-Carías' version when Carmona phoned him "he finally asked me straightforward to give the legal opinion he had requested (in the early hours of the morning), particularly as to the issue of the suspension of the Assembly."

I gave him my adverse opinion and the reservations that as a professional and as a citizen I harbored, precisely in the light of the Inter American Democratic Charter, and that lastly that was a decision of a political nature. I was hoping that he would take into account my warnings and comments. Regrettably he didn't.

José Gregorio Vásquez tells that, in hanging up, Carmona told those present:

Let's go then.

Vásquez himself described how Cardinal Ignacio Velasco told Carmona:

It needs to be done.

Without mentioning his or her identity, the would-be self-sworn in president claims that one of the "personalities" present thereat said:

107 Brewer-Carías, Allan R.: Op. Cit.

No doubt that the decree opens a short *de facto* period but the intention being consulting the people who have the constituent power, the nation will be grateful.

“Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas told Carmona:

Well, Mr. President. We have the power in our hands with that decree. We will amend it along the way.

After that, the lawyers began to leave.”

Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas gave Carmona the text of the short oath that he would later read, before himself, with the right hand raised and the left hand holding the paper in front of photographers and TV cameras.

José Gregorio Vásquez tells that in their way to Ayacucho hall someone asked:

Who is going to read the decree?

Let Daniel read it.

Too late to clarify

The evening or night of April 12th, journalist Edgar López writes for *El Nacional* a note identifying Allan Brewer-Carías as the legal architect of the new Government and interviewed him in such capacity. The interview, logically, would be published the day after, that is, Saturday 13th¹⁰⁸.

Edgar López mentions Brewer-Carías as possible President of the Supreme Court of Justice.

¹⁰⁸ López, Edgar: *Carta Interamericana Democrática fundamenta el gobierno de transición*. (Inter American Charter Finds Bases for Transition Government). Allan Brewer-Carías' statements. *El Nacional*, 04-14-2002.

He asked him about the dissolution of the Branches of Government.

The lawyer justifies it as a manifestation of the right to civil disobedience invoked by the transitional Government.

The dissolution, upholds Brewer-Carías, “corresponds to political decisions which I have wished to distinguish from the legal foundation of the transition regime.”

Seemingly, he himself was not much convinced of this argument –the distinction between political decisions and the legal foundation-, because, as Brewer-Carías said shortly after, he himself talked to journalist Edgar López late in the night of April 12th to express his “contrary opinion about the political decisions that were adopted¹⁰⁹.”

Such position was not published on Saturday 13th, but five days later, on April 17th, because as stated by journalist Edgar López before the Prosecutor General’s Office when Brewer-Carías called him it was too late to include that line in the April 13th edition. The page had been printed already.

The colonel’s initiative

By those days in April, among the Doctoral candidates in Law in Santa María University there was one who, from time to time, attended in a military uniform. It was the Army Colonel Ángel Bellorín, an attorney graduated *magna cum laude* from that

109 Brewer-Carías, Allan R.: Op. Cit.

university. He had no office in the National Armed Force structure, so that he could engage fully to his studies.

Bellorín was not certainly a pro Chávez military. Rather, he had impasses with General Manuel Rosendo when the latter had not betrayed President Chávez, on April 11th. He also had impasses with another officer who, like him, was a colonel and an attorney: Julio Rodríguez Salas, one of the legal brains of the coup.

In the preceding months, Rodríguez Salas had been behind a press campaign through leaks to columnists encouraging uneasiness in the garrisons discrediting various officers. In his case, a column in *El Nacional* signed by journalist Ibéyise Pacheco published a version whereby Bellorín had secretly forged his academic grades in Santa María University. Rodríguez was seizing the opportunity to settle an old personal account with Bellorín¹¹⁰.

In the university he had studied the Organic Criminal Procedure Code which allows any citizen to activate a criminal investigation through a formal complaint. He also studied the Criminal Code whose Article 144(2) provides for 12-24 years of prison for those who “conspire or rebel to violently change the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”

110 The revelation was brought to light in 2001, in an Ibéyise Pacheco's column published in *El Nacional*. Bellorín became a reference case when he won his demand for defamation against the journalist. But instead of rectifying her false reports, Pacheco insisted on new disqualifications against Bellorín. Amidst a scandal for the domiciliary arrest dictated by a judge, the Colonel granted the “pardon of the offended” to Pacheco in order to spear the sanction. Now, he's waiting for a civil demand for damages and prejudices against the newspaper of the Otero family (*El Nacional*).

It took Bellorín a bit longer than a month to gather all the information available in the archives of newspapers and TV recordings until May 22nd, 2002 when he filed with the Prosecutor's Office a brief denouncing Allan Brewer-Carías, Carlos Ayala Corao, Cecilia Sosa Gómez and Daniel Romero.

In 36 pages he requested the investigation of the “intellectual and material authorship and the degree of participation of each of them (...) in the conspiracy and rebellion that violently changed the Constitution under a false right to rebellion” on April 12th, 2002.

He proposed to summon 50 witnesses, including Pedro Carmona, Lucas Rincón, Ignacio Velasco, all those who signed the decree, journalists and militaries of both sides. He almost requested Hugo Chávez himself as a witness.

Both Sosa Gómez and Brewer-Carías reacted against the colonel. The former magistrate said that he was acting under superior orders, that is, the Government, whereas the former constituent representative disqualified him referring to his brief as the brief “that they drafted for him.”

Strictly speaking, Bellorín acted on his own initiative. Had he done it in the performance of an instruction and for personal interest, he would have probably achieved his promotion to general. But he retired in 2008 with the same rank as a colonel upon compliance with 30 years of service.

Three years after the coup, Prosecutor Luisa Ortega Díaz –

subsequently designated Prosecutor General of the Republic- filed charges against Sosa Gómez, Brewer-Carías and José Gregorio Vásquez as presumed drafters of the decree, on October 21st, 2005. Two weeks later, on November 7th, the 25th Control Court, upon request of Ortega Díaz, issued a measure to detain Daniel Romero and Isaac Pérez Recao since none of them appeared before court following due summons issued by the Prosecutor General's Office.

Like these two persons, Brewer-Carías, who did actually attend the first summons, also left the country, afraid of ending up in prison. Sosa Gómez and Vásquez stayed and faced the trial, and therefore, were subjects of the benefit of the Amnesty decree-law issued by President Chávez on December 31st, 2007.

“I went there, but I didn't see Carmona”

A small international scandal broke with the rumor that the Prosecutor General's Office was going to file charges for being one of the drafters of the April 12th decree against the lawyer and university professor Carlos Ayala Corao.

Ayala Corao had chaired the Inter American Human Rights Commission, so that his eventual imputation was aired by activists and organizations as an aggression of “Chávez's regime” against human rights defenders.

Pedro Carmona Estanga himself got him involved in the facts in his so many times quoted book. The Prosecution could use that to accuse him.

Three years after the coup, I invited Ayala Corao to talk about this in an interview in the TV program I hosted, *En Confianza*. I read to him the paragraph of Carmona's book where he is mentioned, and he replied:

My conduct upon learning about the draft decree, which was not the one they ended up issuing, was well known. I was surprised when I learned about the draft decree in the morning of April 12th. In 12 minutes I rejected it and went out to join other persons to achieve the restoration of the constitutional order¹¹¹.

That means that you did know a previous version of the decree.

No. That morning of April 12th there were versions circulating there.

Where?

In Miraflores.

Were you in Miraflores?

I passed by that morning due to the confusion created by the announcement of the High Command about the resignation of the President. I imagined that in case of a presidential resignation, should that be the case, and if the Vice President had resigned as well, the logical thing was to call the representative democracy. That sentence you just read is somewhat curious, because I don't even know Carmona, we haven't ever been introduced, I didn't see him, he didn't see me, he didn't ask for my opinion and I didn't give

111 VTV, 04-22-2005.

him my opinion. My name was hung there. Of course, he says that opinions were not taken into account. Well, let's let him say what opinion was not taken into account and why. He should not hang a name there without specifying the purpose.

Why can he be interested in getting you involved in such a pack?

I don't know. Two choices. One is mentioning 400 names to be able to say: "It was not me, it was all these people." The second one: he was bothered by my attitude that day. Not only helping the persons who were being persecuted, such as Tarek William Saab, but also for having called international bodies and suggest pronouncements against the decree once it was issued. A position consistent with the human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The demons go loose

Human Rights and smacks

Consistency. A quality many sent for vacation under such grave circumstances.

I can't recall what the time was exactly on April 12th when lawyer Fernando Fernández, who used to be an Amnesty International representative entered the newsroom in *El Universal*.

When I spotted him I tackled him to share with him the shame I felt for what I had just watched on TV: The arbitrary detention of the Interior and Justice Minister Ramón Rodríguez Chacín by cops commanded by Chacao Mayor Leopoldo López, and Baruta

Mayor Henrique Capriles Radonski, then both leaders of *Primero Justicia* party.

Later, it was known that both young mayors denied Rodríguez Chacín's request of being taken out through the parking lot of the building and how they insisted in taking him out through the main gate where a heated crowd beat him and pushed him as he was taken in cuffs inside a police car. The media had done their work very well. A collective hysteria had seized the upper middle class neighbors who pushed each other to be able to hit the detainee.

Murderer! Murderer!

In the absence of a better accusation, the mayors alleged that the Minister had two war weapons: two 9mm pistols, one belonging to Rodríguez Chacín himself and the other one belonging to Hugo Chávez who gave it to him shortly before leaving Miraflores a few hours earlier. They also alleged that he had improperly used a vehicle that was a State property, which it happened to be the vehicle assigned by his office to the Minister.

Legally, Rodríguez Chacín still was a Minister. The illegitimate decree dissolving the Branches of Government had not even been announced yet. So, from the perspective of the coup legality, he kept the privilege of an impeachment procedure before the Supreme Court of Justice. Even so, instead of ordering his immediate release, due to the unlawfulness of his detention, the day after –Saturday 13th – the 39th Judge of Control, Mónica Fernández, turned the

procedure legal by issuing a measure depriving Rodríguez Chacín from his liberty¹¹².

The images of his detention were source of dismay around the world, not because of the legal considerations of the fact alone, but especially because of the lynching atmosphere, typical of fascism, surrounding the fact.

When I commented the case, the Amnesty International representative killed the matter unconcernedly.

It was just a few smacks.

I then understood that we had nothing else to talk about.

Although it was unjustifiable, his lack of sensitivity responded not only to the enthusiasm the so called “civil society” was inebriated with because the coup was still triumphant, but also to the old and reciprocal hatred between human rights defenders and policemen.

Besides being perceived as a cop, Rodríguez Chacín bears the stigma of having been a member of a mixed group of cops and militaries that conducted the so called “massacre of *El Amparo*” in Apure State, where a group of peasants branded as Colombian guerrillas got killed in October 29th, 1988. Rodríguez Chacín didn’t participate in that event, but in other preceding armed episodes. He was tried and absolved of guilt by the military courts.

112 Former Judge Mónica Fernández, as well as the mayors Capriles Radonski and López, were formally accused for illegitimate deprivation of liberty, but later they were favored by the amnesty decreed granted by President Chávez.

And they came for Tarek William

Insensitivity, notwithstanding, yielded the way to alarm when the victim of fascist persecution was someone with a background in the realm of human rights defense. Rep. Tarek William Saab also appeared on TV as he was arrested in front of his residence, disregarding his parliamentary immunity, without cuffs but amidst a mob like the one that beat Rodríguez Chacín.

Saab's detention took place at 01:30 p.m.

A DISIP (political police) agent told him:

By orders of President Carmona, you must go to an interview with the Director of the DISIP, General Ovidio Poggioli, and later go to talk with the President in connection with the developments occurred yesterday April 11th.

Ovidio Poggioli had been chosen by Carmona as Director of the DISIP given his experience as Head of the Military Intelligence Division (DIM, Spanish acronym) in Chávez's times. In the early hours of the morning, when the would-be transition President was presented in *Fuerte Tiuna*, Poggioli was close to him. The jacket Carmona was wearing had been borrowed from him.

A while later he arrived in the DISIP *El Helicoide* headquarters, located in Roca Tarpeya close to downtown Caracas. Upon the admission procedure, an official prompted him to take off his belt and the shoelaces.

Saab replied:

You're wrong.

There is always at least one prosecutor on duty at police stations and on April 12th José Gregorio Graterol was on duty at the DISIP.

Graterol informed Saab that his detention responded to a denunciation whereby he had concealed weapons in his residence, the same allegation being used since the night before by the CICPC (investigation police corps) Director, Miguel Dao, working with the new government, in order to break into residences, party headquarters and official entities linked to Chávez's followers. In the case of Saab, some sources attributed the denunciation to retired general Rubén Rojas Pérez, former Head of the Presidential Military House in Rafael Caldera's administration.

Carlos Tablante and Pablo Medina, former Chávez's followers and then representatives of the opposition, as well as José Ángel Rodríguez and my sister Asia Villegas, representatives of the People's Attorney Office, spent five hours at the gates of El Helicoide without information about the detainee. They just received elusive responses. The time came when they allowed them to talk to him over the phone.

From the newsroom in *El Universal* newspaper, I talked over the phone with Francis Fornino, then Saab's wife. She asked me to help disseminating the information as the only way to protect her husband's life. I also received a call from Tarek William himself whose voice I immediately recognized.

Upon expressing my solidarity, I heard him denounce the unconstitutional nature of his detention and express his concern for

the fate of his family. Deeply moved, I took note of the statements of both of them, I passed them onto one of the paper chiefs who by the end of the afternoon told me:

Calm down. It seems that they released him already.

In fact, the illegal detention would last until dawn the day after, when DISIP officials took him by car to nearby Victoria Avenue. A Chávez's supporter passing by with his car recognized him walking down the street and, startlingly, he offered him to drive him home.

In Colombia people mobilized for Chávez

In those hours I received a call from Liliana Ortega, from the Human Rights defense NGO, Cofavic¹¹³, with a critical stance vis-à-vis Chávez's government, who surprised me as she said:

Here we remain at your disposal for anything. You count on us.

It was obvious that the monster of fascism was walking by himself now and started to haunt not only Chávez's supporters.

Some enemies of Chávez applauded the persecutions, but others, more conscious, maybe remembered Martin Niemöller's poem:

*When the Nazis came for the Communists,
I remained silent for I wasn't a Communist;
When they they locked away the Socialists,
I remained silent for I wasn't a Socialist;*

113 Families Committee of February 27th, 1989's Victims, the date of a popular rebellion called El Caracazo, followed by a fierce military and police repression, at the very beginning of CAP's second term which was inaugurated with a "package" of neoliberal economic measures.

*When they came for the union leaders,
I didn't complain for I wasn't a unionist;
They came for the Jews,
And I remained silent, I wasn't a Jew;
When they came for me,
There was no one left to complain¹¹⁴. **

(Translator's note: The poem in English has been directly translated from original German version considering that the most frequent English translation found obviates "the Communists" as referred to in the Spanish version used by the author).*

In Caracas, in the headquarters of Provea human rights defense NGO, one of its founders, Carlos Ayala Corao, had drafted a communication addressed to the Inter American Human Rights Commission, which he had chaired, requesting the adoption of urgent precautionary measures to preserve Tarek William Saab's rights.

In Bogotá, the Colombian Minga NGO did the same, but in its request to the Inter American Human Rights Commission it also included Hugo Chávez whose human rights were being violated in the same manner as Saab's, not by policemen but by "military kidnappers." In the name of Minga, Martha Monroy, Tito Gaitán and Omar Hernández requested the Commission to order the Venezuelan State to:

114 Poem wrongly and usually attributed to Bertold Brecht.

- Refrain from attempting against the life and personal integrity of Hugo Chávez and Tarek William Saab.
- Release them without conditions.
- Respect due process and the meeting, circulation and residence rights of both citizens.

The circumstances surrounding Chávez and Saab were the same: detained, incommunicados, and disabled to exercise their right to defense and lessened in the privileges inherent to the offices they held by popular election.

Santiago Cantón's double standards

Upon receipt of Provea and Minga's requests at his office in Washington, D.C., the secretary of the Inter American Human Rights Commission, the Argentinian lawyer Santiago Cantón, gave a differentiated treatment to each case.

Dated April 13th, the official sent two communications to Caracas, addressed to "His Excellency Mr. José Rodríguez Iturbe, Minister of Foreign Affairs¹¹⁵."

In one of them, Cantón requested the "Illustrious Government" of Carmona "the adoption of precautionary measures to protect the personal integrity, the judicial guarantees and the personal freedom of Mr. Tarek William Saab."

115 A controversial vocative by itself, as it implied the international recognition of the *de facto* government, contradicting what was agreed upon with the OAS, to which is adhered the ICHR.

In the other, Cantón refrained from requesting the immediate adoption of the same measures in connection with Hugo Chávez. Rather, he granted a term to the *de facto* Government to send to Washington data about the situation of the incommunicado prisoner, before the Commission considers the case:

I kindly beg the Illustrious Government of Your Excellency to provide this Inter American Commission with the information you may deem advisable within a five-day term as from the date hereof.

In those five days, from 13 thru 18, anything could have happened to the prisoner. And, effectively, something happened. Fortunately, something good for human rights in general, and for his rights in particular.

Only Santiago Cantón's open bias against Hugo Chávez can explain the double standard applied in 2002. He has been able to manage to keep his position, despite the many objections by Venezuela, thanks to much influential godfathers in law firms and other powers throughout the continent, such as the Inter American Press Society made up by the owners of the main newspapers of the continent.

No precautionary measure requested by such powers, especially if the alleged violator is a progressive or a left-wing government, is rejected or delayed by "their man in Washington"¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁶ Under the influence of the communications corporations, the idea of the freedom of press as a sort of "mother Human Right", from which derive the rest, has been spreading over the whole continent. This has turned the ICHR into a confrontation instance with the left-wing governments recently elected in the region.

The crowning ceremony

In the newsroom in *El Universal* someone approached me to ask:

Do you know at what time will take place the swearing-in ceremony of President Carmona?

I have not the slightest idea.

Indeed, I was diving in the computer, sending and reading e-mails about what was happening in my country. One of them came from the Argentinian journalist and economist Luis Bilbao who from Buenos Aires disagreed with a message I had sent the night before telling that the Bolivarian Revolution was “cracking.”

The information I had is different. You are deciding there the course of the Latin American revolution and of humankind in general.

“Around 04:00 p.m., Daniel Romero, with the decree in his hand, began to call everyone to the hall where the document would be read.

All those present entered the Ayacucho Hall.”

Ayacucho Hall was packed that afternoon of April 12th. Not another soul fitted in among the many suits and ties, long robes, stiff hairdos and gala uniforms. The mixture of the most various fragrances could make you think of a perfume store.

They are recurrently accused by their adversaries of violating such a freedom. The corporations account on a diligent cooperation of the OAS bureaucracy, particularly in the case of Santiago Cantón at the ICHR. In parallel, the media have been developing a growing relevant role as political actors, faced with the political parties' decadence.

The gossip about the detention of Tarek William Saab spreads across the crowd a few minutes prior to the swearing-in ceremony.

José Gregorio Vásquez, Carmona's Deputy Minister of the Secretary of the President's Office, tells that "someone" – he fails to say who- asked Daniel Romero what they were doing with the imprisoned representative.

Daniel Romero, future State Attorney General of Carmona's Administration replied:

Let him be released at once!

For the ceremony a group of "personalities" sat close to Carmona in two rows of seats usually occupied by the ministers or the High Military Command, facing the audience.

"When I came in they placed me next to Cardinal Ignacio Velasco and Carmona's wife and son."

José Gregorio Vásquez sat in the second row. In front of him was Cardinal Velasco, next to him lawyer Cipriano Heredia and on the other side General Ovidio Poggioli, new head of the political police.

When the master of ceremonies began to speak, Vásquez asked Poggioli if Tarek William had already been release.

Yes. That was a mistake¹¹⁷.

117 Questioned by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the coup, Ovidio Poggioli denied his responsibility in the detention of Tarek William Saab, arguing that he never assumed effectively the DISIP direction. In his book, Pedro Carmona dismisses the detention of the National Assembly deputy. He mentions the event as a "much-trumpeted incident" and treats it with

“(…) since I was sitting next to Cardinal Velasco, he asked me:

Son, how do you see everything?

And I replied:

Very bad, Cardinal.

He further inquired:

Why?

He engaged in a conversation with me and was surprised by all the things I told him as to the dreadful decree and the military situation that by that time was delicate, as a result of the everybody-for-himself attitude, there was no consistency, and the thing began to show cracks.”

Among so many heroes of the “end battle”, the great absent is Simon Bolivar. His portrait which together with Chávez always presided over the hall was discretely removed for the ceremony. The decree was also about to be read whereby his name would also be removed from the name of the country.

“Thereafter, Daniel Romero read the grotesque decree.”

I watched the ceremony on the TV sets in the newsroom of *El Universal* newspaper. A landslide of feelings overwhelmed me: the horror for what I watched and, at the same time, the satisfaction of being right in my perception – Despite all Chávez’s flaws, his

disinformation or sarcasm: “The country knows that his neighbors of La Lagunita were protesting and Baruta Police just protected him from potential mistreatments and then let him go, with the required apologies”. Carmona doesn’t explain why the DISIP was “protecting” the legislator for several hours, against his will. When he was released at El Helicoide, DISIP Sheriff Antonio Rodríguez apologized to the representative: “This was an unfortunate mistake”.

opponents were infinitely less “democrat” than him. Respect for the Constitution? Democratic liberties? Division of powers? Popular will?

Bullshit!

The spectacle in Miraflores proved this.

Daniel Romero became famous for the satisfaction his face showed as he read the decree, interrupted by rounds of applause and cheers every time he paused:

The name of Republic of Venezuela is hereby restored and will continue to be the name to identify our homeland from this very moment onwards.

The name “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” had been passed in a popular referendum as a part of the Constitution, on December 15th, 1999. The persons gathered in Miraflores were happy.

Bravo!

Principal Representatives to the National Assembly and their alternates are hereby removed from their office.

The Members of Parliament were officials elected by the people through direct and secret vote.

Democracy! Democracy!

The President of the Republic in Council of Ministers may remove and designate on temporary basis the holders of the national, state and municipal bodies of the public powers.

The measure turned governors and mayors, elected by popular

vote, in simple officials who could be freely appointed and removed by Pedro Carmona.

Liberty! Liberty!

The President and other Magistrates of the Supreme Court of Justice, the Prosecutor General of the Republic, the Comptroller General of the Republic, the People's Attorney and the members of the National Elections Council are hereby removed from their illegitimately held offices.

All such authorities had been designated by the National Assembly with the votes of Chávez's supporters and of the opposition in December 1999, because the Constitution required a qualified majority vote of three thirds of the Parliament. Even so, the decree proclaimed their illegitimacy.

The effectiveness of the 48 decrees with rank and value of a Law issued under the Enabling Law dated November 13th, 2000 is hereby suspended.

The same euphoria shown by the persons in Miraflores was also expressed by my workmates in *El Universal*. Some of them were my friends. When I looked at them like this, I felt something was dying inside me in terms of my relation with them. Others, aware of what was going on, looked at me startled showing disapproval of this ceremony aired on TV and of the reactions in the newsroom atmosphere. You needed not to be a Chávez follower to realize the seriousness of the matter.

Daniel Romero ended his heated reading by saying:

PART II COUP AND COUNTER-COUP

Ladies and gentlemen in order to continue with this movement of the whole national democratic society, at the exit of this hall you are invited to sign the decree that had just been read as a proof of your adhesion to this process.

Thereupon, Pedro Carmona read a brief text he held in his left hand as his right hand was raised 90 degrees with respect to his shoulder. He was the “only” Venezuelan President who was not sworn in by an authority, but by himself, without placing his hand on a Constitution:

I, Pedro Carmona Estanga, in my capacity as President of the Transition Government of the Republic of Venezuela, swear to Almighty God, to the homeland and all the Venezuelan citizens to restore the effectiveness of the Constitution of the Republic of Venezuela of 1999 as fundamental rule of our legal system and restore the Rule of Law, the governance and the liberty of the exercise of civil liberties, as well as the respect for life, justice, equality and social responsibility.



Pedro Carmona, swore himself in, on April 12th. Photo: Orlando Ugueto.

Noticeably, Carmona omitted twice the adjective “Bolivarian” from the name of the country and from the name of the 1999 Constitution.

The signatories

“Upon swearing in, Carmona called the members of political parties to sign the decree.

The first who signed was Cardinal Ignacio Velasco; then, the governor of Zulia State, Manuel Rosales, in representation of the governors; José Curiel, Secretary-General of Copei party, in representation of the political parties; and the business **representations.**”

PART II COUP AND COUNTER-COUP

José Gregorio Vásquez, Deputy Minister of the Secretary of the President's Office, designated by Carmona, says that in hearing the family names of the "personalities" called upon to sign the minutes, he thought that both political and protocol mistakes were being committed.

The first to be called should have been the representative of the Venezuelan Workers Confederation (CTV, Spanish acronym), but when they call Alfredo Ramos, he did not show up, I felt that the floor of the stage was crumbling down beneath my seat.

The persons called to the rostrum in Ayacucho Hall to sign were as follows:

Cardinal Ignacio Velasco, "in representation of the Catholic church";



Cardinal Ignacio Velasco signed a decree to dissolve powers, before Carmona and TV Stations, on behalf of the Catholic Church. Later, he would apologize by saying he just signed a blank page. Photo: Orlando Ugueto.

- Carlos Fernández, first Vice President of Fedecámaras (the national business federation);
- Miguel Ángel Martínez, representative of the mass media (private, of course);
- José Curiel, Secretary-General of Copei party, “in representation of the political parties”;
- Manuel Rosales, governor of Zulia State, in the name of the State governors;



The Governor of the state of Zulia, Manuel Rosales, assumed the representation of the rest of the governors and signed the decree. Photo: Orlando Ugueto.

- Julio Brazón, chairman of the Commerce Chamber, Consecomercio;
- Ignacio Salvatierra, president of the National Banking Association;
- Luis Enrique Ball, president of the Bi-national USA-Venezuelan business chamber (Venamcham);
- Rocío Guijarro, “in representation of the civil society”;
- Alfredo Ramos, in representation of the CTV (Spanish acronym for Venezuelan Workers Confederation), but as told above, he chose to leave the ceremony without signing the decree. The master of ceremonies excused him this way: He is taking a telephone call.

José Gregorio Vásquez says that upon closing the event two hours were required to dissolve the long line of persons wanting to sign the minutes somewhere else in Miraflores, in the Mirrors Hall. The atmosphere was noisy and uncontrolled. Some 400 people signed the document (see attachments).

My mobile didn't stop ringing. Calls from relatives and friends mostly expressing their solidarity, but I also took calls from people who were supposed to be friends of mine inquiring about the status of contracts they were negotiating with the government, proposing themselves for offices, asking for favors, etcetera...

“As from that moment Daniel Romero began to collect signatures from among the public and tells me:

-Arreaza, you are a minister and you have to sign the Decree.
Which I didn't do.”

What are you doing here if you are a Chavista?

“Around 6:00 p.m. of Friday 12th, Manuel Cova, Secretary-General of the Workers Union Confederation, arrived along with other unionists.”

In his book, Pedro Carmona, confirms this second meeting with Manuel Cova, without Carlos Ortega, but unlike Rafael Arreaza, he claims it was held in the morning of Saturday 13th. Who has confused times? Carmona or Arreaza? It was 47 intense hours and it is easy to lose track of the timeline. Or maybe there were two different meetings...

“When Carmona sees him, he offers him the Vice Presidency, which he neither accepted nor rejected. Yet he was asking for some deputy minister offices.

When Manuel Cova sees that I come in the President’s Office, he tells me: Arreaza, what are you doing here if you are a Chavista?

Everybody laughed.

I replied:

I have always had the problem that Copei partisans say I am an AD follower and the AD partisans say I am a Copei follower. The truth is that I have never belonged, do not belong or will ever belong to any political party.

He, then, stared at me.”

The night falls along with...

The impact of the April 11th developments let Chávez’s grassroots standing still for a few hours. There were meetings and protests in places like *23 de enero*, a working class parish close to Miraflores Palace, but generally speaking the grassroots suddenly found themselves in a sort of limbo.

Such initial paralysis was artificially nourished by the instruction given to the TV staff workers to air “zero pro Chávez images.”

To many, especially for those following the developments on TV, the revolutionaries were like their leader: missing.

In such hours, an anti-Chávez friend of mine told me over the phone:

I told you! That Chávez was just bullshit. He fell effortlessly, without fighting. Where are the crowds that claimed they would give their lives for him? Nowhere...

Actually, from Friday 12th itself, protests have begun to mushroom in various places. Word in mouth and phone messages began to fill the emptiness left by VTV TV station, the main mobilization and agitation tool which had been closed and was put off the air.

In the afternoon hours of Friday 12th, a crowd from various towns in Aragua State began to gather outside the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade in *La Placera*, city of Maracay.

Edward Castillo, a movie producer who had just arrived from Rome, interviewed in those hours General Raúl Baduel, Commander of the brigade who insisted in declaring that he was abiding by the Constitution.

According to Castillo, the private TV channels had deployed cameras and microwave equipment there but the reporters didn't want to record or broadcast anything. Annoyed with them, he took out his Venezuelan ID card, stick it to his chest with tape emulating a press ID and told them:

Then, I will play the war correspondent here.

With his camera he recorded their “*deprechera*” faces (a composed colloquial word to mean depression and wrath at the same time)¹¹⁸.

The TV crews and their equipment had been deployed for one week then outside the military garrison waiting for the resignation of Baduel or his pronouncement against the Governemnt, but that

118 Mixture of depression and anger. VTV, program En Confianza, 04-12-2006.

day they alleged “technical failures”, as Edward Castillo recalls. *Venevisión* did broadcast a short interview with Baduel, where a journalist said:

We understand that you still have not surrendered, that you have not surrendered the garrison, just like the air base of the IV Armored Division.

Baduel excused himself for not being able to speak for long since he was not an authorized spokesperson of the National Armed Force. But he commented:

In no moment we could say that we should surrender, because we do not have a hostile attitude, but we comply with orders that we have received from our superiors to remain in the garrison and prepare our unit for operations and, if necessary, to employ it in case of alterations of public order¹¹⁹.

Baduel slipped the idea that the 42nd Brigade “is a strategic assault unit for deep targets which can be used anywhere in the national territory.”

Each one understood what he or she wanted or could understand.

“Later, around six or seven post meridiem, I went to my place very concerned and, if you wish, sick with all what I could watch that day – Nobody was there for the country but, on the contrary, everybody just kept an eye on his own interest, trying to fish in troubled waters.”

119 *Venevisión*, 04-12-2002.

By SMS a call was circulated:

Tonight. 08:00 p.m. pot banging in favor of Chávez.

The pots were banged again, this time in the working class hilly slums and in other working class sectors, this time against Carmona. Lootings took place in a few places, not so widespread as the ones of February 27th, 1989.

In his book, Pedro Carmona tells that in the late hours of that Friday he learned that there were “agitation spots” in some places in Caracas and Guarenas.

I consulted with General Poggioli about their importance. They seemed not to have a worrisome dimension, because it was known that in the surroundings of *Fuerte Tiuna* a group of instigators had gathered once they learnt of Chávez’s presence there. This made the Armed Force, as custodian of the prisoner, to transfer him to the *Turiamo* navy base, and the day after to *La Orchila* island¹²⁰.

José Gregorio Vásquez told that Miraflores was in calm again around 09:00 p.m.

I went to the President’s Office and tripped with Admiral Briceño García, who was my Boss for less than 24 hours.

Both of them were with Pedro Carmona when someone came in and warned them vehemently:

The situation in the Cuban Embassy is unsustainable.

The diplomatic seat continued to be without water or electrical

120 Observe that Carmona doesn’t admit that Chávez was imprisoned, but recognizes that those masses that wanted to set him free were at risk.

power. Before cutting both basic utilities, one of the leaders of the siege, Juan Cristóbal Romero, sent a message via TV:

You will have to eat the rugs!

The young fascist is the son of Pilarica Romero, Minister of Youth in Rafael Caldera's second term.

The Cuban officials had been briefed to defend the embassy "even at the expense of their lives," as per the statements of the Cuban Foreign Minister, Felipe Pérez Roque on Friday 12th.

The protesters suspected that inside the diplomatic seat high personalities of Chávez's government were under asylum. They mentioned Vice President Diosdado Cabello and Members of Parliament Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, among others. They were especially interested in Cabello, first in the presidential succession line in case of default of the Head of State. Neutralizing him was an essential step to complete the coup d'état.

Mayor of Baruta, Henrique Capriles Radonski, of *Primero Justicia* party, and a delegate of the Metropolitan Mayor's Office sent by Alfredo Peña had broken into the Embassy together with the director of the Metropolitan Police, Henry Vivas, to talk with Ambassador Germán Sánchez Otero without dissolving the violent demonstration. Capriles asked the Ambassador to allow them to search the premises to be able to guarantee to the protesters that there was nobody under asylum there. Sánchez Otero refused invoking the Cuban sovereignty over that territory.

In the evening, Carmona asked to talk to the Cuban Ambassador

and a while later they passed him the phone. According to José Gregorio Vásquez, on the other side of the line was Sánchez Otero's wife.

He talked with the lady for long and gave her all the guarantees possible. He hanged up and told us he was very tired that he wanted to go sleep and asked us to take charge of the Embassy issue.

They called from Miraflores with the *Electricidad de Caracas* and *Hidrocapital*, electrical power and water supply utility companies, respectively, to restore both utilities.

José Gregorio Vásquez says that they asked General Rafael Damiani Bustillos, Minister of Interior, to take charge of the security of the Embassy.

At 11:00 p.m. Jose Gregorio Vásquez's phone rang. It was his mother.

Do you want some dinner when you get back home?

Yes, mom. Now I noticed that I had just coffee today.

José Gregorio Vásquez drove back home and had the feeling that Caracas was "happily sleeping."

At the dinner table, his parents asked:

How did you do today?

If this government continues like this it will fall in three days.

A dialogue under siege

Let us get back a bit till Friday 12, 03:30 p.m. A thousand heated anti-Chávez protesters surround the Cuban Embassy. They yelled

an ultimatum. If in one hour the personnel don't surrender, they will break in violently. Among the agitators stand out Salvador Romání, a conspicuous Cuban counterrevolutionary who, earlier, at 08:00 a.m. had called the Embassy to anticipate that he would go to take it over with a group of people. Lawyer Ricardo Koestling and sheriff Henry López Sisco, former DISIP chief in times of the IV Republic are also seen there. Inside, the Cubans, including women and children, prepare themselves to resist. Long ago, water and power supplies had been cut off. Suddenly, voices were heard requesting to talk with them.

A classical scenario had been set. First, the use of force, afterwards an ultimatum, and now the offer of a dialogue, reasoned the head of the diplomatic mission, Germán Sánchez Otero.

From Havana, Fidel authorized the dialogue with those persons without yielding to the demand of opening the gate. Elio Perera, an official of the Embassy climbs the wall and amidst the booing from the mob, he contacts those proposing the dialogue. He invited to come in by climbing a fire ladder placed there for such purposes. They are officials of the Baruta and the Metropolitan mayors. Half an hour later, Henrique Capriles Radonski and two other persons arrived. Later the Metropolitan Police director, Sheriff Henry Vivas showed up. The *Televen* TV station crew completed the party. The crew recorded two hours of an exchange worth being subject of study at every Law School for the implications this had for the Public International Law, sovereignty and asylum rights.

The content of the tape were known partially after the *de facto* government fell.

Article 22 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations of April 18th, 1961 sets forth as follows:

1. The receiving State shall either facilitate the acquisition on its territory, in accordance with its laws, by the sending State of premises necessary for its mission or assist the latter in obtaining accommodation in some other way.

2. It shall also, where necessary, assist missions in obtaining suitable accommodation for their members.

3. The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution.

Knowingly, Capriles Radonski acted before the Cuban diplomat as the “good cop”, demanding the Ambassador “peacefully” what the mob of one thousand heated persons, the “bad cops”, were demanding “by force” outside: Search the embassy to ascertain that Vice President Diosdado Cabello was not there.

Sánchez Otero had unsuccessfully attempted to contact him in the morning. He wanted to inform about Romaní’s threat. He left a message, but Capriles Radonski never called back. In the absence of the mayor, a diplomatic official called the head of operations of Baruta municipal police, Sheriff Osvaldo García, who promised to send a commission at once. A second call was required for him to fulfill his promise: Two cops only arrived later. That was all the police commission sent.

An excerpt of the dialogue between the Ambassador, the Mayor and his companions:

Germán Sánchez Otero (GSO): Be aware, Mayor, that our embassy has neither electrical power nor water supply. It is under siege like the USA keeps our country under siege for over 40 years and we have never given in. You have recognized that the diplomatic seat has to be respected. Those outside should also know it as well, because they are being driven to break in violently and this would force us to react as our people would in case of an aggression. We would defend this piece of land even at the expense of our lives! I invite you to avoid a tragedy! It is in your hands, Mayor. There are children and women here as well. Children without water, without access to electricity. We have been told that we are blocked and that no food will come in. What law they are based on to act like this? Is it a fair, humanitarian and democratic principle? There is no Venezuelan citizen under asylum here. Should this be the pretext to bring about an act of violence, such pretext has to be eliminated. If those people are provoked to move against this Embassy, the punishment of history and the international community will be much more categorical. We have reported the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Head of the Army, the Nuncio, personalities and other embassies. You have to avoid a dramatic ending here.

Henrique Capriles Radonski (HRC): Allow me, ambassador. I am not going to take out a revolver or pistol, not even a single rifle against those outside. I want to say this in the best fashion.

Because I am not going to do what was done yesterday: They shot me yesterday, ambassador. I wasn't waving a weapon. I was in a pacific protest, because in the democratic regimes there is the possibility for the people to express whatever they believe...

GSO: Mayor, excuse me. This manifestation outside the Embassy has had not peaceful expressions. On the contrary, they are very violent. We have endured this siege since early on. There have been acts of violence. They have destroyed cars belonging to this embassy, they have hit that door and they shout that they are going to break in by force. We are under the threat of an ultimatum. Indeed, the situation created includes violence. We accept this dialogue to avoid that this outbreak goes beyond your control in your capacity as the maximum municipal authority. It would also be a huge responsibility for all Venezuelan authorities. Last year, when there was an anti-Cuban demonstration, you guaranteed that you would only permit it at a distance that would not threaten our security. In this occasion it has gone out of your control.

HCR: I agree that diplomatic premises have to be safeguarded. In no moment I have ordered the power to be cut off here.

GSO: Who did it? Who cut off the power? Who cut off the water supply?

HCR: I ignore it.

GSO: It is important to know that, because several flagrant violations of the law have taken place in front of Baruta authorities and in front of the TV cameras. It is very important to know who

are those affirming that food staples will not be allowed in and that they will take over the Embassy.

HCR: Ambassador, when you give a party, you open the premises and the people move around the embassy. Appealing to your cleverness, we are not going to question your word, because there are many reports going and coming. Because I believe that *this is over now if you let us check the embassy*, so that we can tell the people out there that we have checked that neither Diosdado Cabello nor any other Venezuelan are under asylum here. The U.S. Ambassador invited me to visit his embassy and he showed me around. I could walk thru with him...

GSO: Excuse me, if I invite you to this embassy, as many other Venezuelans enter on daily basis and in normal conditions, it would be different. But I cannot accept, like no other ambassador, is that his territory is checked questioning his word. You have the right to place those TV cameras outside the embassy for centuries and then you will verify the truth. But it is inadmissible for the honor, the dignity and the international principles what you are asking (...) We have not been able to offer you not even a glass of water or coffee. That is violence! That is pressure! That is insulting! That is an international scandal! And it is happening despite our will. You are asking me something that is not provided under the rules of the Right to Asylum. I am talking with you because you represent the group out there and to try to avoid what a small group is seeking.

HCR: I cannot drop not even one tear-gas bomb to dissolve that group.

GSO: But they can violate the integrity of this Embassy! They have done so! It is not theory, Mayor! Please, understand me, we have hours without water supply, without electrical power (...) When will be electrical power supply be restored? And water supply? It is an international shame! It goes against ethical and humanitarian principles! A democrat, a humanist, cannot admit that children cannot access electricity, water and food!

Baruta official: We undertake to reconnect water and electricity as soon as possible. We cannot do it by ourselves. We have to ask the utility companies to do it.

GSO: Who did it?

Official: We ignore it.

GSO: How could this situation go beyond your control? It is the same as tossing tear-gas canisters against innocent people. And this has happened before the eyes of the authorities of this municipality! There were police officers! We informed, and it is still happening!

Official: We trust your word, but we insist in the advisability of walking thru the embassy. If you please, invite the Nuncio so that he may accompany us.

HCR: What do you propose?

GSO: That you perform your duty: Talking to those persons, tell them that they are entitled to be outside and we are entitled to

and have the duty to say what it is. Now, harassment? Aggressions against vehicles? Beating the door? Blocking the movement of officials? Threatening to assault our headquarters? Attempts to set them in fire? They are actions that violate much the International Law! They began four days ago. On April 9th, before the acts of violence of yesterday April 11th, there were shots to the air, they tossed a Molotov cocktail and burnt tires.

HCR: Ambassador, the Baruta Police and the Metropolitan Police guarantee that nobody will climb that wall.

GSO: But you cannot guarantee that if those persons decide to do it.

Herny Vivas (HV): I guarantee that.

GSO: You cannot. How many police officers do you have here?

HV: I have got 40 already.

GSO: That's not enough.

HV: It's enough to me.

GSO: How are you going to do it? We would not allow in front of our embassy beatings, blows, wounded people, who knows? It would be very sad! Of course, it would be sadder such things inside. I ask you to find a solution. We have accepted this dialogue to avoid bloodsheds. I urge you to talk with the national authorities who are the appropriate ones together with you to solve this problem.¹²¹

Based on the foregoing facts, Prosecutor Danilo Andreson charged Capriles Radonski with the crimes of breach of

121 In Sánchez Otero, *Ibid.*

international principles, private violence and violation of domicile by a civil servant, as well as accomplice to the crimes of arbitrary deprivation of liberty, public intimidation and damages to properties. The mayor was imprisoned for four months from May 2004¹²², until a court accorded to try him in freedom. In 2006 he was absolved and then, in 2008, the case was reopened¹²³. The status of the current process is unknown.

During the height of this case, free copies of a video defending Capriles Radonski were distributed throughout Venezuela. The audiovisual material consisted of small excerpts of the dialogue recorded by *Televen* at the embassy, where Ambassador Sánchez Otero talks over the phone with the Norwegian Ambassador whose offer of help is kindly rejected by him with the argument that there was no conflict at that moment:

It's not necessary, Ambassador. There is no conflict. We are understanding each other, we are talking, there is no need of an intermediary. We are talking two sister nations. It is a misunderstanding that is being clarified in this very moment.

I talked about it with Sánchez Otero during an interview in VTV TV station in 2006. He explained then that by the time he talked with his Norwegian colleague there was, actually, no international

122 At first, Capriles Radonski declared he was living a forced “clandestine life” and several days after this he gave up to justice. Prosecutor Danilo Anderson assured that the mayor could have been judged in liberty from the very beginning, if it were not for his initial attitude before the trial. “The responsible that he’s in prison are his lawyers, who recommended him to hide”, said Anderson. VTV program *En Confianza*, 07-12-2004.

123 Aporrea.org. 10-17-2008

conflict deserving the intermediation of another ambassador¹²⁴. The dialogue with Capriles Radonski was unfolding at that time and he, Sánchez Otero, aspired the mayor to calm down the mob by conveying the information he had received from the ambassador.

Instead of acting firmly and tell them: “We have talked with the ambassador and he guarantees that Diosdado Cabello is not inside”, he said: “I couldn’t search the Embassy and I can’t affirm or deny that someone is inside”, thus generating more doubts among those persons who actually deserved a firm attitude.

Transfer to Turiamo

From the bedroom where he was secluded in the Military Police regiment, Hugo Chávez is moved to the O’Leary battalion, close to the Army General Command headquarters.

It was around 10:00 p.m., Friday April 12th.

Chávez upholds that Carmona ordered to kill him.

The order to kill me got there, but a conflict arose between those willing to execute it and those who weren’t¹²⁵.

Then, they put him on board of a helicopter that would take him to “Tomás Vega” naval base in the harbor of *Turiamo*, State of Aragua, where the Navy Special Operations Unit has its headquarters as well.

124 VTV program *En Confianza*, 06-09-2006.

125 Panorama, 04-12-2003.

Just imagine the situation. In *Turiamo* there was no room prepared or a prison facility. At last, they put me in the infirmary of the navy base.

Chávez felt that his death was being planned since he watched Napoleón Bravo on the *Venevisión* screen reading a resignation he had not signed as if it were genuine.

If they are telling such a lie to the world to make a Government, then I am dead. They would not let me speak ever again. They are going to terminate me.

Long after, Chávez will say that before giving the order, Carmona received a phone call from Washington to fine-tune the plan; then, he asked the military to “make it look an accident.”

Pedro Carmona denied it from his asylum in Bogotá:

I would have never given such an order and I never talked with Washington¹²⁶.

In his defense, Carmona upheld that “in no file appears, five years later, any charge in connection with that by the Prosecutor General’s Office.”

A new call to Fidel

It’s 11:15 p.m. in Havana when Fidel Castro hears again, for the second time that Friday 12th of April, the voice of María Gabriela Chávez. The daughter of his friend had, according to Fidel, a “tragic accent.”

126 La Verdad, 04-15-2007.

Tell me what's happened?

My father was transferred at night, in a helicopter, with an unknown destination¹²⁷.

Quick! In some minutes you need to denounce it with your own voice.

Once again, journalist Randy Alonso takes María Gabriela statements. In a matter of minutes, from Havana the news travels around the world, but to Venezuela, where nothing is reported about Hugo Chávez's whereabouts.

127 Castro Fidel: Op. Cit.

CHAPTER VI:

SATURDAY APRIL 13TH

Zero pro Chávez's images on TV Collapse signs

The newspapers on the Saturday 13th of April are a big show. They all speak of “president Carmona” and they avoid calling by its name the coup d'état consummated the day before live from Venezuela to the world.

Not even Últimas Noticias, whose newsroom managing director, Eleazar Díaz Rangel, is a moderate leftist journalist favorable to Chávez, did so.

The tabloid highlights in its cover page the “full powers” taken on by Carmona¹²⁸.

128 Últimas Noticias, the daily newspaper with the highest circulation in Venezuela, belongs to Cadena de Publicaciones Capriles, also owner of *El Mundo*, *Líder*, *Urbe*, *Urbe Bikini*, *Dominical* and *Multicolor*, among other publications. The emporium has investments in big building companies, as well as in the financial sector. In times of the IV Republic, its founder Miguel Ángel Capriles Ayala even counted with his own parliamentary representation, thanks to his influence over the prevailing political parties. Henri Capriles Radonski, the opposition candidate for 2012 presidential election, has family bonds with the Capriles of the big commercial chain. His cousin Armando “Pelón” Capriles (Miguel Ángel Capriles' heir) was a parliamentary representative for Copei and he initiated Capriles Radonski as a politician, when he was able to position Radonski in the list of the aforementioned political party for Zulia state, in the 2008 electoral process. In this way, 26-year old lawyer Capriles Radonski was elected as parliamentary representative; then president of the Lower Chamber and in 2002 he was elected mayor of Baruta Mayorality and later he was elected as Governor of Miranda state, always with the support of his party, Primero Justicia (Justice First). Beneficiary of a significant portion of the official investment in publicity, the newspaper Últimas Noticias has had an editorial position quite peculiar vis-à-vis Hugo Chávez's Government.

Paradoxically, *El Nacional*, a frenzied anti-Chavez newspaper, gives more room and significance than other papers to speakers of the ousted powers. Like Últimas Noticias, the newspaper owned by the Oteros, published, even though a few lines only and without much significance in the layout, María Gabriela Chávez's statement denying her father's resignation. It also published on page D-6 the position of the Prosecutor General Isaías Rodríguez under the tile:

This is a coup d'état.

El Universal, on its part, dilutes this statement under the title: Judiciary and the Citizen's Branches of Government shocked.

El Nacional also published that Saturday an interview with José Vicente Rangel, Defense Minister who avoids describing what happened as a coup d'état, despite the follow-up questions by journalist Gioconda Soto. He defines it as a pronouncement of the National Armed Force. Further, he denies that he had requested political asylum and announces his return to journalism.

Some years later, Leonardo Padrón interviewed José Vicente Rangel. The writer quoted that interview as an evidence that the Defense Minister "had got used to the idea" of the consummated facts. But Rangel replied:

No. I was conspiring¹²⁹.

Excepting the Sunday analysis signed by his director, Eleazar Díaz Rangel, and some opinion writers and columnists, its informative content are far away of a pro-governmental stance. During the April 2002 crisis, the newspaper not only recognized Carmona's government but avoided to describe the facts as a coup d'état. (See: Díaz Rangel, Eleazar: *Expectativas por nuevo gobierno* (Expectations about new government), Últimas Noticias, 04-13-2002).

129 Padrón, Leonardo: *Los imposibles 3. Conversaciones al borde de un*

Indeed?

Of course, I was conspiring. I had enough contacts in the National Armed Force. I moved a good part of the military response. The commanders of the force were in contact with me. Now, was I going to tell a journalist: “look, I am here on the street, open chest, conspiring to oust this dick”? No I couldn’t do that.

But Prosecutor General, Isaías Rodríguez, did say so: “This is a coup d’état.”

The Prosecutor lacked the military instruments I handled. It is different. He did what he had to do. I did what I had to do: To give many people the slip, look for the military connections and mobilize what I could mobilize.

“The day after, on Saturday, I went once again around seven in the morning to the Miraflores Palace where I found that all the documents sorted out and absolutely everything in the President’s Office had been picked up by the Military House loyal to President Chavez¹³⁰”.

At 08:00 a.m. José Gregorio Vásquez is in the Palace with his immediate boss, the designated Minister of the President’s Office (Chief of Staff), Jesús Eduardo Briceño, and with Carmona’s private secretary, Juan F. Mejías.

micrófono (The Impossible 3. Conversations at the edge of a Microphone). Editorial Santillana, Caracas, 2008.

130 Rafael Arreaza refers to all President Chávez’s documents classified by Arreaza the previous day following Carmona’s instructions, including letters that Colonel Rodríguez Salas wanted to send to U.S.

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The night before Teodoro Petkoff was presented in *Televen* TV station challenging the dictatorial nature of the new Government.

Governor of Carabobo, Henrique Fernando Salas Feo, of *Proyecto Venezuela* party was contacting governors and mayors to challenge the article that left them to the mercy of Miraflores.

Pedro Carmona had clarified over the phone to Didalco Bolívar, Governor of Aragua, of the *Podemos* party, then a Chávez's ally, that the article would only be applied to radical pro Chávez officials who fail to recognize his authority, such as Freddy Bernal, mayor of Caracas. In the course of time, Didalco will end up grossing up the ranks of the opposition against Chávez.

Bernal's office was strategic. The police forces with Carmona were looking for him to imprison him. That's why he was in the top of the list of "the most wanted" aired by *RCTV* and his whereabouts were source of concern for the evening newspaper *Tal Cual* which published its picture in the end page under the headline: "Where is Bernal?"

Carmona asked Didalco Bolívar to convey the explanation to his colleague governors and to invite them to a meeting in Miraflores on Monday 15.

In the interior of the country, anti-Chávez groups had assaulted Governors and Mayors's offices the day before. Governors Ronald Blanco La Cruz, from Tachira, and Florencio Porras, from Merida, stay detached from their offices in military facilities after the violent

eviction from their offices by those who allegedly represented the “civil society.”

On April 11th, the regional president of *Fedecámaras*, the business association, demanded Governor Didalco Bolívar to yield his office and then sent a priest as emissary with the same petition.

The Governor riposted:

I was elected by 395,000 ballots and there are 700,000 voters here. If you want me to give you this office you need to give me your cassock¹³¹.

The situation in the garrisons was delicate. The army generals resisted to subordinate themselves to a Minister of Defense coming from the Navy, like Ramírez Pérez. General Raúl Baduel still failed to recognize Carmona in the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade in Maracay, surrounded by an ever increasingly number of Chávez’s followers. In the meantime, in *Fuerte Tiuna* officers rejected before their superiors the manner how the President was removed from Miraflores and the evident unconstitutional character of the decree of April 12th.

In Sucre Municipality, which is a part of Caracas Metropolitan Area, the office of its mayor, José Vicente Rangel Ávalos, the son of the Minister of Defense, José Vicente Rangel, was taken over by members of the opposition who, like in Miraflores, invoked the “power vacuum” theory.

131 Panorama, 04-12-2003.

Exceeding the limits of his constitutional powers, the Metropolitan Mayor, Alfredo Peña, took the oath of office of Sheriff Luis Carrasquel as the new Commander of the Sucre Municipal Police superseding Sheriff Jesús Sotillo, the one designaed by Rangel. His citizen's security Secretary Iván Simonovis and the director of the Metropolitan Polcie, Henry Vivas accompanied him.

The mayor's office, which is subject to popular voting, was being disputed by a three opposition politicians, as reported by journalists Mabel Sarmiento and Carolina Páez in *Últimas Noticias*:

Carlos Ocariz, Oscar Pérez and William Ojeda showed their aspirations to that office¹³².

In the same note reads:

Little is known of the whereabouts of Rangel and the eight *MVR* party councilmen.

The international press reported the declaration of the Rio Group Presidential Summit, in Costa Rica, against the breach of the constitutional order in Venezuela.

María Gabriela Chávez's statements to the Cuban TV denouncing that her father had not resigned and remained prisoner had spread throughout the world from Havana.

José Gregorio Vásquez recollects that morning:

In view of the overwhelming criticisms against the stillborn

132 *Últimas Noticias*, 04-13-2002

Government, we decided to undertake a counteroffensive intensifying the dialogue¹³³.

Vásquez called Rafael Marín, Secretary-General of AD party; Juan Francisco Mejías called Manuel Cova, Secretary-General of the Workers Union Confederation, and Juan Ramón Vásquez, a brother of José Gregorio, helped him contact the manager of *Globovisión* TV station, Alberto Federico Ravell.

When I finally managed to contact Ravell, he told me that all the owners of the media were meeting at *Venevisión* TV station. I asked them all to go to Miraflores because the President needed to talk to them urgently. He accepted and told me that at 11:00 a.m. all of them would be there. The corridors of the Palace began to be packed with people again.

The TV channels aired continuously Pedro Carmona's CV. It was necessary to position the virtues of the ruler before the plain people for he did not come from their class or from their ballots.

"I got ready to follow up the situation of the wounded people in hospitals and private clinics. I checked that all the help I requested had come on time.

At around 09:00 a.m., somewhat upset, Vice-admiral Ramírez Pérez got in the President's Office and says that the situation is not under control:

A bloodshed can happen."

133 Vásquez, José Gregorio: Op. Cit.

Ambassadors of the U.S.A. and Spain visit the dictator

In his book, Pedro Carmona, tells that on Saturday 13th he arrived early to Miraflores where after receiving the Military House honors he met with Manuel Cova, Secretary-General of the Workers Union Confederation, whom he had offer to become his right hand as Executive Vice President of the Republic.

He told me that he couldn't give me an answer because he needed to consult with the institution and for such purposes he would travel to meet (Carlos) Ortega in Paraguaná. I insisted that he requests him to urgently come back to Caracas and a private plane was offered to him if it was necessary to as to resume conversations and broaden the consensus.

At 09:00 a.m. he received a visit with serious implications in the light of the International Law. The same way as their governments had issued a joint communiqué in connection with the developments of Thursday 11th, Charles Shapiro and Manuel Viturro de la Torre, ambassadors of the USA and Spain, respectively, went together to meet with whom had just dissolved all the branches of government and take on dictatorial powers.

Carmona asked his Foreign Minister, José Rodríguez Iturbe, to accompany him at the meeting.

The meeting, *per se*, implied a tacit international recognition of the *de facto* Government by Washington and Madrid.

Therefore, and the way how things ended, Carmona insisted in his book that the visit paid by Shapiro and Viturro "had an

informative nature and never intended to express support or rejection to the new government.”

The ambassadors were concerned about the fate of democratic institutions, which was been assessed by the international community.

Rodríguez Iturbe, in a manner that Carmona deems “enlightened”, said:

The Transition Government is committed to lead the country from a brief *de facto* situation to the restoration of institutions by means of popular consultation.

In connection with this meeting, the Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, of the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party (PSOE) read in 2004 to the congress of his country some wires of Ambassador Viturro that the visit to Miraflores took place the afternoon of April 13th where the branches of government had been dissolved¹³⁴.

On his part, Otto Reich, U.S. Undersecretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs by the date of the coup, affirms that Shapiro went with Viturro to Miraflores on April 12th, before Carmona realized his intention of dissolving the National Assembly to talk him over from such purpose, because it would impair Washington to keep supporting an openly unconstitutional government. Reich claims to have ordered Shapiro to convey Carmona his “instructions” and manifest his annoyance at the businessman’s reaction. Carmona,

134 Panorama, 12-02-2004.

according to Reich, replied to Shapiro as follows:

Thank you for your suggestion, Mr. Ambassador, but we know what we are doing.

Reich tells he had insisted with Shapiro:

Charles, did you tell him the instructions were directly briefed by me and were not a suggestion as he took them?

Yes, the ambassador answered.

Beyond the historical truth about the role of the USA in the coup, it is noteworthy how Reich confirms that from the State Department “instructions” and not “suggestions” are issued to rulers (or candidates to become rulers)¹³⁵.

Gringo ships in Venezuelan waters

At 09:00 a.m. of Saturday 13th, April 2002, Venezuelan radars detect three U.S. military ships trespassing territorial waters of the country.

An M13300, M2 2027 and an M3 2132 mobile with military identification entering the Venezuelan territorial sea without due authorization¹³⁶.

Últimas Noticias newspaper quoted a military report presented to Carmona's Government and indicated that the vessels were “prowling La Orchila”, a Venezuelan island where Chávez would be transferred in the afternoon.

135 Reich, Otto. Preface of Carmona-Borjas, Robert book (Op. Cit.).

136 Últimas Noticias, 04-30-2002.

By noon a helicopter took off from one of the ships and flew over the zone and a plane with unknown characteristics and origin, but with U.S. license, also flew over that area and returned without reporting destination.

On April 29th, *The Guardian* newspaper reported from London about the support of the US Navy to the coup in Venezuela.

According to the British paper, the U.S. ships which trespassed Venezuelan waters on Saturday 13th, had intercepted telephone communications between Caracas, Cuba, Iraq and Libya¹³⁷.

Media owners and chiefs in Miraflores

José Gregorio Vásquez estimates that around 11:30 a.m. of Saturday 13th, the owner of *El Universal* newspaper, Andrés Mata Osorio, arrived to Miraflores.

I escorted him to the waiting room of the Private Secretary's Office.

At 12:00 the rest of the guests arrived. Vásquez mentions the following:

- Alberto Federico Ravell and Guillermo Zuloaga (*Globovisión*),
- Gustavo, Ricardo and Guillermo Cisneros (*Venevisión*),
- Miguel Henrique Otero (*El Nacional*),
- Marcel Granier (*RCTV*),

137 Quoted in Últimas Noticias, 04-30-2002.

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- Andrés de Armas (*Bloque de Armas*),
- Orlando Urdaneta, a showman and anchor in *Globovisión*, and a cousin of rear Admiral Daniel Comisso Urdaneta, one of the rebels.

The last one who arrived was Patricia Poleo (*El Nuevo País*).

As he told later, Victor Ferreres, then president of *Venevisión* was also present at the meeting.

“By that time, one of the persons acting as secretary of Carmona tells him: Mr. President, representatives and owners of the media are here.

Carmona answered:

Take them to the Council of Ministers room, I'll be there in a minute.

Carmona asks Ramírez Pérez, whom he designated Minister of Defense, to make a presentation about the current situation to these gentlemen.

He asks me to join him to talk about the control of the situation of the wounded people. Then, we walked together to the Council of Ministers room.”

The media businessmen were on one side of the large table and the officials on the other side. José Gregorio Vásquez lists them:

- Pedro Carmona
- Vice-admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, Minister of Defense,
- Raúl de Armas, Minister of Agriculture,
- Leopoldo Martínez, Minister of Finance,
- (Retired) Vice-admiral Jesús Eduardo Briceño, Minister of the President's Office, and

- José Gregorio Vázquez, Deputy Minister of the President's Office,
- Rafael Arreaza, Minister of Health, mentions himself at the conclave.

“Representatives and owners of Venevisión, RCTV, Globovisión, El Nacional, El Universal and others were present at the Council of Ministers room. Patricia Poleo was also there.

Ramírez Pérez took the floor:

Gentlemen, the situation is extremely delicate. They (the army) did not allow us to meet the condition of sending Chávez to Cuba, and therefore, Chávez refuses to resign which means this is a coup d'état. The military situation, especially in the army, gets more complicated per the hour. As from this moment, the casualties will come from the Armed Forces¹³⁸”

Earlier, Pedro Carmona portrayed the delicacy of the situation and, according to José Gregorio Vázquez, “asked for their support”. The Deputy Minister does not explain what kind of support was asked for.

138 Rafael Arreaza's statement is the second to mention that Héctor Ramírez Pérez used the expression “to put the dead”. In April 25th, 2002, Vice Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos, the FAN Chief of Staff, told before the Prosecutor General's Office about a conversation between Ramírez Pérez, General Commander of the Army Efraín Vázquez Velazco and Carrero Cuberos at *Fuerte Tiuna*, during the night of April 11th. There, Ramírez Pérez would have told them: “The civil society is imposing me two conditions. The President has to be a civilian and there is not going to be a Government Junta. And second, President Chávez has to be imprisoned”. Carrero Cuberos refers that somebody asked why these conditions and Ramírez Pérez replied: “Because they were the ones to put the dead”. Carrero Cuberos adds the following: “That cannot be possible! That is, they knew there was going to be dead. It is not that they put the dead, but that they were going to put the dead”.

The Minister of Defense explained that the Bolivarian Circles were hundred per cent operational, which was an extremely serious problem. He likewise informed that General Baduel was an insurgent.

“Of course, everybody was alarmed and began to talk about possible strategies. To me, who witnessed it, each one sounded more absurd than the other.”

Miguel Henrique Otero and Marcel Granier spoke on behalf of the media.

José Gregorio Vásquez continued:

Granier made a particularly excellent presentation about the mistakes made and the search for solutions. Carmona nodded. Gustavo Cisneros took the floor to ask the President to leave in their hands the communicational management of the Government. Carmona accepted. By consensus, they decided that Alberto Federico Ravell makes the postulations.

Vásquez tells that Ravell proposed Gilberto Carrasquero as President of the National Telecommunications Board (Conatel, Spanish acronym).

Vásquez goes on:

Carmona, then, turned to Patricia Poleo and offered her the Central Information Office (OCI), but Alberto Federico interrupted (him) asking Carmona for a vote of confidence and

proposed Fernán Frías for such office. Carmona accepted and I could see how Poleo's face grew upset.

“Suddenly another discussion broke which had nothing to do with the serious situation at hand, because Carmona told Patricia Poleo that he was going to appoint her to the Central Information Office (OCI).

Immediately, the media representatives replied and demanded Carmona to appoint the candidate they already had.

They had a brief argument with Patricia Poleo.”

Patricia Poleo had a different version of the facts. In her appearance before the Political Committee of the National Assembly investigating the coup, the journalist stated:

It was I who told the country in my columns that Pedro Carmona did offer to me the the OCI on Saturday 13th, at 01:00 p.m.

The offer, according to Poleo, “brought about an infuriated annoyance in Alberto Federico Ravell.”

The only one minister appointed the day before who seemed to have his feet on the ground was José Rodríguez Iturbe, the Foreign Minister, who told me: “Here we are. Standing by.” The rest showed the euphoria of triumph which on the streets already looked precarious.

About the meeting in Miraflores, Patricia Poleo stated as follows:

All media owners met with Carmona. They expressed the general will of helping him move the country forward with the condition that the unconstitutional decrees were amended and that Carlos Ortega was called to a meeting with him so that the country may realize that the working class was not excluded.

Patricia Poleo attributed the censorship request to Héctor Ramírez Pérez, Carmona's Minister of Defense. The journalist mixed up the rank of Vice-admiral with the rank of general:

The general asked not to broadcast a press conference General Baduel was going to give and asked for censorship. It was General (sic) Ramírez the one who asked for censorship¹³⁹.

Miguel Henrique Otero, editor of *El Nacional*, replied with words that to Patricia Poleo seemed an "exemplary" response:

In the Hugo Chávez's Government I was accused of mediating and trying to intimidate my journalists to write what I wanted them to write. It was not so in Hugo Chávez's Government and it will not be either in this Government. I am not going to censor my journalists.

"I simply suggested the media to avoid lootings"

Ramírez Pérez upholds a different version.

The Vice-admiral tells he had not slept the night before when he attended a meeting with media owners and directors in Miraflores on Saturday 13th, 2002.

139 Interpellation before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly.

He had to stay up all night because of “the problems in *Fuerte Tiuna*”. That is why he spent the night on edge “trying to prevent an internal confrontation among ourselves.”

That was Ramírez Pérez’s statement during his appearance before the Political Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April coup.

Ramírez Pérez denied the use of the term “censorship” to describe his request to the Venezuelan press owners and heads.

He told that he had posed a “suggestion” in connection with the lootings that had been recorded in some working-class areas. He didn’t mention Baduel’s press conference which, according to Patricia Poleo he asked to censor.

There was no censorship there. The only thing I requested the media to do is to try to avoid (the coverage of lootings). I asked them as a suggestion because I have nothing to censor.

He argued that with the broadcast of images with lootings “an imitation behavior could be unleashed.”

And that’s all what I said, “they are free to make their own decisions”. But it was not censorship in any manner whatsoever.

In his book, Carmonal also denies having asked his visitors to censor:

In no manner they were requested to apply self-censorship or not to cover a possible Baduel’s press conference as it has been misinterpreted. They were simply briefed about the explosive and delicate situation.

According to Carmona, the heads of the media “broadly commented about the national situation and clearly conveyed their concerns as Marcel Granier did on behalf of them, emphasizing the need to preserve a broad atmosphere of freedoms and to accelerate the call for elections in the shortest time possible.”

Carmona branded “infamous” Patricia Poleo’s chronicles about that meeting and, in general, about the coup. He accused her of creating a “black legend” about his short-lived government. Carmona concludes that after the meeting in Miraflores “each media director briefed about the situation and the challenges made the decisions they deem advisable according to their conscience.”

In an interview for *Panorama* newspaper, Gustavo Valdivieso, special envoy to Bogotá asked Carmona:

Did you suggest or knew about the order of showing “zero pro Chávez images” which was followed during your mandate?

And Carmona answered:

At a meeting with the media they were briefed about the unstable situation of public order in the country, the risk of a possible military pronouncement in Maracay and possible calls to riots in that and other cities, but it was never ordered “zero pro Chavez images” on TV¹⁴⁰.

Information blackout

Patricia Poleo commented at the parliamentary Committee:

140 *Panorama*, 04-12-2003.

If the audiovisual media censored the information, you have to talk with them not with me. The papers did the necessary job for the people to know what was going on.

Even though the blackout was particularly noticeable on TV, the truth is that papers and the radio, with exceptions and nuances, also joined the cartel. The issue is addressed below.

By April 2002, Victor Ferreres was the President of *Venevisión* TV station. Ferreres, a radical anti-Chávez executive described himself as a participant of the meeting of Saturday 13th in Miraflores. He said so during a press conference December that year along with other media owners and directors. They had called the international press to explain the support and active participation of their TV stations and newspapers in the call for strike issued by the Workers Union Confederation (CTV), the Business Association (Fedecámaras) and the PDVSA anti-Chávez management, second significant attempt of the opposition to overthrow the government.

The meeting was a real boxing round between the owners of the Venezuelan press and journalists and reporters of foreign news agencies and newspapers who refused to understand how the media could guarantee an unbiased coverage of the strike if they were among the active parties calling it.

A The Wall Street Journal reporter asked Ferreres:

What happened on April 12th when you had no coverage and only presented programs for children and sports when the

people were coming down the hills to take back the control of Miraflores?

Víctor Ferreres answered:

The problem was not April 12th, It was April 13th. Some developments that day prevented us from operating as we could. At noon on the 13th, by the end of the morning, the chaos began. Many of those who are at this table took part at a meeting in Miraflores, where we went to convey our concern for Carmona's decree that dissolved all the branches of Government: The National Assembly, governors, mayors. We rejected it. I think that was the last meeting that took place in Miraflores. We left for our offices from there¹⁴¹.

141 Besides Ferreres, the others who attended the press conference were: Marcel Granier (RCTV), Alberto Federico Ravell (Globovisión), Miguel Henrique Otero (El Nacional) and Ignacio Luis Oberto (El Universal). The other private TV station with national reach, Televen, was not represented in this press conference. Ferreres was finally replaced as Venevisión's chairman by Carlos Bardasano, an executive with good relations with Chávez' government. This replacement, which coincided with a meeting between Chávez and Cisneros, which was promoted by former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, in 2004, also implied a turn to Televen's editorial policy regarding the Government. Venevisión returned to a list of programs based on entertainment, reduced the number of its opinion programs and received again governmental and Bolivarian officials and speakers. All along the precedent years, they were not invited or were treated with hostility in those programs. In 2007, Chávez renewed the broadcast license to Venevisión and Televen for five years and decided to do the contrary in the case of RCTV. In 2009, Venevisión was the only national TV channel to get an exclusive interview with President Chávez, even on its own headquarters, amidst the campaign to carry out an amendment of Venezuela's Constitution. Chávez proposal won the constitutional referendum held on February 15th, 2009 and, as the rest of the officials elected by the popular vote, now he was able to seek reelection in successive electoral events. In 2011, during a press conference, Chávez took advantage of the question posed to him by the Venevisión's journalist Vanessa Sánchez to remind Cisneros about his role in 2002 and warn him about the consequences of making the same mistake: "Let's

He said that “immediately after that the Bolivarian Circles showed up and surrounded the headquarters of *Venevisión*.”

They stayed there from 01:00 or 02:00 p.m. until President Chávez got back to Miraflores.

Andrés Izarra, then Production Manager of *RCTV* news programs and who resigned based on his disagreement with the blackout policy, tells that from Friday 12th in the morning they had information there that was censored by superior orders, that is, the Directors of the channel.

I interviewed Izarra in August 2002 and inquired about the reasons argued by the owners, directors and some reporters of the TV stations:

To justify the absence of information during April 2002, the media argued that the physical integrity of the staff was threatened so that they could not cover the developments.

I confess that when I left the channel I thought of not going public with my resignation. But when I saw that they started to unleash that biased opinion campaign whereby they had not informed because they were afraid of terrorist behavior against them, I felt insulted. Because (in RCTV) we had information to hope that channels like that one where you work, which supported the coup... We know that, I will never forget the day Cisneros arrived here after the coup to talk me. And I remember what he said to me: “I’m wearing a tie because I’m here to recognize you as my President”. Well, it’s OK. But I know that he participated very actively in the whole coup d’état. Let’s hope he had really rectified, once and for all, him and all those who work with him there. Otherwise they will be under Chávez’s whip, hopefully not, as anyone else supporting or welcoming an invasion or anyone making calls for coups d’état or trying to find generals like those in Altamira Square” (National broadcast from Miraflores Palace. Caracas, September 29, 2011).

report since Friday morning. For instance, the interview of María Gabriela Chávez by the Cuban television that we got via *Telemundo* where she denounced that her father was kidnapped and was an imprisoned President. We also put off the air precipitously the press conference where the Prosecutor General condemned the coup. That happened on Friday, before any violence against reporters or the facilities of the channel had happened. Neither we did spread the news about the protests on Friday afternoon in front of check point 4 at *Fuerte Tiuna*, in the Panamerican Road, in 23 de enero parish, in Petare and Guarenas. We had reports about popular demonstrations taking place throughout the country demanding to know the whereabouts of the President. (They) wanted to see the resignation letter, know the truth about the situation. On Saturday morning, on top of that, there is a press conference by General Baduel at the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade where he demanded the reinstatement of the constitutional process, the return of President Chávez to his office declaring himself in rebellion and disavowing the *de facto* Government¹⁴².

Was there footage of all that?

Yes, sure.

And what happened with that information? Was it destroyed?

Is it kept in the archives?

I don't know. I left by noon (on Saturday 13th). We had that information and was voluntarily and deliberately omitted by an

142 VTV program *En Confianza*, 08-12-2002.

editorial line that was imposed on us. We were expressly told “zero pro-Chavez images on the screen.” In my opinion an attempt to legalize through the media action what clearly was a coup d’état.

Who issued such instruction of “zero pro-Chavez images on the screens?

It came from the directors of the channel.

What did you feel? Why did you resolve to resign?

I was demanding that we should tell what was happening. We could not omit such reports. We even knew where President Chávez was, in *La Orchila* island, because some pilots called our reporters and we deliberately did not say anything. We had a reporter in Miraflores and when the Palace is regained by Chávez’s followers, she had to run away. Despite we had that reporter in Miraflores, we deliberately never told the people that the Palace had been recovered by Chávez’s followers. Instead, I am invited to abide by the line of the channel or leave. Given the choices, I chose to leave.

Izarra received the order of wiping Chávez’s supporters off RCTV screen the morning of Friday 12th.

Did you obey it in that moment?

Everything unfolded quickly. We obeyed it under objections until it became impossible to accept it. I have found later that the Constitution provides for conscious objection allowing differences with the line of the company if one’s job is at stake. The Journalist’s Ethics Code binds to co-responsibility in the information line

between journalists and businessmen.

Is it true that Aristóbulo Istúriz called you to complaint that his name was spread in “the most wanted” list?

He called the channel after the noon news program on Friday 12, around 12 p.m. He complained about the biased coverage.

But they broadcast a list with “the most wanted.”

Freddy Bernal, Aristóbulo Istúriz... Yes, he said that he was home, close to the National Pantheon, and regretted deeply the media coverage of the whole process. I explained the editorial line and the instructions I had received. I told him the information we had that we could not broadcast.

For how long had you worked in the channel?

I was 2 years 8 months.

What do you think about what happened those days?

There was a coup d'état. There's no doubt about it. Along with the coup a repression was unleashed as never before in recent times causing much outrage in the people. Tarek William Saab was dragged out from his place as if he were a thug. Governors were almost lynched. The Cuban Embassy was under siege. This was the ugliest face of that repressive right wing in Venezuela. And, lastly, the decree the most flagrant violation against the democratic process.

Andrés, you say that because you are a Chávez's follower?

I am not. Absolutely. I have serious differences with regard to this process.

There is a Manichean view placing anyone daring to call

these developments a “coup d’état” in one of the sides of the political polarization.

And anyone talking about the media is immediately branded as a “Chavista”. There is no way out. I am somewhat critical about this process. However, it is a democratic process legitimized in six elections. It has a strong popular support. Failing to acknowledge that strength is dangerous.

Later, in 2004, Izarra will be appointed by Chávez Minister of Communication and Information, and after that he founded and chaired the first multi-state television network of the Southern countries, *Telesur*. In March 2009, I reminded his position in year 2002 and asked him:

When did you define yourself a “chavista”?

After the sabotage against the oil industry. From that moment on it became impossible to me not to take sides¹⁴³.

A shameful commitment

The morning of Saturday 13th, a press conference was called by Liliana Ortega, president of COFAVIC, an NGO engaged in the Human Rights defense. The press meeting would take place at COFAVIC headquarters.

Many journalists showed up to cover the statements, including Javier Barrios, director of a Catholic radio network, *Radio Fe y Alegría*.

143 Personal conversation.

The day before, on Friday 12th, that radio station had dedicated a popular *porro* song by singer Pastor López to Pedro Carmona Estanga. The refrain goes like this:

I pay blows with blows

I pay a kiss with a kiss

That is the Law of Love

That I learned, that I learned...

Fe y Alegría, a station that is run, under concession, by Jesuit priests, stood out from the rest of radio stations for its broad coverage of the facts and developments, including activities of Chávez's supporters which were excluded from the TV screens.

After Carmona's inauguration ceremony, that radio station had broadcast an interview with Education Minister Aristóbulo Isturiz who denounced the coup. Once it was broadcast, the staff left the station but the kept the equipment on with music programs solely. They were afraid of being assaulted and imprisoned for breaking the silence imposed.

On the dawn of Saturday 13th, Javier Barrios and his co-workers were resolved to re-open the station. In his way, the director, a journalist through and through, passed by COFAVIC's headquarters to cover Liliana Ortega's statements before going to *Fe y Alegría*. Carlos Figueroa, a reporter with the radio went along with him.

In the book *Golpe de radio* (A radio coup), reflecting the difficulties of those hours, Javier Barrios tells that during the press

conference a journalist whose name he preferred to omit began this conversation:

Aren't you joining the commitment?

What commitment?¹⁴⁴

Not to air anything from Chávez's supporters to help the new government. It is a commitment undertaken by all media.

Ironically, the dialogue took place at the seat of a human rights defense organization. One of them, the right to information, was the victim of that commitment.

We didn't buy a ticket for that train. Our sole commitment is to the truth.

Aren't you Church people? How come that you are not supporting this commitment?

Precisely because we are Church people, good Church people.

Hey mate, we have to help.

That has a name: self-censorship. Very nice, uh? Those who keep bragging about the freedom of speech, now gag themselves!

It's not like that...

We are going to inform the people. And the first thing we are going to broadcast is Baduel's stuff.

Are you nuts? If that comes to be known!

Well, the famous commitment will also be known!

You can't hide what you are... What happened to your solidarity

144 López Vigil, José Ignacio: *Golpe de radio. Los 3 días que transmitimos peligrosamente* (Radio coup. Three days dangerously broadcasted). Asociación Latinoamericana de Educación Radiofónica (ALER), Mérida (Venezuela), 2006.

with your colleagues?

My solidarity is with the people, sis...

A reporter and adviser from Havana

At noon of Saturday 13th, Fidel Castro felt he was a journalist himself:

I had become a sort of press reporter receiving and transmitting news and public messages by mobile phone and with a tape recorder in the hands of (Cuban journalist) Randy (Alonso).

By that time he had talked over the phone with María Gabriela Chávez, with her grandparents Elena and Hugo de los Reyes, who were troubled for their son's fate; with the Mayor of Sabaneta – place of birth of Chávez- with generals Lucas Rincón, Raúl Baduel and Julio García Montoya.

Lucas Rincón has told Fidel Castro that both the Paratroopers Brigade and the Armored Division, on the one hand, and the F-16 fighter planes unit, on the other hand, were against the coup and ready for action to reinstate the Constitution.

I dared suggesting to do whatever was possible to find a solution without combats among militaries.

A few minutes later, Fidel receives a new call from María Gabriela. This time, the young lady gets him through General Baduel who was interested in broadcasting a statement of the military gathered in Maracay's 42 Paratroopers Brigade headquarters. The statement was vetoed by the Venezuelan TV stations abiding by the "zero pro

Chavez images on the screen” policy.

Baduel contributes details to the Cuban leader about the situation. According to Fidel, the military “sweated fighting spirit in each phrase.”

Everything is ready for your statement.

Hold on a minute. Let me put on the phone Division General Julio García Montoya, Permanent Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council.

He didn’t have direct command over the troops, but García Montoya was the most senior military among all the ones gathered in Maracay. In such capacity he will be the Commander of the National Dignity Rescue Operation. Later, he will be appointed General Commander of the Army, and after that, once he retired, he was appointed Ambassador to Brazilia.

From Havana the news censored by the Venezuelan media was spread to the rest of the world – García Montoya proclaimed the full endorsement of the National Armed Force to the Constitution.

In his book of conversations with Ignacio Ramonet, Fidel notes:
With this, he said everything.

“We need to leave the Palace”

At the meeting with the media owners and chiefs on Saturday April 13th, Pedro Carmona excused himself saying there were matters he needed to address.

José Gregorio Vásquez, his Deputy Minister for the President’s

Office, says that Gustavo Cisneros, owner of *Venevisión*, asked Carmona if the group could stay a while longer gathered there.

He consented.

“After that, all the media people stayed in the Council of Ministers room as we left.”

Carmona and the rest of his team left the Council of Ministers room and headed for the office of the Private Secretary of the President’s Office, recalls José Gregorio Vásquez.

“In the way I tripped with Julio Rodríguez Salas, with red spots everywhere in his face, openly unsettled and, according to him, talking with General Baduel.

Thereafter, we headed for the President’s Office where I gave Carmona an overview about how to successfully handle healthcare in Venezuela jointly with the Ministry of Environment in order to correct the water supply problems and environmental sanitation as a source of the main diseases and child mortality in Venezuela.

In that moment, Julio Rodríguez Salas and Carlos Molina Tamayo came in. They told Carmona that they wanted to talk in private with him. Carmona replied that there was no problem if I was present. Then, they told him:

Well, they say that they will bomb Miraflores at any time and that Baduel was ready to go rescue the President even if he has to fight anyone.”

Carmona tells in his book that the guests for the inauguration ceremony of the first members of his Cabinet started to show up in Miraflores around 02:00 p.m. of Saturday 13th, when Rear-

Admiral Molina Tamayo, head of his Military House, asked the *de facto* President to leave immediately:

We need to leave the Palace.

“Thereupon, Carmona told me:

I am going to the Army General Command Headquarters. Do you want to come with me?

I replied:

I’d better go home. Call me if you need me.”

The operation to regain the Palace

By the afternoon of Saturday 13th, thousands of Chávez’s followers gathered in the surroundings of Miraflores. The Military House soldiers greeted the crowds waving the National Flag and raised their fists from the rooftops of the palace.

In the morning, after his men paid military honors to Carmona, Colonel Jesús Morao Gardona, head of the Honor Guard regiment had contacted generals loyal to the ousted President.

Morao Gardona told me his version of the facts during a special broadcast of the TV program “En Confianza” on April 12th, 2006 at the gates of the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade in Maracay, State of Aragua. Morao became the commander of that unit when he earned the rank of Brigade General. General Raúl Baduel, then General Commander of the Army, was a guest as well.

I learned the morning of April 13th that my general Baduel did not recognize the government and disagreed with what was

happening in the country. I phoned him and told him: “I agree with your position¹⁴⁵.”

Morao also talked to General Jorge Luis García Carneiro, Head of the III Infantry Division in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

General, we need tanks here.

García Carneiro says that Morao Gardona placed himself under his orders so he gave him an instruction:

Take over the Palace, keep under custody and protect all the conspirers and other citizens present at the Palace and secure the physical security of all the persons detained¹⁴⁶.

In the interview Morao Gardona commented that once the order had been given to his men, they proceeded to “withhold” the members of the Navy Special Operations Unit (UOPE) who had been taken to Miraflores by Rear-admiral Molina Tamayo¹⁴⁷.

As to the members of the *de facto* Government, Morao Gardona said:

When they realized our actions, they began to run away. Unfortunately one of our men opened Gate number 3, the exit

145 VTV program *En Confianza*, 04-12-2006.

146 Interpellation to General Luis García Carneiro before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April 2002 facts.

147 Robert Carlos González, a member of UOPE, asserts that the Lieutenant and the four sergeants of that unit moved to Caracas on April 11th were never detained, because they headed from Miraflores to the Navy headquarters during the night of April 12th and the following day they rented two taxi cabs to return to their base in Turiamo. If there were detainees from his unit, comments González, they should have been the Lieutenant Commander Domínguez Moreno and the Lieutenant De Moura Brito, who were the only officers of that group linked to Molina Tamayo.

used by Carmona Estanga and Molina Tamayo to run away¹⁴⁸.

Molina Tamayo had Carmona wait at the Golden Gate, the same he used the morning of April 12th, and a few seconds later, Molina Tamayo came with a Mercedes Benz and Carmona got in the rear seat.

The car raced out of Miraflores.

Molina Tamayo was sitting in the front seat. His aide was driving the car. Both military took off their mess jackets “to go unnoticed through *La Pastora*, a working and lower middle class area close to Miraflores. They were aware that they were repudiated in the working-class areas.

Once in the rear seat, they asked me to lean down so as not to show my face in that zone of the city.

Inside, in the corridors of Miraflores, José Gregorio Vásquez perceived a significant lack of control. Some shouted:

They are evacuating the Palace!

Vásquez tells:

I saw came hurriedly towards me heading for the main gate all the media owners.

148 VTV program *En Confianza*, 04-12-2006. During this show, the tension between Baduel and Morao was evident. The first looked irritated when the second said that he was the first to contact, before anybody else, the military officers who held Chávez in captivity in La Orchila. Then, looking to the cameras, Baduel claimed that they, in Maracay, had also made that contact with Chávez’ captors. After the show, a disgruntled Baduel commented on Morao’s version and said that he was forced to call Morao by phone and press him to take control of Miraflores, using the following expression: “Or do you want me to go instead?” This is the tip of the iceberg of the many existent rivalries for the leading roles of April 2002 feat.

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José Gregorio Vásquez affirms that one of them, Gustavo Cisneros, held his arm and told him:

See you in the 6th floor of *Venevisión*.

“I actually went home.

By the time I left Miraflores, the Bolivarian Circles had totally surrounded the Palace and when I got close to the gate, some of them, inebriated, recognized me and said:

That is Doctor Arreaza. He is a good dick. Come with us, we will help you out of here.

That's how I got out and went home. That is all.”

The Mercedes employed to evacuate Pedro Carmona took *Baralt* Avenue, and then the *Boyaca* Avenue, or *Cota Mil* -as the one thousand meters height northern highway connecting East and West Caracas by the Waraira Repano mountain skirts is better known - heading for the East of the city.

Molina Tamayo told the *de facto* President:

Sorry for the haste, but our duty is to preserve your integrity as Head of the Transition Government.

The head of his Military House told him that the swearing-in of the ministers would take place in *Fuerte Tiuna*, after they and their guests are taken from Miraflores to the garrison. They would be taken by bus. Such ceremony never took place.

The three of them waited somewhere in the East of Caracas before they went to *Fuerte Tiuna*. They entered through a discrete

check point in *Cumbres de Curumo*. A residential area for upper middle and high class families, there were no popular protests as in the entrance of the fort that is close to the Panamerican Road, Coche and El Valle working class sectors.

Carmona thinks he entered *Fuerte Tiuna* and the National Armed Force General Inspector's Office at 02:50 p.m. He would leave that place as a prisoner a few hours later.

Vásquez Velazco ignores Carmona

Fuerte Tiuna was a pressure vessel on the dawn of Saturday 13.

Check point number 3, closer to the working-class slums in Coche, El Valle and the Panamerican Road, was surrounded by a crowd of Hugo Chávez's supporters since the night before.

The fear that the crowds may enter the fort seeking to set Chávez free had led the coup commanders to take him very far away. The place chosen is located miles away: The bay of *Turiamo*.

The common people ignored that Chávez was no longer in *Fuerte Tiuna*. All day long that Saturday the crowd kept on growing around the garrison.

We want to see Chávez!

Same happened in Miraflores, in the Maracay-based Paratroopers Brigade and in military facilities in other regions of the country. The offices of VTV in Los Ruices, in the East of Caracs, were also surrounded by the President's followers.

Sheltered in *Fuerte Tiuna*, Carmona learned that General Vásquez Velazco, General Commander of the Army, pressed by his subordinates, was planning to give a press conference to demand the revision of the decree issued the day before. The middle Officers were annoyed by the ousting of Chávez and the unconstitutional behavior of the new Government.

Carmona ordered to call General Vásquez Velazco who refused to appear before him, that is, before the alleged Commander-in-chief of the National Armed Force. Only after a long insistence, Vásquez Velazco sent an emissary, General García Ordoñez.

I told him that I wished that announcements were subject of consensus as to the amendment of the decree, and therefore Vásquez had to appear.

Hurt, Carmona writes:

García Ordoñez listened to me with signs of superiority and withdrew to the command to convey my request to Vásquez Velazco, which regrettably was not followed.

In the morning Vásquez Velazco had received a group of unit commanders stationed in *Fuerte Tiuna*, with the ranks of lieutenant colonels. They expressed their concern for the decree of the day before. They wanted to see the resignation letter Chávez had allegedly signed.

Vásquez Velazco called them for a meeting at 02:00 p.m. in the social facilities of the Ayala Battalion officers.

From Turiamo to La Orchila

By 02:45 p.m. of Saturday April 13th, Chávez is a prisoner in Turiamo. He wrote a letter there with crucial repercussions where he denies having resigned.

The text was drafted in red ink on a page, the overleaf of which had a scribbled layout of the base. It began to circulate via fax around Venezuela and the world, thanks to navy Chief Luis Herrera Ramírez and Corporal Juan Bautista Rodríguez of the National Guard.

The latter has told in several occasions that he was the one who invited Chávez to write the letter and throw it away in the garbage can in the room which he would pick up later.

Juan Bautista Rodríguez with the help of Herrera Ramírez would bring it to the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade in Maracay. Such letter would be read later by Baduel using a megaphone before thousands of followers of the ousted President. In this fashion, Baduel rose as one of the main icons of the April counter coup. He will even propose a change in one of the lines of the National Anthem: “Follow the example given by Maracay” instead of “Follow the example given by Caracas”. Once a retired general, he breaks with Chávez in 2007 in disagreement with the socialist character Chávez instilled in the Bolivarian Revolution. But that is another story¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴⁹ Raúl Isaías Baduel stayed for a while at the head of the 42 Paratroopers Brigade. He was later promoted to Divisional General and Commander of the Army. Afterwards, he was promoted to General in Chief and then to Minister of Defense. In those positions he experienced internal confrontations with General García

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The text drafted in Turiamo reads like this:

Turiamo, April 13th, 2002

14:45 hours

To the people of Venezuela
(and to whom it may concern).

I, Hugo Chávez Frías, a Venezuelan, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela do hereby state: That I have never resigned to the legitimate power the people gave me.

Forever!!!

Hugo Chávez F.

Carneiro and other officers close to Chávez. Some of these clashes transcended to the press as denounces for administrative corruption involving the ones and the others. In 2007, already retired as a civilian, he was opposed to the project of constitutional amendment promoted by President Chávez to lay the foundations of a socialist model in Venezuela. Baduel accompanied his own calls to vote “no” in the constitutional referendum with explicit appeals to his arms fellows in the FAN. These appeals were easily interpreted as invocations to stage a coup d’état. Chávez proposal was defeated by a narrow margin. In 2009, a military court dictated a prison sentence against Baduel for presumed corruption during his term as Minister of Defense. Since then, Baduel declared himself a prisoner of Hugo Chávez.

CHAPTER VI: SATURDAY APRIL 13TH



Back at Miraflores Palace, President Chavez showed a copy of a letter signed by himself hours before, Saturday, April 13th. There he confirms he didn't resign as president. Photo: Ernesto Morgado

It was 02:45 p.m., 14:45 hours in military time, of Saturday 13th of April.

That very day Chávez was transferred in a helicopter once again. They took him to *La Orchila* Island, 180 kilometers north Caracas seat of a Presidential vacation resort and where a navy base operates. His enemies sent a private plane there which they finally had accepted he would leave abroad. On board was Cardinal Ignacio Velasco.

Politicians and gringos in *Fuerte Tiuna*

Around 03:00 p.m., Pedro Carmona received Teodoro Petkoff in *Fuerte Tiuna*. Both keep friendly ties. They worked harmoniously together when Petkoff was Planning Minister (then Cordiplan) in the second term of Caldera and he was the president of the Confederation of Commerce Chambers of Venezuela (*Consecomercio*). The founder of MAS (The Movement to Socialism) party requested him to correct the decree that dissolved the Branches of Government.

I told him that despite its validity, I was determined to do so for the sake of the National Interest.

Carmona asked lawyer Gustavo Linares Benzo “to help write the draft amendment” as per the account in his book.

In those afternoon hours, through one of the check points of *Fuerte Tiuna* a car entered with two U.S. military officers.

They were Lieutenant Colonels Ronald McCamon, the U.S. Military Attaché, and Gerald George, head of Counterterrorism of the U.S Embassy to Caracas. They both were in the Army General Command from 03:12 p.m. to 04:25 p.m. Another version mentions also Lieutenant Colonel James Rodgers¹⁵⁰.

When he was questioned by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the coup, General Efraín Vásquez Velazco, General Commander of the Army in April 2002,

150 Elizalde, Rosa Miriam and Báez, Luis: *Chávez Nuestro* (Our Chávez), interview with Raúl Baduel.

confirmed his meeting with McCamon:

He wanted to know what was happening.

Besides the U.S. officers, Vásquez Velazco was visited by numberless Venezuelan military and civilians. Among the latter, Herman Escarrá and Luis Miquilena.

Cuban Ambassador talks to Vásquez Velazco

Later than 04:15 p.m., Vásquez Velazco received the phone call of the Cuban Ambassador to Caracas, Germán Sánchez Otero.

A few minutes earlier, Fidel Castro had ordered Sánchez Otero to telephone with the following instructions:

Use my name. Tell him on my behalf the opinion that blood can be shed throughout Venezuela due to these developments. That only one man can prevent such risks: Hugo Chávez. Urge him to set Chávez free immediately to prevent that probable course¹⁵¹.

Vásquez Velazco affirmed to the Ambassador that the National Armed Force kept President Chávez “under custody” and that he would guarantee his life, but he “could not accept what was requested.”

The Cuban Ambassador’s insistence annoyed Vásquez Velazco who, in turn, hung up.

He hung up the phone.

151 Castro, Fidel: Op. Cit.

Futile last ditch effort

The *Comacates* rebellion

The meeting called by Vásquez Velazco in the social premises of Ayala Battalion was a tense one.

The meeting was attended on the one hand by the *Comacates*, a colloquial Venezuelan acronym for Commanders, Majors, Captains and Lieutenants, and on the other hand, by the generals involved in the coup d'état.

The uneasy atmosphere in the Army forced Carmona to agree a change in the *de facto* Government Cabinet. The Defense Minister would no longer be Vice-admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, but an army general, Antonio Navarro Chacón, also present at the meeting. Ramírez Pérez would remain a step lower, in the capacity as General Inspector of the Armed Force.

After listening to General Félix Ruiz Guzmán, who defended the actions undertaken to install a *de facto* Government, a lieutenant colonel took the floor.

General García Carneiro, also present in that place, summarizes the words of that Lieutenant Colonel:

He said that he didn't agree with that position. That he has been lied to, that he has been deceived, that he hasn't been told where the President was. That he hasn't been shown the President's resignation letter¹⁵².

152 Interpellation to General García Carneiro before the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April 2002 facts.

Other commanders spoke with similar positions. They basically advocated the respect for the Constitution.

General Martínez Vidal argued against the manner how Chávez had exercised the Presidency in the last three years. Among his criticisms, he mentioned the creation of the “armed” Bolivarian circles.

García Carneiro replied:

That’s not the issue we are discussing here. And if you are referring to the poor, they have been armed with hunger and misery.

Amidst a great tension, the idea of producing a second pronouncement by the Army grew among the militaries subjecting their endorsement to Carmona’s Government to the restoration the effectiveness of the Constitution. Something that in the course of time seems ambiguous, but at that moment sounded acceptable to the people gathered there.

Vásquez Velazco was advised by the lawyer and constituent representative Hermann Escarrá to draft the second pronouncement.

At a given moment, Navarro Chacón and the retired generals Ovidio Poggioli and Guaicaipuro Lamedá, who sneaked through the active generals, took Vásquez Velazco aside to try to dissuade him from accepting the request of the majority. The head of the Army left the document on the table inside.

García Carneiro took the paper and was amazed by the

“atrocities” he allegedly read, including an explicit recognition of Carmona’s Government. García Carneiro took a pen and began to strike what seemed incorrect to him.

As Vázquez Velazco took long to come back, the officers decided to leave the room and looked for him. They were some 50 men. They had him come back. Vázquez Velazco read the pronouncement in a press conference. CNN broadcast it.

Second Pronouncement of the Army

The new statement by the Army subjected its support to the “Transitional Government” to the amendment of crucial aspects of the decree of the day before, among them, the dissolution of the Branches of Government.

The document had serious flaws.

In item 11, it read:

We guarantee good treatment and respect to Lieutenant Colonel Hugo Chávez Frías and request the petition (*sic*) of his leaving the country immediately¹⁵³.

The list of conditions was as follows:

- Establishing a peaceful transition respecting the Constitution, the laws and the human rights.

153 In Rosas Alexis, A: *La noche de los generales. La verdad sobre el golpe del 11-A*. (The Night of the Generals. The truth about the A/11 coup). 5ª edición, Caracas, 2005.

- Amendment of the April 12th decree.
- Reinstatement of the National Assembly.
- Plurality and representativeness in the transitional Government.
- Respect for elected governors and mayors.

In the preceding hours, Vásquez Velazco had been pressed by Carmona and his closest military advisors to remove generals loyal to Chávez from command positions. Therefore, he stated:

I ratify in my capacity as General Commander of the Army the members of the High Military Command of the Army and their natural commands in all their positions. The people with me will remain with me and only I can transfer them.

As Vásquez Velazco read the document, outside *Fuerte Tiuna* and other garrisons, the demonstrations were increasingly larger, as well as the blockade of roads, violent protests and lootings in working-class areas. The ghost of a major social outburst, like in February 27th, 1989, this time with political motivations, was haunting Venezuela.

Then, the General was heard as he included among the conditions to support the *de facto* Government the following:

Continuation of the social benefits for the Venezuelan people with the programs in progress. We cannot abandon the neediest. We need to follow attentively the same programs that had been implemented in the country.

In the next item he advocated a society without exclusions where demands and complaints are expressed in a peaceful way without arms.

We want to keep democracy. We love democracy and we want to continue in democracy.

We likewise demand that all Branches of Government are reinstated, such as the Supreme Court of Justice and the Public Ministry, all those that are in force.

Vásquez Velazco insisted:

This is not a coup d'état. We want and respect a transition Government that respects the right to all what we have had. The problem that arose in Venezuela was the loss of human lives because of the loss of control by the central Government at a given time.

Carmona amends the decree

Almost simultaneously, Pedro Carmona issued Decree number 2 of his Government whereby he amended Decree number 1 and called the National Assembly to special sessions “for purposes of swearing-in the new President of the Republic, restore its normal functioning and proceed to designate the holders of the offices of the Branches of Government.”

But the new decree had a tag line:

The current officials will continue exercising their offices until such appointments take place.

In his book, Carmona deems “unforgivable” that Vásquez Velazco has disclosed the pronouncement of the Army without waiting for Decree No. 2.

The logical thing was, as I proposed, to jointly with the high military bodies announce the amendment of the decree.

To Carmona Vásquez Velazco’s statement “was interpreted as a withdrawal of support to the Transition Government by the Army, which encouraged Chávez’s followers to act with more determination.”

Carmona also reproaches Vásquez Velazco his refusal to accept changes in the lines of command in the Army.

In this connection, he writes in his book that generals Néstor González González and Luis Hermógenes Castillo “tried to detain García Carneiro or achieve his removal.”

But it was not possible because, as it was said, General Vásquez Velazco avoided any change in the Army lines of command.

On his part, Vásquez Velazco said during his appearance before the National Assembly that on Saturday April 13th, he kept García Carneiro in his position and ordered him to keep under control the *Fuerte Tiuna* check points.

The information we had was that people from outside were going to come in and loot the military residences. I was frightened that something like that could happen. Thank God it didn’t happen.

Chávez leaning to “abandon the office”

Once in La Orchila, unaware of what was happening in Miraflores and *Fuerte Tiuna*, and unaware of the popular demonstration supporting him, Chávez reconsidered the possibility of signing a document whereby he “abandons the office” not involving the resignation to the Government and which may allow him to stay in a “friendly country” to “act internationally and begin a (counterattack) action.”

He will tell so later to Marta Harnecker in a subsequent visit to *La Orchila* Island:

They came to bring me the resignation decree and tell me that they had a plane ready to take me out of the country once I sign the document. Two nights before they said that it didn't matter if I didn't sign. When I saw this, I said: “They have a problem. Something quite serious is happening if they have to come here and place a plane at my disposal.” I told them I could not simply sign just like that. I reminded them that I had accepted to sign subject to a number of conditions and I repeated what I have said in the Palace. I knew they were not going to fulfill them¹⁵⁴.

“I headed for the Office again where Ramírez Pérez and Julio Rodríguez Salas were very unsettled.

Ramírez Pérez said that they had to fulfill the condition of sending the President to Cuba so that he may sign the resignation letter because as long as there is not resignation letter signed by the President that was a coup d'état.”

154 Harnecker, Marta: Op. Cit.

Chávez, as per Harnecker's account, insisted in the physical security of his followers.

You violated that. You have outraged and detained people. Who knows what is happening back there. The little I could watch (on TV) in *Fuerte Tiuna*, You have imprisoned Tarek and ministers were almost dragged off their homes.

He repeated the need to respect the Constitution.

If I resign, it has to be before the Assembly and the Vice President takes office as President until new elections are called. You kicked the Constitution. You dissolved the Assembly, the Supreme Court of Justice.

He stressed his demand to talk live on TV.

How can you think that I am leaving just like this, without telling the country?

Lastly, he proposed that in his eventual departure abroad, officials of his Government, including a number of military belonging to his Guard for years.

They weren't going to accept that either because it was a task force I was going to have at hand.

Cardinal Ignacio Velasco was with Chávez in *La Orchila*. He had gone there to guarantee his physical integrity and help in the negotiations. He told Chávez:

Well, Chávez, you have to think of the country. You know..., that discourse of yours...

Well, Monseigneur, I am thinking of the country.

A tricky interpretation

Chavez's idea in that moment was to make time and get a better assessment of what was happening in the mainland, from which he was estranged, without any communication whatsoever.

I saw the sergeants walking around with rifles and recoilless guns talking to each other and looking at me sideways. They were nervous. Outside, the Admiral who brought me here kept on making calls, coming and going about. I could feel something was happening besides my resignation. So, my purpose was to make time, talk, discuss.

In such circumstances, the prisoner decides to make a proposal to his captors.

Listen, I am not signing the resignation decree. Don't insist Monseigneur. You violated the Constitution. Is the absolute absence of the President what you want? The resignation is up to me. My death is up to you. Do you want a medical board to declare I am an insane person and that such declaration is accepted by the Supreme Court or the National Assembly? But today we have neither Supreme Court nor Assembly. I don't know if there are doctors able to do that. Who will endorse it? It is not viable either. There is one choice left which I propose. A constitutional alternative: The detachment from office.

Chávez told Harnecker that it was an "interpretative trap", a bait.

I knew Monseigneur is not knowledgeable in the realm of the

law, but a colonel was there (Rodríguez Salas) who is actually a lawyer, and a quite clever one. I told myself: “But he doesn’t know the Constitution as I do.” Then, I told them: “I can abandon the office. Here you are the Constitution. Let’s read:

Article 233 of the Constitution sets forth the absolute absence of the President:

- Death
- Resignation
- Removal decreed by a Supreme Court decision.
- Physical or mental inability certified by a medical board designated by the Supreme Court following approval of the Assembly.
- Abandonment of office, declared by the Assembly.
- Popular Recall of the mandate.

The tricky interpretation referred to by Chávez lied in the fact that the abandonment of office, as appears above, needs to be declared by the Parliament and “I didn’t read” that part. There was no Parliament due to the decree dissolving the Branches of Government, dated the day before, April 12th.

I can sign a document whereby I abandon the office, but I will not resign.

But what’s the difference, they asked.

The colonel went out to make a consultation over the phone with Caracas and a while later came back with a copy of the Constitution in his hand. He had noticed the detail omitted by

Chávez, his “interpretative trap.”

But, Chávez, there is a problem: the National Assembly.

That’s your problem! But that is the only way I can sign. Further, you have to allow me to use a phone, because if I leave for Mexico or Cuba, I need to talk with the President of that country. I am not taking a plane without course. Additionally, I need to talk to my wife and children.

Then, Chávez wrote with his own hand a document which reads as follows:

“I, Hugo Chávez Frías, holder of ID Card number 4258228, faced with the developments of the last days in the country, and aware that I have been ousted from the Presidency of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, I hereby state: That I abandon the office for which I was legitimately elected by the Venezuelan people, which office I have exercised since February 2nd, 1999. I likewise hereby state that I have removed from his office, due to the evident weight of the developments, the Executive Vice President, Diosdado Cabello Rondón.

In La Orchila, April 13th, 2002.”

Chávez never undersigned such letter.

Yet, *El Nacional* published it a week after the coup as a way to insist that Chávez had the will to abandon the Presidency amidst the April crisis¹⁵⁵.

Is in any manner legally valid a document with such characteristics?

155 El Nacional, 04-18-2002.

The lawyer and handwriting expert Raymond Orta Martínez published his analysis in *Tecnojuris* legal web.

Orta Martínez quoted Article 1374 of the Venezuelan Civil Code which recognizes the value for evidence of some handwritten letters sent to the recipient, even if they are not signed.

Such article, however, clarifies that “the Judge shall dismiss those documents which have been filed breaching the Law.”

The expert upholds:

If the letter is analyzed it could be established the material validity of that instrument for being handwritten, even if it is not signed, all this from the scientific point of view, because the expert analysis can determine if the original letter of April 13th was written or not by the hand of Hugo Chávez Frías¹⁵⁶.

And Orta Martínez adds:

But so far, the matters of law have not been explained in connection with the vices of consent surrounding this situation which were of public domain.

He explains that one person in the situation in which Chávez was in those days of April, deprived from liberty, surrounded by others against him, and pressed by militaries “cannot be deemed to be drafting a document like this without duress and by free will.”

Additionally, it is evident from the reading of the text that what he expressed was not a resignation because positively for the juridical tactics chosen this document is but a declaration or

156 www.tecnofuris.com.

ratification that the President had been removed from his office. The foregoing, in the light of the current Law renders the content of this letter null and void, including the removal of Diosdado Cabello.

Nervousness in the island: “They come to rescue you”

Holding the paper, colonel Rodríguez ended up by accepting the prisoner’s proposal.

O.K., man. It’s alright. I have to take back something signed.

According to Chávez, the colonel “swallowed the bait” and instructed a lieutenant to type the content of the paper in a computer.

The officer who typed it was one of the officers I had been talking over, one by one. Most of them good guys in good faith. He typed slowly and made intentional mistakes. He played along the game of making time. The colonel hurried him up.

Chávez noticed that certain nervousness was seizing the officers in *La Orchila*. Armed sergeants took alert positions. He asked Admiral Chetro Romero who was in charge of the prisoner to explain what was going on.

Admiral, what threat can exist here? Why are the boys carrying recoilless guns and taking defense positions?

It's nothing President. Nothing has happened. You know we have to custody your life.

Chávez felt the Admiral was nervous. He stayed alone in the living and suddenly an officer got close and discreetly told him in lowly:

Don't sign anything, Mr. President.

Chávez wondered what could be happening. He went to the bathroom and stayed there for a while just thinking. As he came out he had made a decision.

Listen, Lieutenant. Stop typing that thing.

Then, he addressed to Cardinal Velasco and the rest of his companions, and adopted a blunt and ironic tone. Chávez was another person now:

Listen, definitely I am not signing anything. So, thanks for calling. If you want you can spend the night here in my prison, which is a luxurious one, and you may leave tomorrow. I have slept on it. Definitely, I am staying. My family, my children, my wife, my followers, my people are all here. I don't know what's happening. You have declined to give me information. I have not even had a phone. You have kept me incommunicado.

Chávez was startled because, instead opposing resistance, they told him:

Well, Chávez, you are right. We are leaving.

Pursuant to his account, they were nervous when they left.

But Carmona tells in his book that Cardinal Velasco had

arrived to *La Orchila* with a group of generals on board of a private jet “arranged by the Ministry of Defense without committing his owner, businessman Víctor Gil Ramírez.” Velasco was assigned the mission to convey to Chávez “the decision of the Transition Government and the High Command to guarantee his transfer abroad.”

According to Carmona, the pilots got scared with the sound of a military helicopter approaching.

They made the decision to take off leaving on the ground the members of the mission¹⁵⁷.

Chávez tells that Ignacio Velasco and his companions got back five minutes later, more nervous than when they had firstly left.

The priest was as pale as the color of that white chair. And the others were nervous. I noticed the boys were tenser.

Admiral Chetro Romero got close and said:

President, we got a situation here. A paratroopers squad is coming.

They all there also were unaware that a frigate and navy quick patrol ships were also heading for *La Orchila* dispatched by Vice-admiral Orlando Maniglia, one of the officers joining the National Dignity Rescue Operation. General Alí Uzcátegui Urdaneta was commanding the helicopters.

What do they come for?

They come to rescue you.

157 Carmona Estanga, Pedro: Op. Cit.

A latent *Caracazo*

Only Chávez's return to power could stop the protests and lootings recorded on April 12 and 13, 2002. No one can guess what could have happened if Chávez hadn't returned, but the ghost of a new February 27th, 1989 showed its fangs.

Unlike the social outburst of that date, the people this time gave a political meaning to their protests and headed for the private TV stations.

The report of the National Assembly Politics Committee investigating the April developments reads like this:

In *RCTV* channel where officials of the People's Attorney Office had to insist several times with the Information Manager, Eduardo Sapene, so that he stopped refusing to broadcast the communiqué of the protesters alleging the threat reporters may be exposed at if they went out. After the mediation one of the citizens was given the chance to speak but when the crowd noticed the message was being aired voiceless and with a note telling that the broadcast was the outcome of the pressure exerted by the Bolivarian Circles, they continued the protest. After the people's attorney officials intervened once again, the broadcast was performed, but protesters remained at the entrance of the television channel until around 02:00 a.m.

The situation in *Venevisión's* headquarters was similar.

A crowd outside the channel demanded the broadcast of information about the developments in the country and to be

allowed to address the Nation, while a significant amount of the People's Attorney Office tried to mediate between the parties. The Metropolitan Police and the National Guard provided security to the television channel. The protesters got heated as they received no answers from *Venevisión's* representatives and got even overexcited when a cameraman simulated a broadcast. Faced with the denial of the channel, protesters tossed objects against the channel's walls and even against officers of the People's Attorney Office. They claimed to have been deceived. The People's Attorney resumed the dialog with the channel, and requested the channel to broadcast in order to calm down the people and guarantee the free circulation of information. The representatives of the channel gave in, but the image was accompanied by a caption reading that the broadcast was taking place due to the pressure of the Bolivarian Circles. This angered the protesters and their reiterated demands made the directors of *Venevisión* take a step back and allow a third recording which led the protesters to disperse.

A few days after the developments, and with the publication of papers and audiovisual broadcasts resumed, a *Venevisión* reporter informed as follows:

What could be deemed an orgy of violence left 160 stores destroyed, many of them ransacked and burnt in the afternoon of last Saturday 13 in Antímano, Sucre, Petare and Libertador, Caracas. In those places the biggest disasters occurred: 50 cars burn, 55 fires in buildings¹⁵⁸.

158 *Venevisión*, taken from the show *24 horas*, on April 18th, 2002.

A witness said:

From 06:00 p.m. there was no authority backing up or helping the fire brigade. Practically, firefighters entered by themselves in the impact zones were, as I just said, damage was serious.

The reporter estimated that an average of 50-60 million bolivars were lost by each storekeeper, “many of whom don’t know what to do.”

You lost practically everything?

Practically everything. Absolutely. We worked for 15 years and in a little while we just lost everything.

A storekeeper in the West working-class zone Catia said:

It was a large number here. Almost half of the stores were looted and burnt down.

The reporter highlighted the following:

But besides looting, there was vandalism.

A police officer told:

They robbed the pick-up truck to transport the items looted, they even turned the sirens on. The truck was found burnt later.

The reporter said:

Storekeepers complained about the inaction by the police corps. Firstly, to fight the looters. And later to search those places where the stolen items are allegedly concealed. Now they struggle between starving and re-starting. They can organize themselves to protest and make public that lootings left over 3,000 people without employment.

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Another *Venevision* report talked about the casualties:

One hundred and four people were shot to death and 334 were wounded as per figures gathered from hospitals and the Legal Medicine institute. On Thursday 11 corpses were brought to the Medical Examiner Division: 15 were shot by handguns and 2 by FAL assault rifles, the latter being considered one of the most destructive rifles. A corpse had a 22 caliber bullet orifice; other two were shot with a 38 revolver; several died by the impact of shots from 9 mm pistols, and one died by a 1.40 pistol. Friday and Saturday 49 corpses were brought to the Medical Examiner Division in *Bello Monte* and *Lídice, Vargas, Catia and Pérez Carreño* hospitals. From Saturday afternoon until Sunday evening other 24 casualties resulted from the lootings.

It is common to find references to the casualties of April 12, 13 and 14 in the historiography of April 2002. In fact, the document signed in Maracay by the officers participating in the National Dignity Rescue Operation reads in item one as follows:

Stop immediately the massacre being perpetrated especially by the Metropolitan and Chacao police corps and other groups that are being cruelly and illegally used.

It is unknown however if there are criminal investigations in connection with such casualties. Should there be any, it is noticeable the absence of interest of the press and other institutions as to the disclosure of its conduction and results¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁹ In March, 2011, Guillermo Garroz, who was Civil Protection Director by the time of the coup, revealed a list of 66 dead and 436 wounded occurred

Where is Diosdado?

It was not a whim of Baruta's Mayor Henrique Capriles Radonski to have insisted with the Cuban Ambassador to search the embassy so as to ascertain that Diosdado Cabello had not been granted asylum there. Neutralizing the Vice President was a key piece in the puzzle of the coup. With Cabello alive and kicking, the constitutional thread was alive as well. The Constitution could be reinstated, as actually was.

Cabello tells that on April 11th, he was in *El Helicoide*, headquarters of the Police Security and Intelligence Division (DISIP) after flying over the demonstration that was detoured to Miraflores on board of a helicopter. He received a call from José Vicente Rangel, Defense Minister, who told him that the Military High Command, through General Rosendo, was requesting his presence in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

Asked them if they believe I am a jerk¹⁶⁰.

Cabello asked him not to disclose his location. After the presidential television broadcast chain, the Vice President talked to Chávez over the phone who asked him where he was.

after Chávez' deposition. The list was consolidated with information gathered by officials under his command at the different hospitals located in Caracas, Guarenas, Anzoátegui and Trujillo states. Garroz estimates that the coup total toll was 85 dead and 573 wounded, excluding the figures of April 12 which were not available. After this interview conducted by journalist Clodovaldo Hernández (newspaper Ciudad CCS, March 28th, 2011), when he provided this data, Garroz was summoned to testify before the Prosecutor General's Office, where he consigned the list. (<http://www.ciudadccs.info/?p=158366>).

160 Personal interview with the author, February 2012.

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I'm at the DISIP, but I am moving. There is no guarantee of anything here. I will try to get to the Palace now.

Cabello says he unsuccessfully tried to get to Miraflores.

I sent the motorcyclists, but everything was surrounded by them.

He talked once again with the President, and told him he couldn't get there.

Around 06:00 p.m. he leaves *El Helicoide*, shortly before General Andrés Eloy González Cárdenas, appointed deputy director of the DISIP by Carmona, arrived to take control of the headquarters. Cabello goes to the city of Los Teques, neighboring state of Miranda, by the longest and less used road: He goes down to Vargas State, drives up the mountains of *Carayaca*, pass by *Colonia Tovar*, and arrives in La Matica, a slum in Los Teques city. By radio he learns of the latest developments. At midnight he speaks with Chávez again.

How are you? Where are you?

I am fine my Commander. I am taking the mountains. I have got 40 well-armed men. I am going to make the life miserable to those in the media.

Take care, don't take risks.

Don't worry. I am sheltered in a good place. You take care.

I am not going to resign. Let them accept this is a coup.

Cabello arrived to a humble shack located in *La Matica* shanty town. He was accompanied by a DISIP bodyguard, whose alias is

“Pedro”, and Manuel Barroso, a companion of the February 4th Rebellion. Even though he proved his loyalty later, Cabello did not trust the cop, so he made up he was feeling bad and agreed with Barroso so that the latter may go buy a medicine. So, when he was alone he sneaked away with a backpack carrying a folding Sig Sauer gun kit.

Around 03:00 a.m. he left by car to *Catia La Mar*. He found a “shell” (a hideout) in an apartment owned by businessman Henry Hoyos, who according to Cabello supported with his helicopter the first Chávez’s election campaign in 1998. From that “shell” he sends a handwritten known to the newsrooms of the papers on the dawn of April 12th denouncing the coup and proclaiming he is the acting president because Chávez is imprisoned.

The only journalist publishing something about that is Alfredo Rojas for *El Universal* newspaper.

He sees that *Globovisión* is broadcasting the signal of *CNN en español*, and Cabello called its headquarters in Atlanta, U.S.A., and asks to make a statement and they broadcast live. He repeats there what he sent in writing to the papers.

At night he leaves his “shell”. He gets to Montesano, a residential zone close to the International Airport in Maiquetía, Vargas State, where he joins the poor people who bangs pots in favor of Chávez. After that, he heads for *Carayaca*, also in Vargas State where Hoyos has a farm which will serve as a new “shell”. The director of the DISIP, Carlos Aguilera goes along with him. He went to meet with

him after fleeing *Fuerte Tiuna* effortlessly where he had been sent by the coup leaders.

Cabellos tells that Saturday 13th he kept contact with Jesús Suárez Chourio, head of Chávez's personal bodyguards, coordinating his arrival to Miraflores once the Palace was taken over by the loyal forces. They firstly agree that he will be transported by a helicopter. But Hoyo's chopper had not enough fuel. The businessman offers Cabello two big motorbikes. He and Aguilera left Carayaca heading for the Caracas-La Guaira highway. The Vice President wears a full face helmet.

Before leaving he has called "Chourio" and tells him that he will not arrive by helicopter and asks him to send the presidential convoy to Sucre Avenue, which is the first exit of the highway, located in the East of Caracas and close to Miraflores Palace. In getting there they find a bottleneck. Not even motorbikes can pass through the cars parked in the way or through the people protesting against Carmona.

The two of them decide to walk to the beginning of the line, Cabello takes out his weapon and aims at the head of a driver and shouts at him:

Give me your car!

Frightened, the driver grows pale, but immediately recognizes him, because he had to put off the helmet. The world is a small handkerchief, we say in Venezuela: The "victim" was José Gregorio

Duque who used to work at the airport with José Vielma Mora, another rebel of February 4th.

My Lieutenant! It's me!

The driver ends up joining the operation. The car makes its way through the first barricades along the highway. Aguilera tells the protesters:

I bring Diosdado, guys!

Let us see!

As soon as he lets his face be seen, the people shouted with joy.

I felt rejoiced. No doubts: If Diosdado came back, Chávez had to come back as well.

In the first two barricades, the Vice President showed himself with his hands up.

Thenceforth, the barricades made way for them. The people dispatched motor bikers ahead to make way amidst the fire, the garbage containers, pieces of furniture and appliances, washing machines, cars...

When they got to *Catia* they tripped with a pandemonium: lootings and shots everywhere. The Metropolitan Police applies repression with firearms.

Bullets cut the air everywhere and some dead boys were laying around a corner.

Cabello orders the driver to go back because they are in serious danger there. They take the highway again. He calls Chourio:

Man, send the convoy to *Quinta Crespo*, downtown Caracas.

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When the three of them got to that place, there are no presidential cars. An individual approaches to the car. Aguilera prefers not to take chances: He detained the man and handcuffed him to a lamp post.

Instead of the convoy an ambulance arrives and a bunch of armed guys come out. Cabello figured the worst thing. But there was no reason. Chorio and the soldiers of the Military House came in that ambulance. Otto Neustaldt, CNN correspondent was invited to record with his crew that moment.

The military wrap Cabello up with a lead sheet, designed for the protection of personalities, they lay him down in the ambulance. Everybody piled up on top of him, like a human shield. They almost suffocate him.

In the Palace, following moving hugs, Diosdado asks to talk with General Baduel. According to Cabello, he had to press him so that he hurry up the rescue of the President, still a prisoner in La Orchila.

Tomorrow morning? No. I want the President back in the Palace right away!

The next call was for Víctor Ferreres, president of *Venevisión* TV station:

We are going on air in 15 minutes. If you don't broadcast live I am sending some tanks to that shit and there won't be a bolt left.

Technically, we cannot.

That's your problem. Either you broadcast or you broadcast.

That channel was one of the first to broadcast the swearing-in of Cabello as acting president by Willian Lara, President of the National Assembly.

Prior to the swearing-in ceremony, former Vice President Adina Bastidas, then Commerce Minister, expressed reserves with regard to the ceremony. Cabello stopped her:

Calm down, Ms. Adina. I assure that love more that man (Chávez) than any of the other people here.

Cabello was acting President five hours and fifteen minutes. He did not talk with Chávez until he got off the helicopter that brought him back from La Orchila.

The columnist farewell

Shocked by the conduct of commercial journalism during the April crisis, Ibsen Martínez a writer and a columnist announced his temporary withdrawal from the opinion pages of *El Nacional*.

Martínez wrote on April 20th, 2002, the following note:

“This will be my last Saturday chronicle in a long time.”

“After much dwelling on the issue, I find that voluntarily excluding myself from the guild of press opinion writers is the only modest remedy I have available to express not only my disagreement, as a citizen, but also my visceral repudiation of the ‘values’ that have prevailed in the Venezuelan communicational establishment, taking it as a whole.”

“The indescribable censorship of news and opinions, maliciously imposed to the Venezuelan citizens, during very grave hours of the Nation’s life, against the best interest of the public, circumventing the duty of not withholding relevant information which may allow the public to construct an opinion, giving in to reasons that cannot be conceived but of political nature, and all this completed by the concurrent omission by a significant majority of radio electrical media of the country cannot be ignored by any person who has harbored the belief that the media, in an infuse and natural manner, always stand by the truth, democracy and plurality.”

The case of self-imposed censorship by the Venezuelan press during the coup d’état in April 2002, is to undoubtedly gross up the textbooks in the courses of ethics in the schools of journalism around the world. It is not simply a phrase: Numberless wires, reports and analysis by the foreign press during and after such developments have dedicated very sad paragraphs dealing with the shameful and disturbing matter.”

“Such wires, reports and analysis contrast with the feeble explanations and insufficient excuses with which directors and celebrities of the “news shows” close the issue. This makes me reaffirm my conviction that, in the course of the last years, an insidious ideology of moral supremacy has gripped the Venezuelan journalism encouraging the compliant view with which media –

and interviewers, anchors of opinion programs and their vedettes-kindly indulge themselves¹⁶¹.”

161 El Nacional, 04-20-2002.

PART III
The loose ends of April

CHAPTER VII: OTTO NEUSTALDT, TIRED OF TEPID WATER

Confessions at the UCAB

Like a surgeon without a scalpel, a street cleaner without a brush, a tailor without scissors. That's how I felt —a journalist without a tape-recorder— at that forum, to which I was invited as a panelist in May, 2002.

Journalism was the topic in vogue. The impact of the media blackout occurred the previous month had submerged many students of journalism into a crisis, so they asked themselves:

What am I doing studying journalism?

The hall in the private Andrés Bello Catholic University (UCAB), led by the Jesuit priest Luis Ugalde, was packed. The students' government of the School of Journalism had invited me to present my experience and views about the April's events. This was the first time I visited that *campus*.

Next to me, the journalist Otto Neustaldt talked about his experience as a *CNN* correspondent during the events of April 11. He was in the spotlight: with the silence of the local TV stations, which broadcast cartoons while the people and the military restored Hugo Chávez to his office, Venezuelans were forced to look for local information in the foreign media, such as *CNN*, *Caracol* and *Telemundo*. The students were impressed with the

adventures narrated by the Peruvian reporter, a tale sprinkled with daring episodes. Small video-cameras recorded the speaker's performance. My news detector was constantly ringing.

At the end of his presentation, during the round of applause by the young audience, I invited Neustaldt to tell his story in *En Confianza*, the VTV program I hosted, but I noticed he was hesitant. His resistance was understandable for a journalist like him, considering that he was being invited to participate in a program broadcast by "Chávez's TV station." To be seen in the screen of VTV may have serious consequences.

How about an interview for *Quinto Día*?

In those days I had resigned to my job at *El Universal* and Carlos Croes had invited me to write on his weekly publication, *Quinto Día*.

Okay, sure. Here you are my telephone number to make the arrangements, said Neustaldt.

In the highway, headed towards downtown Caracas, I kept feeling disappointed because I didn't have at hand a tape-recorder. What was said there was extremely serious and complex as to be written by heart, without the support of a recorded tape to minimize the risk of being later accused of lying.

Then, I called Neustaldt about the agreed upon interview, but it was impossible to talk to him again. I tried unsuccessfully to contact somebody who had recorded his presentation at that university hall.

Showbiz and politics

During those days, *El Nacional* published on its show-business pages an interview with Otto Neustaldt, where he announced his leaving *CNN* and his desire of becoming a businessman.

I have a radio project for the Internet and would like to create an informative TV channel, but not focused on news exclusively.¹⁶²

Journalist Katiuska Silva asked him:

After the events following April 11 there were criticisms about the coverage made by the media, CNN included. What do you have to say about this?

It's always very delicate to express opinions. Some have called me a *chavista* and others have warned me about not to fall into manipulations. I say to both of them that, as a journalist, my job is to look for the truth, to find all possible versions to favor balance and let people express their views. That's what I did.

Neustaldt added that he reported when Chávez was ousted and also when he returned to power...

Something that, although I don't criticize them, the Venezuelan channels didn't do. If someone has anything to say, he should first watch the videos and then draw his conclusions.

The video appears

Luckily, some time afterwards I received a call from somebody whose voice I was unable to identify at first.

¹⁶² Silva, Katiuska: *Otto Neustaldt pide tiempo* (Otto Neustaldt asks for a break). *El Nacional*, 06-05-2002.

Hello?

Hello. I'm Gustavo Suárez.

He was an old friend of my sister Asia, from whom I had heard nothing since I was a child. He was a founding member of the *Liga Socialista* (The Socialist League) political party in El Valle, where he was Asia's political chief.

Brother, I'm working at the *Universidad Bicentenaria Aragua* (Aragua Bicentennial University) and I have a material that must be of your interest.

Gustavo told me that "the CNN journalist named Neustaldt or something like that" had been at the university, accompanied with his then wife, Gladys Rodríguez – "the one who narrates the news in *Globovisión*" – at a public gathering organized by the University's students. He summarized what he had heard; very similar to the content of the UCAB presentation I have previously attended.

The next day, a VHS-tape enclosed in a yellow envelop arrived to VTV's facilities, at Los Ruices neighborhood. It was delivered by a messenger. The cassette inside was identified with a tag reading: "Forum about Journalism in Times of Crisis", and was dated July 16th, 2002.

Once I finished the morning program of that day, I went quickly to my house. I spent hours in front of the TV screen watching the video.

The audio of the tape was not very good, so I passed a long

time reviewing the video and taking notes by hand.

I got the impression that in Maracay (capital city of Aragua state), Neustaldt had disclosed more things than in Montalbán (the neighborhood where is located the UCAB).

By night, I returned to *Los Ruices* and looked for the president of the channel Jesús Romero Anselmi, who was at a meeting with Rubén Hernández, his right hand.

Those were times when the private media overwhelmed the meager communicational state apparatus –made up basically by VTV channel, *Radio Nacional de Venezuela* and *Radio YVKE Mundial* radio stations- with a campaign imposing the thesis of a “power vacuum” against the fact that what happened was a “coup d’état”. Words are the first battle front.

As expected, Romero and Hernández were ecstatic with the finding.

The cassette was left in Ruben’s hands, who as an audiovisual producer counted on the required technical means to extract the most significant passages and compensate the poor audio with subtitles.

This was the beginning of a long wait; all along which I came to regret not to have run the original tape, although it was very long and had flaws.

Final decision on the “power vacuum”

I don’t remember very well if this happened before or after. In

any case, the delivery of the tape containing Neustaldt's testimony took place around August 14th, 2002.

That day, the Supreme Court made national and international headlines with its final decision, denying the coup d'état of April 2002, and supporting instead the anti-Chávez thesis of the "power vacuum".

This decision led to the rejection of a petition filed by the Prosecutor General's Office to submit the military officers Héctor Ramírez Pérez, Efraín Vásquez Velazco, Daniel Comisso Urdaneta and Pedro Pereira to a preliminary hearing for the crime of military rebellion.

In 1999, following an unexpected concession of the National Assembly to the National Armed Force (FAN), the privilege of the preliminary hearing –reserved to the high-ranking officers of the State– was extended to all the FAN's active-duty generals. After August 14, the Constitutional Court restricted this privilege only to those generals in the highest positions of command within the FAN.

The preliminary hearing is a sort of brief pre-trial procedure before the highest court of the nation aiming not to find the officers guilty or not guilty, but to inquire on the existence of convincing elements (probable cause) to press criminal charges against those officers. It was conceived as a protection for the best functioning of the State so that its highest representatives are not exposed to a hypothetical arbitrary judgment of a regular, legal, fiscal or police authority.

The military who participated in the coup of April 11 took advantage of this prerogative not only to avoid a trial, but also to legitimize similar conspiracies in the future.

The sentence, based on a case presented by Justice Franklin Arrieche, established that in April 2002, the military acted “impregnated of good intentions”.

In his dissenting vote, one of the justices, Alejandro Angulo Fontiveros, baptized the decision as a *monstrum horrendum*.

The great political operator behind the final decision was Luis Miquilena.

While he was a member of Chávez’s entourage, Miquilena was able to place figures of his greatest confidence in governmental key positions.

Miquilena’s allies –including Arrieche- joined other justices who had survived the previous historical period, associated with the old political parties, in order to pass the controversial decision by a single vote. To succeed, they had previously put out of the game Omar Mora, a judge who impeded them to form a voting majority and was subject of a recusal orchestrated by Miquilena’s allies.

The Supreme Court’s final decision granted impunity to the military discontented with Chávez, who still remained at the military garrisons.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Some weeks later, tens of those military, led by their fellows who had rebelled against Chávez in April, carried out a second action: the siege of Plaza Altamira. There, they declared themselves in disobedience, while the civil opposition agitated the streets with frequent rallies and prepared the oil sabotage, with which they tried to complete the frustrated task of April. The stoppage lasted for 63 days,

Mortal conspiracy

The long wait ended on September 8th, the day of *Our Lady of El Valle*.

That Sunday, during his TV program *Aló Presidente*, Chávez ran Rubén Hernández' documentary *Conspiración mortal* (Deadly Conspiracy), where the testimony of Otto Neustaldt was used, dully contextualized, with its original audio and subtitled.

To be honest, Rubén Hernández was secretly working on the reconstruction of the April's coup events. Once he watched the VHS tape containing Neustaldt's version, he was able to solve a riddle that the rest of the editors have been unable to break: the TV video-tapes showed two different versions of the plotters' proclamation, which was read by Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, flanked by the other insurrected officers.

In one of the versions, Ramírez Pérez talked about "Hugo Chávez", while in the other one he talked about "Hugo Chávez Frías". The location of the officers around Ramírez Pérez is not the same in both tapes.

from December 12th, 2002 to February 2nd, 2003, when their planners decided to make more "flexible" the stoppage. The TSJ's Constitutional Court rejected, first, a special resource of constitutional interpretation filed by the lawyer Oleg Oropeza to invalidate the decision of August 14th. Afterwards, the Prosecutor General's Office filed its own petition. The Constitutional Court processed the petition and cancelled the ruling that legitimated the power vacuum thesis. Years later, many people in Venezuela wrongly believe that the sentence is still in force. For the moment of the annulment, the military were already passed to retirement, so they had lost the privilege of the preliminary hearing. They went to live abroad.

One version corresponds to a rehearsal that Neustaldt recorded with the military for *CNN*, while the other was the reading of the document before the TV national channels.

“Tomorrow there’s going to be some dead”

Although it was not clear if it was because he resigned, was fired or a combination of both, Otto Neustaldt explained to the students gathered at the *Bicentennial University of Aragua* why by then—in July 2002—his face was already absent from *CNN*’s screen:

I got tired of being in that tepid water where you cannot say things to people just to preserve public relations, or just to be Ok with the people you trip |daily on the streets.

He tracked the origin of his experiences related to April to Thursday April 4th, a week before the coup, when he traveled to *CNN*’s headquarters in Atlanta. During the flight, he coincided with an advance party of the Military House which was headed to Costa Rica, seat of the Rio Group Summit which President Chávez was to attend.

On Monday April 8th, he decided to return “because things were not going well” in Caracas.

Friends from different sectors have told me that something was being planned.

On Tuesday April 9th, he was already in Venezuela.

Over the night of Wednesday 10th, he receives a telephone call from someone saying this:

Otto, tomorrow, the 11th, there will be a Chávez video; the march goes to Miraflores, there's going to be casualties and 20 high-ranking military officers will make a pronouncement against the Government and demand Chávez's resignation.

The day after, Thursday 11th, he receives another call and he's told that:

Now, we don't know if the number of militaries who are going to rise against the Government is 20, but we do know they are a significant group of high-ranking officers, or at least a representative group, which is going to demand Chávez's resignation, and everything continues as scheduled: the video, the dead people and then the military talking.

During these remarks, Neustaltdt meditates before the students:

When many people tell me "Well, here in Venezuela there was not a coup d'état"... Yes, highly probable. Technically or legally there was not a coup d'état here, because in the Constitution there is an article which allows rebellion up to a certain extent, or disobedience with the Government. But, no doubt, what I saw was very similar to what I witnessed in 1992, with the attempted coups d'état, first in February 4th and then in November 27th.

With the coup plotters, two hours before

The correspondent arrived somewhat early to the place where

Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez and other officers read their pronouncement against Chávez.

I have also heard people saying around: “When we saw the dead, we got out and met”. Come on! I was with them two hours before the dead!

He continues with the account of his experiences:

I’m seeing how is being organized what is going to happen and I have second-thoughts about who was the first to fire or who killed whom in the surroundings of Miraflores Palace. What I can say is that I saw dead people from both sides.

He adds that, the next day, Friday 12th, at around 10:30 a.m., the morgue had received 9 dead considered *chavistas* and 7 considered opposition marchers.

Then, that also made me doubt who was the first to fire or who was interested in such deaths and in a clash between the followers of both sides.

In regard to this, he tries to put himself on the shoes of someone staging a coup d’état:

Just imagine I’m not necessarily for the opposition; not necessarily for the Government either. I’m just somebody staging a coup. I fire shots here; I fire shots there. I know that both groups are armed. I know that there is going to be violence, because they cannot bear each other anymore. And there is going to be an automatic clash. The only one to win is me, placed in the middle, encouraging a confrontation of both sides.

They rehearsed as they waited for a microwave to broadcast live

Otto Neustaldt tells that Ramírez Pérez and the other military officers “apparently have coordinated a microwave technicians crew to broadcast” the pronouncement.

The pronouncement was the signal for their supporters in the rest of the country would rise against the Government and support the military insurrection underway.

Without mentioning her name, Neustaldt alludes to journalist Lourdes Ubieta:

A girl that I was acquainted with was in charge of transcribing the communiqué read by Ramírez Pérez, the Vice Admiral who was later appointed by Carmona as his Minister of Defense.

The microwave crew had not yet arrived, so Neustaldt proposed the military to record the pronouncement. He said:

Why don't you rehearse so as to avoid mistakes during the broadcast which could bring about uncertainty in the population?

They did it.

That rehearsal was recorded in a tape that, supposedly, was going to be kept there as a souvenir for us, something that was not going to be used because they were going to make a live broadcast.

Neustaldt failed to identify the channel for which the microwave technicians worked. The team for the live broadcast finally arrived.

According to the journalist, the officers tried to make the live broadcast with that team, but they thought they had been

discovered when the Government got the private TV stations' signals off the air.

It was then when Chávez was told "there is a coup underway". With a coup underway it is very logic to activate the *Ávila Plan*, abiding by the normal procedures.

He points out that what is not normal "is to activate the *Ávila Plan* when there is a million people on the streets".

That's more common sense than anything else. If I have a single soldier fire a FAL rifle, a single bullet may wound 20 persons standing in the trajectory. Then, I will have more than a thousand dead or probably 2 or 3 thousand, just in half-an-hour, or an hour.

Nevertheless, he insists:

But he (Chávez) implements his *Ávila Plan* because he sees the institutions threatened. Because he's seeing a signal [transmitted] through the antenna in the *Ávila Mountain* with some military asking for the Government's demise.

Once verified that the signal of the Venezuelan private TV stations has been suspended, an officer asks Neustaldt:

Can you guarantee the broadcast of the video we recorded previously?

If I wouldn't be able to do it, I wouldn't be here.

He took the cassette with the rehearsal recorded.

I left there my assistant with the technical crew, departed along with my cameraman on a motorcycle and tried to figure out where we could broadcast it to the US.

He decided to go to a satellite service company recently opened at La Urbina, a neighborhood located in the eastern sector of Caracas.

But before that, I gave a copy to the people of Reuters and sent another copy to the different TV channels, so that they could also have the material to broadcast it. I was committed to get that on air.

The explanation of such an endeavor was the following:

When you make a promise as a journalist, you cannot fail to meet that promise, because the same day you fail to comply nobody else is going to believe in you anymore.

The TV stations put more at risk than the people

This account helps to make evident how preeminently important private property is within the scale of values of some people in the media business –it is more preeminent than human life- as well as the frequent roles confusion of owners and employees. It is also clear in this context the awareness about the consequences of the media performance in April 2002.

Journalist Gladys Rodríguez took the floor in the forum to explain as follows:

The TV stations were putting more at risk than the common citizens. Because if they put at risk their lives when they took the streets to protest, the media also took the same risk with their journalists on the street. In fact, a photo-journalist died. But the TV stations were putting at risk even their concessions. When they

took that risk of splitting the screen during the President's address, they knew they were breaching the law. They were playing their last card, but everyone thought it was great.

In turn, Neustaldt discards a connection between the opposition demonstrators of April 11 and the coup.

Those who went out to march were not the same staging the coup. The people who went out to march were discontent. And what Carmona and his group did was beating all those people who went out to march. What we witnessed was treason to everybody.

Anticipated “buildings take over” and casualties

Regarding his theories about the violence on April 11, Neustaldt explains:

I think that the ones who started to fire and the responsible for the first 15 dead belonged to neither side. That is, they belonged to those who were staging the coup.

He based his theory on “certain things that I heard from conversations among them”:

Did you already take over the building?

Yes, we did.

Should we use the planes now?

No, don't. We need the people on the streets.

After this account, Neustaldt adds the following:

I have the video of that rehearsal and in the rehearsal, which unfortunately I don't have with me at the moment, they already

talk about dead people, when no casualty had not occurred yet.

Gladys Rodríguez interrupts him:

Well, but this is also a theory.

It's a theory. It's my particular view.

Gladys Rodríguez, in turn, allows herself to propose a different thesis. She attributes it to the father of one of the opposition's victims, who she fails to identify. According to him, the pro-Chávez demonstrators stepped back one block at *El Silencio*, so that the opposition could move forward and become targets of the gunfire.

They say: we don't know if it was an ambush and these people retreated from the place because they knew that the shooting was going to start as soon as we arrived to that point.

Then, Neustaldt puts into question that the Government was interested in using snipers against the opposition rally.

Just imagine that I am the Government, that I am its sniper, I'm going to produce that [slaughter]... For me as a sniper it is exactly the same to put a bullet in a boy walking down the street waving a flag or put a bullet in Carmona's head or in the CTV's leader, or any of them. And if I'm going to start killing people, why don't I kill those who are leading this and problem solved? I mean, they're going to get into a huge problem, but it would be the same with the others. That's another thesis. I don't believe that any government would deem advisable to kill innocent people just to defend the revolution. Because the people would turn against them. I find

rather logic, and this is a quite personal theory, that [the responsible is] this group of people who are trying to take over the power, who are not Chávez's supporters or his adversaries, because these people do not represent the whole opposition, which is growing more and more, and wants to get Chávez out of his office...

Who are the beneficiaries of the dead?

The broadcast of Neustaldt's video, on September 9th, 2002, brought about a political earthquake in Venezuela.

The opposition, that was happy with the court decision of August 14 rejecting the preliminary hearing for four of the officers who made the pronouncement on April 11, received a hard opinion blow precisely when it was preparing itself for the second great offensive against Chávez: The siege of Altamira Square and the oil sabotage-stoppage.

With his testimony, Neustaldt broke the spiral of silence around the "truth" of April 11. By then, the Government, the Prosecutor General's Office and Chávez's followers were not the only ones to disagree with the exculpatory campaign around the insurgent military. A respectable former correspondent of a "mainstream" TV channel, as *CNN*, was doing the same.

At the forum, Neustaldt poses a number of questions:

To whom were the dead convenient? The Government? The opposition? To those who were staging the coup?

And he answers to himself:

No doubt, the dead were very convenient for those who were staging the coup, because that allowed them to say: “Ladies and gentlemen, the Government’s hands are stained in blood. We are here to take them out from power”.

A student asks Neustaldt who had told him, on Wednesday 10, about what was going to happen on Thursday 11.

A friend of mine who was very acquainted with the people who were staging the coup. In fact, she is at the United States now, together with all those who staged the coup. I mean, with Pérez Recao, with all those who were there. Then, I had good reasons to believe her and, in fact, it was her who led me to get in touch with them on that day.

Lourdes Ubieta and Ramírez Pérez rebuts Otto

That “friend of mine” mentioned by Neustaldt is journalist Lourdes Ubieta.

They were very close friends. Both worked together in the program *En este país* (In this Country) broadcast by *Televen* in 2002, when Neustaldt was briefly separated from his job with *CNN*. In February 28th, 2001, the program addressed the subject of express kidnappings and discussed the topic with their guest Sheriff Iván Simonovis.

On Tuesday September 10th, *El Nacional* opens its front-page with the press-conference offered by Héctor Ramírez Pérez:

The video was recorded after the death of Tortoza.

According to independent documentary filmmaker Liliane Blaser, who captured with her camera the moment when Tortoza was shot, the fact occurred around 4:20 p.m., of April 11.

Vice Admiral Ramírez Pérez denied every word said by Neustaltdt:

We did not summon Otto Neustaltdt. We didn't record two hours before the first casualties and the statement was not rehearsed.

Carlos Bastidas, the lawyer of Ramírez Pérez, said that Neustaltdt "will have to explain to the country who contacted him, whom he talked to and which officers he is talking about, because these are not the ones".

And the lawyer added that he was preparing a criminal action against the former *CNN* correspondent for "defamation and insult".

Ramírez Pérez invoked the testimony of the journalists, cameramen and microwave operators who were with them the afternoon of April 11.

[They] know that everything said by Neustaltdt is false.¹⁶⁴

The officer affirmed that while their pronouncement was being written, they learned about the death of the photographer Jorge Tortoza "because they [the technicians] told us what they have heard through their walkie-talkies".

Neustaltdt took the video in a motorcycle, leaving the rest without a copy. It was not broadcast by *CNN*, but by *TV Española*. The Venezuelan journalists asked us to do it again (7 minutes

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later), so that they could bring the video to their channels.

That same day, September 10th, 2002, journalist Lourdes Ubieta appeared at *Televen's* news program *30 minutos* (30 Minutes), interviewed by César Miguel Rondón. She said things like these:

At that time I was reporting the march's development for *Univisión*- Chicago.

However, in her account Ubieta does not mention any activity whatsoever typical of those carried out by a TV correspondent during those critical hours.

The journalist tells the following:

Around 2:30 p.m., when I was nearby the UCV campus (Central University of Venezuela), I received a phone call from General Marco Antonio Ferreira, the Identification and Immigration Service former director, telling me that he needed support because he was going to make a pronouncement [against the Government], due to what was going on. I understood that he needed support from the press, that he needed the media.¹⁶⁵

By then, according to Ubieta, she had been out of the Venezuelan media for a whole year. Her last job in Venezuela was at *Televen*, along with Otto Neustaltdt.

From that place (nearby the UCV campus), I walked to Las Mercedes, where I got a ride up to my house. It was around 3 p.m. I changed my clothes. I did not know where I was going to meet with the General. My assistant was with me.

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Ubieta mentions her assistant, but never mentions a cameraman who worked with her for *Univisión*-Chicago.

She proceeds with her account saying that she took her car and, at that moment, General Ferreira called and told her:

Lulú (Ubieta's nickname), let's meet in that place in San Román.

Ubieta describes herself going to that neighborhood East Caracas, and phoning Otto Neustaldt and his wife Gladys Rodríguez, also a journalist and chief at *Globovisión*, asking them “to find me a journalist of that channel”.

Meanwhile, I was listening to the radio and things were getting worse, because they were reporting wounded people, bullets and casualties.

It was then when she found Otto Neustaldt on a motorcycle with his respective cameraman, under *Puente Veracruz* at Las Mercedes.

We were following General Ferreira's van.

Do you have any idea what the time was?

Yes. It was around 3:15, 3:20 p.m. If you want we can ask for my phone records of that day and there we'll find the calls between Otto and I.

Please, take note of the time: between 3:15 and 3:20 p.m.

By that time, according to her own words, Lourdes Ubieta had already heard comments in the radio about dead and wounded people while driving her car. It is logically understood that she arrived to her destination knowingly that those supposedly

wounded and dead people had already fallen in downtown Caracas.

However, it was at 3:31 p.m. when *Televen* shows the first image of a wounded, in a box on its screen, simultaneously to the statements of the Prosecutor General, Isaías Rodríguez.

Six minutes later, at 3:37 p.m., while Rodríguez continued talking, *Televen* presents the same frame showing a second wounded.¹⁶⁶

Until 3:45 p.m., *RCTV* had reported no incidents on the streets.¹⁶⁷

Ubieta continues with her account:

We arrived to a building located between Chacao and Bello Campo, nearby *Centro Lido*. We went into that office. His escorts told us to wait there. Then, they made us go in.

We assume Ubieta refers to General Ferreira's escorts.

It was a surprise, she said, to find there seven high-ranking FAN officers.

I thought that General Ferreira was going to do this himself, as Molina Tamayo or González González did before.

But that was not "another pronouncement".

The pronouncement rehearsal

Lourdes Ubieta told that when she arrived to the office she held the following conversation with Ramírez Pérez:

¹⁶⁶ *Televen*, news program *30 minutos*, introduced by César Miguel Rondón, 10-09-2002.

¹⁶⁷ Britto García, Luis: *Investigación de unos medios por encima de toda sospecha* (*Investigation on some media above all suspicion*). Edited by Venezolana de Televisión, Caracas, 2003

Are you Lourdes Ubieta?

Yes.

Well, look. I want to go out in live television and I need a microwave.

Where do I find a microwave?

She thought of *Globovisión* and called them.

I'm asking for support with a microwave and they tell me that there is no microwave because everyone is covering the rally.

Finally, she adds, "we got one from *Venevisión*".

She doesn't mention who found it.

From that moment on "we started to mount the CNN camera" and "to indicate [the military] where to stand-up". She does not mention a *Univisión*'s camera, at all.

The scene took, according to Ubieta, "all the time required for preparing an ordinary recording".

César Miguel Rondón pointed out:

That is what Otto Neustaldt defined as a previous rehearsal.

I want to think that when Otto refers to a rehearsal is because when we were going to shoot they hadn't anything in writing to read. Originally, the Vice Admiral was going to speak without decree (sic). He's a very brave mister. I suggested him: "You'd better read it, because you could make mistakes and this admits no mistakes". That [the pronouncement] was hand-written.

Lourdes Ubieta estimated that at that moment it was 4:00 p.m. of April 11.

The presidential national broadcast began at 3:45 p.m.¹⁶⁸

And had already people died?

All the information we had was the one we could watch on TV ...

Hugo Chávez's address was already on the air at that moment?

I saw Hugo Chávez in the national TV broadcast and also how they split the screen between the march and the presidential address.

And you're seeing all this before shooting the video.

Before shooting the video.

According to Ubieta, when Ramírez Pérez starts reading the hand-written paper "in what I guess is what Otto calls a rehearsal", the official interrupted himself:

Wait, what is this word? I don't understand. Here lacks an accent.

She points out that she told him:

Look, Vice Admiral. We have to finish this at once. Give me that and I'll type it in the computer, because those misters don't know how to use a PC.

Lourdes Ubieta sat down in front of a computer, while her assistant dictated.

When I was about to hand him the paper out, a *Venevisión's* technician tells me: "A journalist has just been killed". My heart

¹⁶⁸ President Chavez started his speech of April 11th, 2002, by saying: "I have made the decision, according to my watch, at 15 minutes to 4 p.m., to convene this national radio and TV broadcast in order to send a message to the Venezuelan people". Available at <http://www.analitica.com/biblioteca/hchavez/cadena20020411.asp>.

got frozen and I asked: “Who?” “A photo-journalist, Tortoza. And there is talking that at this moment there are 6 dead”.

And that is why they say so.

Of course. Then, it was discussed if this had to be said or not, because we were not sure if the dead were 6, 10 or 15, but the media information around talked about 6 casualties, including Tortoza. Then, the first video is recorded, so as Otto could take it and go fast to broadcast it through satellite services. I asked the Vice Admiral to record a second version for the local media.

That is, two versions were made?

Minutes apart.

Not even once, Ubieta mentions any camera of *Univisión-Chicago* shooting that piece of news. She doesn't mention either the U.S. channel she first said she was working for. Instead, she cooperates with *CNN*, a competing channel. Was she really acting there as a reporter? Jorge Olavarría will say later that she was rather working for Isaac Pérez Recao, the businessman that allegedly financed the coup.

According to what she said to *Televen*, Ubieta's heart got frozen when she heard about Tortoza's death. But this was not the first time she heard about a dead that afternoon. She herself has said to César Miguel Rondón, some minutes ago, that she had heard by radio around 3:15-3:20 p.m. –one hour before the shot against Tortoza- that there were dead and wounded in downtown Caracas, while she was driving to Chacao-Bello Campo.

Did she say that to the military when she arrived to the building?
Did she forget it? Did she think that was irrelevant?

Suspicious about Neustaldt

Rondón and Ubieta continue the interview:

Why did Otto say all that he said in Maracay?

I don't know. This has been a surprise for me. I have been living in the U.S. for the last five months.

Five months. Exactly the same time elapsed since the April coup until the Neustaldt scandal in September.

I came this week because I received a job offer here in Venezuela. I arrived last Saturday and on Sunday I find this. Otto called me very late last night and told me: "Please, Lulú, call me back that I need to talk to you". I felt he was very sad, worried, but I haven't had the courage or the strength to call him back.

Why Lulú?

Because he is my friend, my workmate. I'm very fond of him and I don't want to think that he's being manipulated, being used. Or that he offered himself to do this.

If what Otto said was true, why did he say it now and not previously, before the Prosecutor General's Office?

I don't know what happened to Otto, because what he has just told are lies. He was not convened by the military and he wasn't there two hours in advance. And yes, there were dead when we recorded. If that was true, I would not have participated in

anything of that. I myself would have gone. Besides, Mayela León, from *Globovisión*, and Javier Ignacio Mayorca, from *El Nacional*, were also there with their crews.

You know that, as he had a quite notorious participation in those events and the Government has repeatedly underlined that the regime was rescued thanks to the international media, for example CNN, some people came to suspect that he could be close to or supporting the regime.

That is what is being said about Otto. Besides our friendship, one has to be clear about this. When nobody here knew the whereabouts of the Prosecutor General, the First Lady, the National Assembly's president, who got an exclusive telephone interview with the Prosecutor General? You answer me.

Otto.

Who got an exclusive telephone interview with the First Lady for CNN? Perhaps he's an excellent journalist.

Sure.

Sure he is. And he has friends in the Government as I have mine and as you probably have yours. The problem is why he lies. Why is he telling things that are untrue? This is the big question I would like to ask him. Why is he manipulating? He's playing with the life and the career of 10 military officers, plus 17 dead, plus all the forthcoming trials and everything that this country is suffering. This is not for playing games. Nobody should lie. One has to take a step forward and tell the truth.

Besides this interview, Ubieta gave other interviews to refute his friend Otto.

In one of them, she is questioned about the conversations that Neustaldt said he heard among the military about the mobilization of war planes in April 11. Ubieta answers that she only heard the officers saying good-bye to their wives and their children, by phone.

They were aware that the decision they were making was extremely serious.¹⁶⁹

Ubieta was also interviewed by *Globovisión*.

There, she insisted that during the military pronouncement she was the one who typed in the computer the document read by Ramírez Pérez and specified that “it was almost 4:30 p.m. when we heard about six allegedly dead [and] when a journalist received by radio the news of Tortoza’s death”.

A first version was recorded. Otto took that cassette, got on his motorcycle and went to broadcast it by satellite. By that hour, the signal was kidnapped by the government. There was no signal on the air, but it was necessary to guarantee that the local media could also have the video. Then, I suggested the Vice Admiral to record a second version as, in effect, was done and I myself took that cassette, in my car, to *Globovisión*.

At what time in the afternoon?

It was around 4:45 or 5:00 p.m.

169 <http://www.terra.com.ve/actualidad/articulo/html/act102789.htm>

Olavarría: Ubieta to the service of Pérez Recao

In those days, the lawyer and historian Jorge Olavarría joined the debate:

The delicate matters exposed in the talk given by journalists Otto Neustaldt of *CNN* and Gladys Rodríguez of *Globovisión* at the Bicentennial University of Aragua, cannot be dissolved into oblivion of the ceaseless fuss we live in.¹⁷⁰

Olavarria shared the “suspicion” that Neustaldt’s testimony cast over the insurgents of April 11, about the dead of that day:

The possibility that the video of the military headed by Vice Admiral Ramírez Pérez —denouncing the killing of marchers by snipers— could have been recorded before the killings had occurred, gives rise to a very serious suspicion which can and should be thoroughly investigated. Otherwise, it will be diluted by diversion maneuvers of events occurred after that testimony.

Olavarría noted that if the suspicion raised by Neustaldt happens to be false and untrue, it “needs to be so ascertained and published”. And if it happens to have some grounds, it needs “to be processed as it should”.

He referred to the videos showing the moment when photographer Jorge Tortoza was shot to death on April 11, and a few seconds later, another person gets shot in his face.

[These] are to me conclusive proof that those bullets were fired by a sniper who was located in some of the nearby buildings and

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not bullets coming from *Puente Llaguno*.

Olavarría claimed his “right to know who placed those snipers there, who protected and covered them”, and concluded:

Journalist Lourdes Ubieta, who apparently disqualified Neustaldt’s testimony, is seriously in question, as she was at the service of the Pérez Recaos. The behavior of these individuals during the events of April 11 and 12 leaves no room to Manichaeism, at least for those who want to know what happened there.

Olavarría talks about the “Pérez Recaos”. Isaac has a brother, Vicente, linked to the business of casinos. In 2002, he was a *MVR* representative. *MVR*? Yes, Chávez’s political party built by Luis Miquilena, among others. How did he arrive there and by whose hand?

Who were there?

Ramírez Pérez *et alter*’s pronouncement was attended by the following journalist ad showbiz personalities:

- Lourdes Ubieta
- Mayela León (*Globovisión*)
- Otto Neustaldt (*CNN*)
- Adrián Crispao, (freelance journalist who worked for *CNN in English*)
- Javier Ignacio Mayorca (*El Nacional*)
- Orlando Urdaneta (*Globovisión*), who is cousin of Rear Admiral Comisso Urdaneta.

- The military were:
- Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez, Chief of Staff of the Army

- Rear Admiral Daniel Comisso Urdaneta
- Rear Admiral Francisco Noriega
- Brigadier General (National Guard) Marcos Ferreira
- Brigadier General (National Guard) Oscar Martínez
- Brigadier General (National Guard) Ramón Lozada
- Brigadier General (Army) Vidal Rigoberto Martínez
- Brigadier General (Army) Henry Lugo Peña
- Brigadier General (Air Force) Pedro Pereira
- Brigadier General (Air Force) Clinio Rodríguez

Ramírez Pérez said on behalf of the group:

We have decided to address the Venezuelan people to disown the current regime and the authority of Hugo Chávez Frías and the Military High Command.

Everybody against Otto

Journalists Mayela León and Javier Ignacio Mayorca coincided with Ubieta and Ramírez Pérez in denying that the latter has said such words before the first dead had fallen, as Otto Neustaltdt had affirmed.

All of them admit that before anyone else Neustaltdt took with him a tape with the first version of the pronouncement. It wasn't clear why -with a *Globovision* team present there-, the crew did

not record that same version to send the scoop to their channel in a tape.

According to Ramírez Pérez, the two videos were recorded seven minutes apart.

Mayela León was interviewed in *Globovisión*.

She said that upon arriving she noticed that the military “were very attentive to what was happening on the streets”.

And they were also giving certain orders to people accompanying them of preventing the tanks of *Fuerte Tiuna* to go to defend [Miraflones].

Questioned about the time when this happened, León says:

Shortly before the presidential broadcast. From 2:30 to 3:30 p.m.

She explains, however:

Quite frankly and honestly, I don't have times. I was never attentive to my watch. That is why, my statement or the statement of anyone who was there could have many gaps in terms of time, accurate times, I mean. It's very difficult, indeed, to define the time.

She explained the existence of two recordings and pointed out that when Lourdes Ubieta had finished typing the military pronouncement and they were standing-up in front of the camera, the presidential broadcast came on the air.

When this happens, there is a lot of confusion. That first plan was no longer possible, it was impossible to go on the air with a live broadcast, at least at that moment. Then, they proceeded

with the first video. Shortly before that, we had already received information by radio from one of the teammates there that there were dead people in *Puente Llaguno*. We learned about the death of Jorge Tortoza, the first dead to be known. And at that moment, another correction is made to the document they were going to read...

That is, originally the document...

Well, I didn't read the original document, but I saw when the correction was made. I can't tell for sure if there were dead people or not, but at that moment was added that there were dead people, based on the information of Tortoza's death. When the presidential broadcast goes on the air, confusion reigned.

She said that from that moment on the channels were unable to "download the signal from Mecedores, a booster of the microwave signal located at *Warairarepano*, a mountain ridge formerly called *El Ávila* which goes along the North from West to East Caracas.

According to the journalist, somebody suggested at that moment to record the first video.

In that first version, she affirms, "there is not yet any mention of a number of casualties".

That is the video that Otto Neustaltdt takes with him. I'm just realizing that he went out first. Because there was a lot of confusion and nerves among us.

She asserts that when the channels split the screens into two during the presidential broadcast, the military decided to record their pronouncement for a second time.

And she slip this:

Perhaps, thinking that if they split the screen they could go live...

That is, Chávez on one side and the insurgent military on the other side, simultaneously.

According to Mayela León, once this second recording had been made, the journalists abandoned the place between 5:00 and 5:30 p.m. Only a *CNN* camera was left inside. According to their estimations, they had been there by two or two hours and a half.

Javier Ignacio Mayorca wrote three reviews in *El Nacional* about the subject: one on April 13th; another one on September 11th and the last one the 18th of the same month.

The first one reports:

*Alliance of retired military rushed Hugo Chávez's fall.*¹⁷¹

The second one responds to Otto Neustaldt's version:

*The tape was recorded during the presidential broadcast of April 11.*¹⁷²

171 Mayorca, Javier Ignacio: "Alianza de militares activos precipitó la caída de Hugo Chávez", (Alliance of retired military rushed Hugo Chávez's fall). *El Nacional*, D-4, 04-13-2002.

172 Mayorca, Javier Ignacio: "La cinta se grabó durante la cadena del 11-A" (The tape was recorded during the presidential broadcast of April 11), *El Nacional*, D-2, 09-11-2002.

And the third one contradicts a Chávez's statement where he commented excerpts of Mayorca's review published in April to reaffirm Neustaldt's version:

*The President tries to confound.*¹⁷³

In the first article, of April 13th, Mayorca pioneers reporting that the military rehearsed the pronouncement. In the September 18th review, five months later, he specifies what he had meant by "rehearse":

Ramírez Pérez read them (the texts) quietly while he walked slowly, as someone who is learning his lesson by heart...

These were the rehearsals he referred to in his report of April 13, very different from those mentioned by Neustaldt during his presentation in Maracay.

On April 13, Mayorca had used the plural:

They rehearsed the reading twice. Ramírez wanted it to be impeccable, and proposed to try once more. But an Army colonel warned that the DIM had detected the activity at the office.

The colonel, not identified by Mayorca, said aloud "dispersion! That was to say "each one must take his own path".

And it was so. The first to leave were the journalists. At the end of the afternoon, the message of the dissident officials was on the air.

173 Mayorca, Javier Ignacio: "El Presidente intenta confundir" (The President tries to confound), El Nacional, D-2, 09-18-2002.

“Every minute counts”

Frank Salcedo, a spontaneous researcher of April 11, affirms that in the analysis of all the versions about the facts of the coup “every minute counts”.¹⁷⁴

Salcedo focused his analysis on a paragraph of Mayorca’s April 13 review:

Shortly after 2:30 p.m., the cameras of two news agencies were ready to deliver the message of the dissident group. The final text of the message wasn’t yet ready. Ramírez Pérez was reviewing, rehearsing and correcting it with his usual parsimony, while a young woman typed it in a computer.

In his September 18 article, Mayorca changes the expression “After 2:30 p.m.” for “After 2:00 p.m.”, and specifies:

Who writes these lines doesn’t wear a wristwatch.

Salcedo asks to himself:

What is the reason for this change of the time? Why do we now have half-an-hour of difference in relation to the previous chronicles?

Salcedo remembers that Neustaltdt said he was in the place for at least two hours before the recording and in a press conference he ratified that he was there at 1:15 p.m.

Mayorca, in his two last testimonies, has affirmed that he was there before Neustaltdt and Lourdes Ubieta and that they arrived after 2:00 p.m. But, there is another detail: in his review

174 http://espanol.geocities.com/mariana_hzz/mayorca_neustaltdt.htm

of September 11, Mayorca says as follows: “around 3:30 p.m. the Generals arrived...” And later on he adds: “After that time, the journalists Lourdes Ubieta and Mr. Otto Neustaldt arrived...”

Salcedo proposes to observe the difference of over two hours between Neustaldt and Mayorca’s versions about the presence of each other in the place where the recording was made.

And Mayorca still had not said that he does not wear a wristwatch.

Why two recordings?

For Frank Salcedo, there is a “certain agreement” among all those who have given their versions of the facts that the military intended to do their pronouncement through a live broadcast, when Chávez went on the air, at 3:45 p.m. of April 11.

Mayorca’s account in this regard is rendered in his review of April 13:

When everything was ready, Chávez started a national broadcast to refer to the demonstrations. Then, the signals of Mecedores and El Volcán boosters fell down, presumably through the working of the government. They had to send the tape by car.

He ratifies this on his September 11 article:

When the microwave tests have started, the TV technicians warned that the Executive has taken total control of the signals to broadcast the presidential address. Neustaldt volunteered to take the military message to a TV station able to broadcast it to *CNN International*, in the hope that it could bounce back to Venezuela via cable services.

About both reviews, Frank Salcedo wonders:

What tape was that? The one recorded by Neustaltdt before the presidential broadcast? Why a video cassette if Mayorca says that there was not a recorded rehearsal prior to the attempt to live broadcast?

Frank Salcedo draws the conclusion that:

There is not a convincing justification or explanation of having recorded two versions, one for the international TV stations and another for local channels. In any case, are the two versions identical? Is the first version the one Neustaltdt has? Was the first version recorded before or after 4:30 p.m.?

The researcher underlines that, in his last review, Mayorca “closed ranks with the version of Ramírez Pérez, Lourdes Ubieta, Mayela León and Martha Colomina, who was not there but also told her version”.

What these versions share is that the recording was made after the circulation of some news about the first casualties, including Tortoza’s.

Frank Salcedo ponders:

In his review of April 13, Mayorca omits an event of an unquestionable newsworthy value: the officers and journalists had learnt there about the casualties in downtown Caracas, which would become decisive to change the text of the original pronouncement. Isn’t that something? This was not included in his account of April 13 and he didn’t confirm it in his September 11

review either. And now it came all of the sudden to his memory.

Later, he points out:

Mayorca doesn't wear a wristwatch, what a detail! Nevertheless, he is a very attentive journalist in relation to time, as his three articles include these type of references. Does he remember –if he saw it in some wall clock- at what time he heard the unidentified Army colonel shout “dispersion!” to warn that “the Intelligence Division had detected the activity in the office”? Did this happen during the presidential broadcast? Could the DIM know about this detail? Or are we talking about a pro-Carmona DIM? We must remember that Ramírez Pérez stated that they stayed gathered at that office until very late at night. Of course, they were waiting to record another memorable video with Ibéyise Pacheco.

Impertinent questions

Researcher Frank Salcedo poses a number of questions based on “methodic doubts”. Some of them are:

- In which office building did the military officers meet on April 11? Is it true that these offices are located in Chacao-Bello Campo? Who is the owner of those offices? In what capacity did he lend these facilities for the recording of the military's “pronouncement”?¹⁷⁵
- How could Ramírez Pérez prove or confirm in his pronouncement that President Chávez had ordered the

175 http://espanol.geocities.com/mariana_hzz/conspiracion_mortal.htm

killing of those who died around Miraflores?

- Is it true or false what Otto Neustaldt states that he heard the military officers exchanging information about controlling the buildings before reading the pronouncement? What was all about controlling the buildings around Miraflores?

- At what time was recorded the first video of the pronouncement and at what time was recorded the second video? Before or after 3:45 p.m.?

- Why does Ramírez Pérez say that Otto Neustaldt took with him the first video, while the rest of the journalists were left there without a copy? Is it possible that the journalists there had not tape recorders? Mayela León, of *Globovisión*, did not count on her own recording equipment?

- Journalist Lourdes Ubieta states that she was contacted during the march. What time was that? Before or after the detour of the march towards Miraflores? She also states that she went home and changed her clothes. What was the time? Then, she met with the contact person (Marco Ferreira, director of the Immigration Division) in Las Mercedes and with Otto Neustaldt to go to the place where the recording was made. What time did they arrive in Chacao, the place where the officers were gathered?

- Who is Lourdes Ubieta? Why did she leave the country after the events of April 11-14?

- Why should one believe in Lourdes Ubieta and not in Otto Neustaldt?
- The last one is the most crucial of all the questions posed by Salcedo:
 - Were the military officers already gathered before the first deaths occurred? If they didn't know there would be some casualties, on what legal or constitutional grounds would support their pronouncement?

“Yes. I arrived two hours in advance”

Otto Neustaldt's first reaction was disgruntlement vis-à-vis the broadcast of the documentary *Conspiración Mortal* (Deadly Conspiracy), with excerpts of his presentation in Maracay.

He called the authorities of the Bicentennial University of Aragua and they said that the video had been taken out of their facilities without their knowing.

On Tuesday September 9th, he stated to *El Nacional*:

I was there with three other colleagues (...). I was the only TV worker at that place. I arrived there two hours in advance and, as I have already said, I asked them to rehearse and record the message just in case the intelligence corps arrived.¹⁷⁶

During his initial intervention, in Maracay, Neustaldt had used a different argument: the rehearsal, according to what he supposedly said to the military officers, would serve to avoid mistakes in the final version.

176 *El Nacional*, 09-10-2002

My responsibility as a journalist was to record the event, not to judge if that was illegal.

Otto Neustaldt affirmed that the journalists' "sole asset is our prestige and the day we make something irregular we lose it".

CNN communiqué

For its part, *CNN* issued a communiqué to reject any involvement in the scandal. The channel informed that Neustaldt worked there from August 2001 to May 2002 and expressed its support to Neustaldt's work for *CNN* before and during the events of April "in moments of great confusion and amidst very hard working conditions".

About Neustaldt's words at the university in Aragua, *CNN* said:

They were taken from a presentation offered by Mr. Otto Neustaldt at a university in Maracay, after he had quitted his job as independent reporter for *CNN en Español*. Those statements reflect Mr. Neustaldt's personal views.

In turn, Vice President José Vicente Rangel offered governmental protection to the former *CNN* correspondent.

He said that Neustaldt "has been threatened since yesterday".

He was questioned by whom and Rangel answered:

For sure people who feel the video alludes them.

The People's Attorney (Ombudsperson), Germán Mundaraín, stated that those who disqualified the video as a farce should prove it.

Until now, this is public evidence and they haven't been able to demonstrate that it is a set up.

For Mundaraín, Neustaldt's video was "a substantive contribution of evidence of the April 11 developments and of the preparations they did for that coup d'état".

Simultaneously, an acid rain of opinion columns, political parties' statements and radio and TV shows was falling over Neustaldt. They denounced him as a *chavista* and a mercenary. The media were devouring one of his prodigal sons.

Otto in anti-Chávez people's arms

Neustaldt was unable to resist the pressure. On September 11, one year after the Twin Towers tragedy in New York, the journalist offered a press conference, along with lawyers Gonzalo Himiob and Eduardo Meyer.

Himiob and Meyer, members of the *Fuerza Integradora* NGO (Integrating Force), are the same lawyers who in those days tried to bring President Hugo Chávez before the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity committed on April 11th, 2002.¹⁷⁷ They were acting on behalf of some of the opposition victims of that day.

The view of the lawyers was radically contrary to that expressed by Neustaldt at the Maracay gathering. They had already reached the conclusion that Chávez was the culprit. The journalist took

¹⁷⁷ The prosecution would be rejected by the General Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo.

back the balanced opinion he exposed at first before the UCAB and the Bicentennial University's students and adopted his lawyers' stance as his own.

He did it through a communiqué he read before the journalists, where he complained about the partial reproduction of his words in the documentary *Deadly Conspiracy*:

The Government has illegally obtained a copy of a video made for exclusive academic purposes, addressed to journalism students, where I express my impressions and stances about the April developments and many others.

He denied that the video broadcasting had been an "information disclosure" and insisted on reducing to "a personal opinion" what he had said in Maracay.

The video which consists of my personal opinions has been edited, manipulated and mutilated to give to my words a political bias they have not.

Without distinction between facts and opinion

Conveniently written, the communiqué read by Neustaltdt omitted the distinction between his opinions –subjective valuations- and the facts that the journalist himself said to have lived and witnessed during the April 2002 crisis. Opinions can be modified, can vary over the time, but testimonies cannot.

Notwithstanding, Neustaldt insisted that his “opinions” were taken out of context “and without my consent and illegally they have been put to the Government’s service”.

It is an official censorship to mutilate my expressions before their publication, to distort the real message without my consent, therefore I cannot be taken as the responsible of the content of the video presented by the Government, because it was illegally used for purposes I have not consented to.

The communiqué implied the purpose of invalidating Neustaldt’s testimony as a possible proof or evidence for probable cause in the legal procedures related to the coup d’état.

In this way, Neustaldt denied that he held responsible the military officers who pronounced themselves on April 11 against the Hugo Chávez’s Government and the opposition, for the dead and wounded of that day.

I consider that those terrible facts are crimes against humanity that shall be investigated in an objective and unbiased manner.

He claimed that “the illegal and distorted divulgation of my personal opinions constitutes a serious violation of my fundamental rights by the Venezuelan State”.

[The State] has jeopardized my own image, my professional career, my good name and reputation, as well as put at risk the life of my family and friends.

He announced legal actions to protect his rights.

“Thanks to the military...”

At this point, Otto Neustaldt has put aside any trace of prudence related to his status as a foreigner and he bluntly placed himself on the side of the military officers whose pronouncement he recorded in April:

In my opinion, the April's facts are a concrete manifestation of a systematic and generalized plan of the Government, aiming to violently control the peaceful dissidence, the consequences of which were not worst thanks to the active intervention of the military sector committed to the defense and protection of public institutions and Human Rights.

The journalists asked Neustaldt who invited him to cover the Ramírez Pérez's pronouncement. And he mentioned Lourdes Ubieta as one of them.

I prefer not to disclose the names of the other persons who provide information, because that is part of the confidentiality we must respect.¹⁷⁸

He recognized his friendship with some of the military officers who appear in the video.¹⁷⁹

Journalist Berenice Gómez, who covered the press conference for Últimas Noticias, confronted Neustaldt and said:

You said with your own voice, without editing, that you had been called, that you had been told about some dead and that

178 Carvajal, Ilich, “Habló Otto Neustaldt: Nada de lo que yo dije allí es mentira” (Everything I said there is true). *Panorama*, 10-13 -2002. Also available at <http://www.aporrea.org/a409.html>

179 Ibid.

you had heard that day the military officers there giving orders in relation to snipers. Those are pure and hard facts. That is so serious and painful that the Supreme Court said that those men did not commit rebellion. And now, they turn out to be murderers?

Neustaldt answered:

I'm not denying anything that was said at that forum. OK? I'm not denying anything. I'm not taking back any word that I said at that forum either.

Lawyer Gonzalo Himiob added:

To abound about what happened is to side with those who intend to turn personal opinions into legal evidence.

VTV broadcasts the video uncut and unedited

Neustaldt's complain over the "mutilation" of his words in Maracay was quickly addressed by VTV channel.

On that same day, in prime time, the State-owned channel broadcast the video fully uncut and unedited, with the participations of Otto Neustaldt and Gladys Rodríguez during the forum "*Periodismo en tiempos de crisis*" (Journalism in times of crisis).

Otto Neustaldt never appeared again in the public scene.

The prevailing versions of April 11th, 2002 in the Venezuelan mainstream private media do not make any reference whatsoever to his revelations.

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His face has not been seen again in *CNN* screens, or in any of the Venezuelan channels, except for *VTV* that runs excerpts of his presentation in Aragua every April.

CHAPTER VIII: THE ÁVILA PLAN

A plan designed in 1997

Had there been presidential elections in 1997, instead of 1998, Venezuela would have then a woman in the President's Office rather than a man. Her name? Irene Sáez.

The former Miss Universe ruled as the Mayor of the wealthy small Chacao municipality, in Caracas. She was the absolute queen in the voting intention polls, in view of the ever increasing discredit of the traditional political leadership.

But the calendar, provided for under the 1961 Constitution, fixed the electoral event in December 1998 and, by March of that year, Sáez's reign was already in free-fall. Much to the perplexity of the elites, Hugo Chávez had displaced her.

During a visit to Venezuela's National Electoral Council, a journalist asked Irene Sáez:

Aren't you worried by your drop in the polls?

She answered:

The numbers go up and down. I defend a change without violence that can only be brought about by fresh young talented people.¹⁸⁰

That same day, unreported by the press, the Minister of Defense, Vice Admiral Tito Manlio Rincón Bravo, and the Army Chief

180 *El Universal*, 03-25-1998.

Major General Noel Martínez Ochoa, signed the “Sovereignty” 01-98 Rector Plan of Operations, which established the parameters for the use of military units under exceptional situations of serious public unrest.

It was the final year of Rafael Caldera’s second term.

In the geographic area comprising Caracas, Miranda and Vargas states, the Sovereignty Plan takes the name of *Plan Ávila* (Ávila Plan). This plan would have to wait four years to be tested.

“There was going to be lots of dead people”

On Wednesday April 10th, 2002, one day before the coup d’état, Miraflores was the seat of a meeting to evaluate actions in view of the risk of a generalized interruption of PDVSA’s operations.

Vice Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cuberos, Chief of Staff of the FAN, presented his analysis to President Chávez and the Council of Ministers.

I made a presentation based on the scenario of a partial strike in PDVSA, because a total strike would have been impossible to control by the Armed Forces.¹⁸¹

By then, the management had been able to paralyze *El Palito* refinery plant, something that had never happened in the life-span of such facilities.

Carrero Cubero remembers:

The plan set forth that the Ávila Plan —the security plan to

¹⁸¹ Statement of Vice Admiral Bernabé Carrero Cubero before the Prosecutor General’s Office, April 25th, 2002.

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contain riots beyond the police and National Guard capacity, along with the Sovereignty Plan— could get activated if those disturbances spread to other parts of the country.

Next day, the Military High Command held a meeting at the office of the Armed Force General Inspector, Lucas Rincón, in the Ministry of Defense, in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

They were watching on TV that the opposition's march had been deviated towards the Presidential Palace.

The anti-Chávez leadership inflamed the crowd:

Let's go to Miraflores!

The military knew that around Miraflores there was another crowd supporting the Government, so there were too many reasons to fear the worst.



While the opposition advanced towards Miraflores - from the east side of Caracas city, a crowd of revolutionary followers were showing their support to Hugo Chavez. Photo: Egilda Gómez.

Carrero Cuberos tells:

At that moment we reached an agreement that the march was not going to arrive in Miraflores, where there were a lot of people belonging to the Bolivarian Circles and people supporting President Chávez. If the two crowds clash, there was going to be lots of dead people there. The march had to be stopped before, much before arriving Miraflores.

Carrero Cuberos says that he recommended preventing the march from going beyond the Avenida Bolívar, “but unfortunately, containment was decided when they were too close” [to Miraflores].

Chávez orders the activation of the Ávila Plan

This is when the Command and Control Shark Network enters the scene – A radiocommunication network helping President Hugo Chávez coordinate actions. Chávez had a VHF radio and his radio call sign was “Shark One”.

Globovisión broadcast an audio with Chávez’s orders to the officers he manage to contact, among them, General Jorge Luis García Carneiro.

This recording highlights President Chávez’s attempts to get in touch with General Manuel Rosendo, Chief of the Armed Force Unified Command (CUFAN), a key position for any military mobilization.

His first contact was with General Eugenio Gutiérrez, aka “Shark 5”, chief of the regional command N° 5 of the National Guard.

How is everything going?¹⁸²

Well, the march is a little further down O'Leary Square.

Are the people splitting?

Well, we have contained them. We are leading them backwards.

Ah, OK, Shark 5. What's your position? And report the situation over there?

I'm behind the Palace. People here are under control. They were already moved down to O'Leary Square. We have everything under control up to the National Assembly building and people are stationed at the Avenida Bolívar sector.

Right. Give me your assessment. What's the spirit of these people there? Those who are arriving, are they firing? What's happened with that?

Well. There have been several wounded because there has been a confrontation and then they have come here to protect themselves. But people have begun to calm down. And there were snipers shooting from the rooftop of some buildings. Those buildings were already identified and they are under control.

Can we then summarize the situation with two words: Under control.

It's under control here in this sector.

So, you authorized that movement of troops.

Affirmative. The troops in the Ayacucho Theater building, affirmative. The commander is calling me now.

182 <http://www.globovision.com/documentos/discursostranscripciones/200204/22/transcripcion2/index.shtml>

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I was telling you that it's urgent and very important to send units, one support, custody, and security unit to Channel 8 facilities.

We have 20 men under the command of an officer at this moment...

Are they leaving now?

Right. They are on the spot.

Ah, they are already in place. Tell me if it is possible to reinforce them a bit more.

I inform you that General Lugo Peña spoke on the 101.5 FM radio station. He is commanding the rebellion.

Ok. Who's talking over there?

Aguilera [Carlos, head of the Intelligence Police], Mr. President.

Ah, right. Where did he spoke?

On 104.5 radio station

Right. Find him wherever he is.

Ok. Listen, they have talked about an "H" hour when they were going to speak.

Ok. Listen, I've been using all means to get in touch with Rosendo. Now by phone. I haven't been able to talk to him, I have been here for half-an hour now. Have you had any contact him?

No, negative. I'm here and I haven't had contact with him, for around 40 minutes.

Ok. Listen. Activate Ávila Plan. Can you read me?

Copied. Ávila Plan. I'll activate it. I proceed immediately.

Wait, One. Tell me if you read me.

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Yes, yes. I'm waiting for your instructions. Don't worry. I await your instructions.

Wait, One. It seems that Rosendo is on the phone. He has no radio. I'm calling him by the phone. Shark 4 to Shark One. Over. Shark 4 to Shark One. Over. Shark 2 to Shark One. Over. Shark 2 to Shark One. Over. Shark 4 to Shark One. Over. Shark 3 to Shark One. Over. Listen. I order you to activate the Ávila Plan. And the first movement we are going to do is the Ayala Battalion's column, have it take positions...

They are a stand-by battalion and can be located wherever you order.

The officer who is talking to Chávez is García Carneiro.

Then, send it here to the Palace, its surroundings, to take positions. And the commander must come here, under my direct orders.

Very well. Copied. Ayala Battalion goes out right away. Right now the most advisable thing to do would be to use the tunnels to get to Sucre Avenue and get there. Can you read me?

Right. Copied. Well, talk to [the General] José Aquiles Vietri who is here to coordinate positions. One dissuasion group. Another group could stand by at the *patio*, etc... Tell me if you copy.

If Vietri Vietri can reach me by this same means is better because I have been meaning to contact him by phone and it's not been possible.

No. He's right here. I have Vietri right here. Over.

Very well. Listen. At this moment a tank column of the Ayala Battalion is leaving towards the tunnels. It goes towards Sucre Avenue to reach the Palace.

Ok. Copied.

Here's Chávez talking. Here's Chávez talking. Yes. Shark One. Do you copy?

Affirmative. Who am I talking to?

It's me, Chávez.

Ah. Listen, I'm here waiting for your instructions at the fort, along with López Hidalgo. I'm with López, General Italo and several officers. We are here at the fort.

Ok. Wait 1, Shark 8, say if you copy. Shark 1 talking.

Yes, Mr. President. The Commander [Cepeda Báez] talking here.

Alright. I embrace you with my solidarity. Remain strong at this moment when a coup is attempted against the institutions and against us. Where are you?

Arriving to Catia

Ah, then come here. There is a situation at the National Guard command that we are evaluating and as soon as you arrive in here come immediately to talk to me. Locate their positions, come here and talk to me.

Ok. Understood.

Once the armored units have arrived to Miraflores, the Army's General Commander Efraín Vásquez Velazco, called by phone to

Lieutenant Colonel Cepeda Báez, second commander of the tanks column, after General Wilfredo Silva, and ordered them to return to *Fuerte Tiuna* with their units. Cepeda Báez did it.¹⁸³

Civil vehicles diverted to block *Fuerte Tiuna*

For purposes of neutralizing the Government's defensive capacity civilians and military officers committed to the coup on April 11th, 2002, applied mechanisms that eventually collapsed *Fuerte Tiuna* in an attempt to prevent Chávez's supporters arriving from the center of the country to Caracas.

The plotters managed to stop the traffic of individual vehicles, collective transportation and trucks in *Tazón* – a sector of the main highway connecting the western states to the entrance to the capital city. They were diverted into *Fuerte Tiuna*, which has a special entrance there. As a consequence, strong bottlenecks obstructed the internal ways of the Fort, compromising the mobilization of military personnel and equipment.

General Melvin López Hidalgo, Chief of the High Command of the Army, wrote a report pointing out that at 3:45 p.m. he arrived on a Military Police motorcycle to *Fuerte Tiuna's* checkpoint number 5, located in *Tazón*.

I saw three heavy load articulated trucks blocking the highway.

¹⁸³ During his interpellation before the National Assembly, General Jorge Luis García Carneiro commented: "This Mr. Lieutenant Colonel was manipulated by the General Commander and he obeyed the order. Of course, there is an act of insubordination, because the instructions were precise: stay under the custody and provide security to the Palace".

One of them containing inflammable butane was parked in the middle of the road.¹⁸⁴

López Hidalgo, who later would head a committee of the Ministry of Defense to investigate the military events of April, referred that a group of Army soldiers took over the checkpoint, imprisoned the NG custody officers and shot into the air to stop the vehicles circulating on the highway.

The contingent was under the command of Captain Wismerck Martínez, commander of the 8203 Sanity Company, who said to López he was under the command of General Vidal Rigoberto Martínez, one of the April's coup plotters.

This was not the only sector where the highway was blocked with similar purposes.

Agents of Chacao Police Department, of Miranda state, seized the switch of some particular vehicles away from their owners, thus further blocking the highway.

Mayor Leopoldo López disclosed this during the *Venevisión* TV program *24 horas* (24 Hours), the morning after the coup, on April 12.

Two buses were coming from the Central Highway to Caracas. We decided to go there with a group of the Chacao Police Department and we stopped those vehicles. We took the driver's keys away, thus blocking the highway to prevent the arrival of those buses.

184 López Hidalgo, Melvin: Report on the facts occurred on April 11, 12 and 13, 2002 at *Fuerte Tiuna*. Mimeographed material.

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Three weeks later, on March 6th, 2002, when he was questioned by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April's events, Leopoldo López was asked to elaborate on that episode and he confirmed it, but he located the events far away from *Fuerte Tiuna*.

We participated at the highway level, near the Altamira freeway junction. We learned of a violent group coming to oppose the people that were marching.

Before his questioning at the National Assembly, during his interview in *Venevisión's* show, Leopoldo López had argued that the Governors supporting Chávez had allegedly announced the mobilization of 400 buses towards Caracas.

Cojedes Governor said: "I'm going to bring armed people" [to the march].

Immediately, he corrected himself:

He didn't say "armed", but he said "I'm going to bring the buses..."

For his part, General López Hidalgo accounted on his report an action film-like episode, but in Tazón sector, when he got in touch with the military that have taken the control over *Fuerte Tiuna's* entrance.

While I was talking to them with a strong voice, in an attempt to make them depose their attitude, I managed to disarm soldier Rigman Reyes, Junior Jesús, identity card number V-18.574.194 and, 10 minutes afterwards, I took away the service pistol from

2nd Lieutenant Gilberto Landaeta Vielma, which he had under his belt at the front part of his abdomen. This officer stayed pointing at my chest with an assault rifle.

López Hidalgo said that at that moment a National Guard officer and three troops had been arrested by the plotters. They were laying face down on the pavement and without their boots, behind a guardhouse. He added that, because of his insistence, the guards were allowed to stand up, put their boots on and maintain their detention “in a more decent situation”.

Nevertheless, they continued pointing at me with 7.62 rifles and Uzi machine-guns, both the officers and the soldiers platoon.

López Hidalgo was able to phone General-in-Chief Lucas Rincón and informed him about that situation. He didn't provide details about how the situation was reversed in his favor.

I managed to control the situation around 17:00 hours (5:00 p.m.). The personnel was arrested and taken into the custody of the Military Police Regiment; the circulation of the vehicles repressed within the internal ways of the Fort was controlled by opening gates 4 and 7, which had been also taken over and closed.

He learned from some NG officers at Tazón tollgate that a column of vehicles coming from *Fuerte Guaicaipuro* was coming along the highway.

I got in touch with General García Carneiro to check if they were loyal troops and he informed me that they were troops of the 314 Ayacucho Group of Artillery, which were coming to back the

Ávila Plan. I received and identified them at Tazón tollgate and I accompanied them to the Fort, around 18:20 hours (6:20 p.m.).

As soon as he learned about the pronouncement of the Commander General of the Army, Efraín Vásquez Velazco, President Chávez appointed López Hidalgo as the commander of that component. But López couldn't take office effectively due to the coup underway.

“Had they heard what I said...”

Two days after the bloody events, reduced to the condition of prisoner, Hugo Chávez will give account of the Ávila Plan activation to a Navy's officer, during his captivity at the Turiamo naval base. The conversation was recorded by a video camera.

The private TV stations run the content of this video as a proof that Chávez intended to repress the opposition march with the tanks' firing power.

That march, however, had not diverted its original route in the morning of April 11. The route was, as planned, from *Parque del Este* to *Chuao*. If the order was given in the morning, there is no clear relation between that order and the deviated march.

The exchange between Chávez and the naval officer developed as follows:

In the morning, I ordered the application of the Ávila Plan—I have the capacity to do that—, when I learned through intelligence reports from the DISIP and the Armed Forces that

the insurrectional plan was underway and that General [Enrique] Medina Gómez, the military attaché of the Embassy of Venezuela to Washington, was here and had brought weapons... I learned all that and ordered, in the light of the abundant evidences “Ávila Plan, General Rosendo!” But General Rosendo didn’t want to. He vanished. “Lucas, Ávila Plan!”... “President, let’s think about it”. “What the hell we have to think about? Ávila Plan!”. “Well, I’m going to *Fuerte Tiuna*”. Then, there: “No, this is not advisable”. Then, I took a radio, started to contact the network and I got in touch with García Carneiro, the brigade commander. I told him: “García Carneiro, what’s going on?” “Fuck, my Commander, I don’t know. They are hunting me, they want to arrest me”. “Who?” “The generals”. “Arresting you? How come? What’s going on?” “Well, there is a military insurrection”. Then, I told him: “Well, listen, I’m in command. Send here the war tanks. Let’s apply the Ávila Plan”. They blocked the highway, *Avenida Los Próceres*. They tried to avoid that. Nevertheless, the tanks departed. Had they complied... Look, history will show the responsible ones. Had the Military High Command obeyed the order I gave and applied the Ávila Plan that morning. I knew then, and they did as well, that the insurrectional plan was underway... The problem was that some of them were committed to General Vásquez Velazco, the traitor.¹⁸⁵

185 Quoted in relation to the dissenting vote of the opposition’s representatives to the final report issued by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April 2002’s events.

“Lucas took out a gun”

Vice Admiral Carrero Cuberos describes the reaction of General Lucas Rincón when he learned that García Carneiro had ordered the mobilization of the Ayala Battalion's tanks, without his consent. By that moment “people continued to arrive and pack around” Miraflores .

According to Carrero Cuberos, Rincón “took out a gun” and said: I'm going to see what is going on with García Carneiro.

This was because the General-in-Chief “didn't know that the Ávila Plan had been activated”.

Carrero Cuberos contained him:

No, my general. Stay here that I'm going to talk to García Carneiro.

The naval officer went along with his aide to look for García Carneiro and when he finds him at *Fuerte Tiuna*, he saw a tank column of the Ayala Battalion leaving for Miraflores.

I was surprised because I had no information about the Ávila Plan activation.

Then, he said to the commander of the 3rd Infantry Division:

Look, García Carneiro, come with me, let's talk to General Lucas.

According to Carrero Cuberos' version, García Carneiro “believed at first that I was arresting him, but no way”.

He got into the car quietly, we arrived to the Ministry and he talked to Lucas. It was around 5 or 6 p.m.

Some minutes later, Lucas Rincón decides to go to Miraflores to speak with the President, along with the Military High Command and García Carneiro. A helicopter takes them to the Palace, where they land at 6:45 p.m. They waited around an hour before they were received by Chávez. The whole Military High Command was there, except for Vásquez Velazco, as well as the former Minister of Defense and retired General Hurtado Soucre, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Arévalo Méndez, an army General.

Carrero and Rosendo place their posts at the President's disposal

At the beginning of the meeting, Carrero Cuberos recalls a Simón Bolívar's phrase: "Damned be the soldier who raises his arms against his people".

This is something we have deep in the bottom of our chests, both soldiers and officers. Nobody wanted to send troops against the mob. Then, the activation of the Ávila Plan had to be the last [resort], when we were completely hopeless, and we didn't think the situation was so serious so as to activate it. Moreover, we never learned it had been activated, but undoubtedly, if the President gives an order, it's done, because that is why he is the Commander-in-chief. What we didn't understand was why García Carneiro was moving tanks, because to do that the Ávila Plan needed to be active.

Carrero Cuberos tells that General Rosendo, chief of the National Armed Force Joint Command (CUFAN, Spanish

acronym), “was also in disagreement with the Bolivarian Circles which were getting together, because of the risk of confrontation between the two sides.

When finally, the President allows them to come in, he talks to them for around 15 minutes. By that time, General Vásquez Velazco had already pronounced himself, withdrawing the Army support to the Government and demanding the President’s resignation.

Vásquez Velazco insisted:

This is not a coup d’état.

And addressing Chávez, he said:

Until today I was loyal, President.

Even so, according to Carrero Cuberos, the President told them that “the situation is under control” and urged them:

Well, I’m going to let you talk, one by one.

But “practically nobody has a thing to say”.

Then I (Carrero Cuberos) told the President that my post was at his disposal, because I was in disagreement with certain things. Rosendo said the same. Then, Arévalo and Hurtado told us not to step down to avoid breaking the chain of command and perhaps the ousting of the President.

General Manuel Rosendo, for his part, accounts that when he and Carrero Cuberos placed their posts at the President’s disposal, General Hurtado Soucre asked them to rectify.

Chávez, according to Rosendo, asked him if he would rectify, and he responded:

Only if the Bolivarian Circles get disarmed.

Rosendo claims that Chávez, among other things, responded to him that “he couldn’t guarantee that the Bolivarian Circles would cease to defend him” and that “because of that, he preferred to remove me”.

I was removed on that day.

At a given time, the Army commander, Vice Admiral Jorge Sierralta, received a telephone call and told the President:

The Navy Infantry has rebelled.

General Francisco Belisario Landis, the National Guard commander, also receives a telephone call to inform him that the same was happening in his own component. His second in the chain of command, General Carlos Alfonso Martínez, General Inspector of the National Guard, also pronounced himself and disowned the President’s authority and publicly demanded his resignation. Among all the components, the National Guard is the only one able to confront and eventually defeat the Army in a coup d’état, as it happened during the two attempts in 1992: it has the troops, the weapons and the expertise in urban combat.

Carrero Cuberos remembers Chávez’s words:

I don’t want confrontations among us. Somebody has to fix this problem.

According to the navy officer, nobody said anything and, again, it was him who broke the silence to tell Chávez:

Well, I’m going to the NG and the Navy Infantry and I’ll fix it.

Surprised, Chávez replied:

And how are you going to fix that?

Well, Alfonso and I are very close friends and he's the one in rebellion, and the commander of the Navy Infantry obeys me.

According to Carrero Cuberos, Rosendo said:

I'm not reconsidering any option. I place my post at your disposal.

Afterwards, the President dismissed them.

General Lucas Rincón approaches Carrero Cuberos and, according to the latter, he said:

Look, Carrero. Go and fix that problem, but I think that this has reached a point of no return. I'm going to talk to the President so as he resigns.

Carrero Cuberos went to the NG headquarters, in *El Paraíso* a neighborhood close to downtown Caracas, where General Carlos Alfonso Martínez is giving a press conference, surrounded by generals.

At the end of the press conference he tells him:

Look, little old man. You cannot take troops out to the streets, because if the Army also takes its troops out we are going to clash and there will be bloodshed.

Don't you worry; I'm going to stay here with all my people.

Carrero Cuberos says that he tried to make contact from there with Admiral Castillo, commander of the Navy Infantry, "to tell him not to take troops out to the street". But he couldn't, he asserts.

At the NG headquarters, a journalist approaches Carrero Cuberos, during a live broadcast.

I stated that I had resigned or had placed my post at the President's disposal, I don't remember, and I asked the FAN to avoid a confrontation among us. I made a call to Admiral Castillo not to take troops out to the streets. And I also told Baduel, who was in Maracay, please to return the troops to the garrison.

For sure, it was a hard blow to Chávez to see him on TV, for he was supposed to go to El Paraíso and "fix" the situation, not to appear on TV as if he was sided with the NG pronouncement.

General Carlos Alonso Martínez received a call from General Vásquez Velazco, who asked him to go to the Army command, in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

Carrero Cuberos accompanied him. They were escorted by Vásquez Velazco's people.

"Who's in command here?"

Arriving to the Army post of command, generals Medina Gómez and Rommel Fuenmayor discussed about how they were going to capture President Chávez in Miraflores.

Carrero Cuberos was intrigued when he saw Medina Gómez putting on a bullet-proof vest.

He asked to himself:

And the President had not resigned?

Surprised, Carrero Cuberos asked Vásquez Velazco:

Hey buddy, what's this? Who is in command here?

Vásquez Velazco answered to him:

Well, let's wait and see.

Later on, Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez arrived to the Army headquarters. He was returning from the office at Chacao-Bello Campo where he had headed the pronouncement of the officers in the afternoon. Ramírez Pérez had just appeared on *Venevisión*, giving journalist Ibéyise Pacheco details of the uprising. He told her:

We were pronouncing ourselves before the first death occurred.¹⁸⁶

Carrero Cuberos recollects that Ramírez Pérez, because of his lesser seniority and lower position within the FAN, “is a subordinate of mine and of the Army commander”, but he arrived with an attitude of superiority:

I am the one giving instructions here. We are going to appoint a civil president.

Carrero Cuberos asked Vásquez Velazco:

Look buddy. Who is in command here? I don't understand this. Are you subordinating yourself to this gentleman? What is going on here?

Easy, buddy.

“The civilians were going to put the dead”

Efraín Vásquez Velazco, according to Carrera Cubero recollections, explained to him:

186 *Venevisión*, 04-11-2002.

There are two conditions that we have to meet. One is that the President must go to prison.

Why?

Don't you get into this, because you're not involved.

Look, buddy. I'm not going to get involved in this. This is very weird. I don't understand how come that you submit yourself to a subordinate of yours. I'd better be off.

When Carrero Cuberos stands up from his chair, Vásquez Velazco grabs his arm and says:

No. Carrero is going to stay with me.

He stayed, but under protest:

I disagree committing the President to prison.

He took distance and, according to his words, he watched the developments from the sidelines ever since.

Carrero Cuberos remembers that, at that moment, Ramírez Pérez "said something very serious that I would never forget".

There are two conditions that the civil society imposed me: the President has to be a civilian and there is not going to be a Government *Junta*. The second one is that President Chávez has to be committed to prison.

Somebody asked him why a civilian President and why those conditions. According to Carrero Cuberos, Ramírez Pérez replied:

Because they were the ones who would put the dead.

Carrero Cuberos says he was horrified:

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Then I said: This cannot be possible! That is, they knew there were going to be dead people. It is not that they put the dead, but they were going to put the dead.

To Carrero Cuberos “it would be necessary to know at what time that meeting was held” where those self-proclaimed representatives of the “civil society” told Ramírez Pérez in advance about those dead.

Once he was in *Fuerte Tiuna*, Carrero Cuberos observed that Ramírez Pérez, Rear Admiral Daniel Comisso Urdaneta and General Pedro Pereira, of the Air Force were the ones giving orders there. By then, Rear Admiral Carlos Molina Tamayo, also a coup leader hadn’t arrived. Carrero Cuberos points out that there was another group commanded by Medina Gómez and Rommel Fuenmayor.

Ramírez Pérez was in command, but the others were doing other things.

Carrero Cuberos recalls that General Rommel Fuenmayor received a telephone call and said to Medina Gómez:

Look, the trace of the mobile phone of the Minister [of Defense], José Vicente Rangel. He is driving along the Caracas-La Guaira highway (connecting Caracas and the seaside, especially the international airport). He’s going to escape.

Medina Gómez replied:

Don’t worry. The airport is under control and he is not leaving the country.

In Carrero Cuberos's account, such conversation "is an indication that they both had something planned".

It cannot be possible that he is called to be said that the telephone trace of the Minister is moving along the Caracas-La Guaira highway. That means that all our telephones were controlled, at least those of the Military High Command and ministers.

Molina Tamayo and the use of force

When he was questioned by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April's facts, General Jorge García Carneiro justified the Ávila Plan activation arguing that, besides the march, the insurgent military officials had a plan to attack Miraflores Palace.

He based this assertion on the statements offered by Rear Admiral Carlos Molina Tamayo, chief of Carmona's Military House, to the program *24 horas* (24 Hours) broadcast by *Venevisión* and conducted by Napoleon Bravo, the morning of Friday April 12.

Molina Tamayo was there along with Chacao Mayor, Leopoldo López, and Víctor Manuel García. The latter was so far known as the owner of CECA, a pollster company. All of them looked proud, telling the country the inner details of the move to oust Hugo Chávez. They believed that the umpire had already called the end of the game.

Napoleón Bravo asked:

What was the original plan?

And Molina Tamayo replied:

The original plan was to reach the highest level of support of the democratic society at large and pass to use the FAN.

The navy officer added that, during the night of Thursday 11, “a lot of pressure is exerted” over Chávez to force him sign a resignation letter and Miraflores Palace “was going to be taken over by force”.

General Enrique Medina Gómez and General González González were expected to go out with a group of tanks.

Dissuasive or repressive plan? A peaceful march?

Historically, in any clash between two antagonistic groups, the first front of battle is not physical or material, but symbolic. The confrontation is reflected on how things are called. For the Spaniards of the Independence times, for example, Simón Bolívar was a bandit and his war actions were vandalism. The winner of the historical struggle implants his way of naming things, thus writing the history.

In the Venezuela of 2002, there were two ways of characterizing the coup d'état.

The first one, labels it that way: “coup d'état”. The other one, defines it as a “power vacuum”.

Logically, different ways arise to characterize the facts and actions that revolved around the events.

For those who embrace the “power vacuum” thesis, the march

deviated towards Miraflores was a “peaceful march”, and they highlight that it was attended by children, women and elderly who, in a civic manner were asking the President of the Republic to, please, step down. Any answer preventing their purpose of being attained shall be deemed at least reprehensible.

To those who believe there was a coup d'état, the march lost its peaceful nature when it was deviated to Miraflores knowingly that there was another crowd there supporting the idea that the President should remain in office. The crowd –cannon fodder- turned into a gun fired against the Palace in order to produce the necessary deaths to favor the intervention of the military demanding the President's resignation. The use of the Metropolitan Police as the armed vanguard and the snipers stationed in the final trench of the route –deployed by those moving the threads in the backstage- complete the view of Chávez's supporters of the developments, and also my own view.

The Ávila Plan, ordered by President Chávez on April 11, is also involved in this symbolic battle.

In their dissenting vote on the report issued by the National Assembly's Politics Committee investigating the April's events, a group of opposition congressmen alleged the “political responsibility” of President Chávez for having ordered the activation of the Ávila Plan.¹⁸⁷

187 Dissenting vote of Vestalia San Pedro de Araujo, Liliana Hernández, Edgar Zambrano, Alfonso Marquina, Carlos Tablante, Andrés Velásquez, César Pérez Vivas, Alberto Jordán Hernández, José Luis Farías, Carlos Casanova and Gerardo Blyde before the National Assembly's Politics Committee investigating the April

They characterize the plan as follows:

It's a repressive plan conceived to face situations of serious disorders of the national public order or military aggressions against the territorial integrity or the democratic institutions.

The opposition representatives added:

The application of this plan to control or dissolve a peaceful demonstration and without arms was an attempt against the political right to protest that, besides, is also a mean to express thoughts and political participation.

In their dissenting vote, the opposition representatives quoted the stance sustained by General Manuel Rosendo, former chief of the CUFAN, who questioned by the committee considered that the Ávila Plan should be adapted to the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, of 1999, as it was devised in 1998.

Rosendo argued that articles 328 and 329 of the Constitution assign to the Army, the Navy and the Air Force the responsibility of the national defense, whereas the National Guard, besides cooperating with them, is in charge of the internal order.

They further added:

Article 68 reads that we cannot use firearms [to control demonstrations] and we have war weapons.

On the contrary, the final report of the Politics Committee of the National Assembly takes for granted "the arrangement of a conspiracy plan aimed to overthrow Chávez's constitutional

Government, which used the April 11 march as one of its means”.

On April 11 there was a number of elements that fulfill the requirements set for the reactivation of the Ávila Plan to safeguard the State's integrity.

Among them, they mention:

- Subversive groups or people disaffected of the democratic system carry out violent actions against the stability of the democratic system and jeopardize the safety of people and property.
- The alterations of public order are of such dimension that the use of the public security corps is insufficient to its reestablishment.

The Committee estimated that the mission behind the order to activate the Ávila Plan was the “reestablishment of public order in a dissuasive manner, due to the fact that the demonstration had turned from peaceful into violent and had overcome the State security agencies capacity”.

The parliamentary report quotes an explanation about the Ávila Plan offered by General Jorge García Carneiro, head of the 3rd Infantry Division, given during his appearance before the Committee.

The Ávila Plan has a dissuasive and passive nature. Its mission does not foresee to repress, confront or serve as a barrier or mattress, a term that has been used during these appearances, in demonstrations or civil disturbances.

García Carneiro said that the plan “only specifies the taking of critical points in the sectors of responsibility and support the various national bodies for purposes of safeguarding and guaranteeing peace”.

But if a disturbance of public order trespasses the law and try to avoid that the Ávila Plan complies its objective of protection, calm and security, it will receive a response allowing peace for the citizens.

The Ávila Plan, according to that explanation, has a preliminary phase and three subsequent phases:

- The preliminary phase is characterized by an early warning, organization of units, vehicles checking, equipment, pneumatics and a passive review of the critical points.
- The first phase of execution provides for the National Guard's support to the State's security corps.
- The second phase foresees the inspection of military patrols and occupation of critical points.
- The third phase implies the withdrawal of the troops to their garrisons, once the order has been reestablished.

García Carneiro underlined:

The only thing that was used [in April 11] was the stand-by troops, following the President's request, to be used for dissuasion purposes, according to the conversation between Shark 1 and Shark 6.

At 5:45 p.m. of April 11, a column of tanks departed from

Fuerte Tiuna under the command of General Wilfredo Silva.

According to García Carneiro's recollections, it "took the routes less exposed to the demonstrations": checkpoint 3 in *Fuerte Tiuna*, Coche, El Valle tunnels, El Paraíso, Los Flores de Catia, Avenida Sucre, Miraflores.

This indicates that [the tanks] were not intended to confront the march, which by then was splitting. They were moved into the *patio* of the Honor Guard Regiment and take over the security device of that critical point according to the Ávila Plan.

García Carneiro remembered that during the parliamentary examination tens of questions were made about the Ávila Plan

But we don't know of one dead, wounded, beaten, or a scratched car caused by the movement of the tanks from *Fuerte Tiuna* to Miraflores and back.

The General asked the parliamentary representatives:

Don't you believe that this subject has been sufficiently discussed? Is it worth to continue discussing this subject?

He answered to himself:

I don't think so, because the activation of the plan was reduced to the materialization of the use of reserve elements to dissuade violence and protect Miraflores Palace as it is the seat of the Executive Branch of Government, therefore, the critical point with the highest value in this sector as set forth in the Ávila Plan.

García Carneiro and Baduel, together

Two years after the coup, on April 13th, 2004, I interviewed simultaneously two leading actors of that story: Jorge Luis García Carneiro and Raúl Isaías Baduel. It was one of the many special programs that I conducted in *VTV* in connection with the commemorations of the coup and the countercoup of April.

By then, García Carneiro already had the three suns corresponding to the rank of General-in-Chief and he was at the head of the Ministry of Defense. On Baduel's epaulettes there were still the two suns corresponding to the rank of General of Division. He was the Army's General Commander.

The interview took place at the Ministry of Defense headquarters, in *Fuerte Tiuna*, where so many events had occurred in 2002.

The rivalry between García Carneiro and Baduel was by then an open secret. They had just been involved in a muted battle for the Ministry of Defense. The exchange at the State-owned TV station favored the impression of distention and comradeship. The initiative to do this program came from García Carneiro's press team. In retrospective, it is possible that, besides disowning the rumors of friction between the two generals, it was intended to make clear the subordination of Baduel before the authority and military hierarchy of the Minister.

I asked García Carneiro about the order to activate the Ávila Plan given by President Chávez on April 11th, 2002.

The opposition has kept arguing that the purpose was to use the Army to repress the civilian demonstrators.

The concept of repression is their pretext. They know perfectly well that the Ávila Plan is within a macro-plan, the Sovereignty Plan, which provides for plans with specific names for each command or garrison. The Ávila Plan is the one corresponding to the Great Caracas.

The National Armed Force has a plan for each part of the country plan for the same purposes. This allows us to respond to a transportation stoppage, a students' stoppage, or any other thing which may arise, as well as public disasters, such as the Vargas State tragedy [in 1999], where units had specific places under their responsibility.

Baduel ratified García Carneiro's explanation.

Basically, it's a dissuasive non-repressive plan. And, as pointed out very well by the General-in-Chief, it is intended to guarantee life, peace and preserve the citizens' goods.

Baduel deemed "perverse" the way the Government's enemies described the plan:

As if the military units are going to fire at once against the population as soon as they leave their garrisons. That is false and untrue.

The Garrison Rules of Service, according to Baduel, is one of the foundations of the Sovereignty Plan, "It sets forth the steps to make use of weapons":

First, use of dissuasive means. Announcements said out loud or by means allowing their transmission.

Baduel added:

It would be interesting, even considering the confidential nature of the plan, revealing some aspects of that plan so that both domestic and international audiences get a clear understanding that in no manner whatsoever the plan provides for repressive action by the FAN.

During the same interview, Baduel said that, on April 2002, he received invitations to support the coup in his capacity as head of the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade, in Maracay,:

Many people called me [asking me] to depose my attitude, to think it over and take a step forward for the future of Venezuela. To all of them I said that I was listening just for education, but if they were proposing me to participate in a charade I would be forced to cut communication.

Baduel said he had received a telephone call from Luis Miquilena, to whom he would have recriminated:

You are committing irresponsible actions that could trigger violence. There aren't enough lampposts in Caracas for the people to hang you.

And what did he reply?

To reconsider my positions, understand that everything was for the future of the country.

I asked García Carneiro:

How about you? Did Miquilena call you?

No. I haven't met him and I'm not interested in meeting him.

CHAPTER IX: THE SNIPERS' MYSTERY

What is a sniper?

According to Wikipedia a sniper is a “marksman or a qualified specialist who operates alone, in a pair, or with a sniper team to maintain close visual contact with the enemy and engage targets from concealed positions or distances exceeding the detection capabilities of enemy personnel.” Etymologically, in English the verb “snipe” was born in British India to refer to shooting snipe and the term “sniper” seems to have been used in the sense of “sharpshooter”, a calque for the 18th-century German term *Scharfschütze* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sniper). (Translator’s note: the author makes an etymological reference to *francotirador*, the Spanish word used in Spanish for sniper, which derives from the French term for French shooters).

During the French-Prussian war (1870-1871), the French inaugurated the use of long range guns with telescopic sight to annihilate the German troops. They did this from a distance, all alone and hidden. Their enemies fell down without knowing the location of the bullet’s source. Since then, the use of this war “resource” was generalized and adopted by all armies.

In the civilian field, the police corps took the idea from the military to train snipers specialized to neutralize, for example, criminals involved in hostages situations.

They have been also employed to commit crimes, homicides at a distance, commissioned killings, for political or economic reasons, as in the case of the U.S. president, John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas, Texas, 1963.

In modern times, they are called "elite shooter", "tactic shooter" or "precision shooter".

These individuals are characterized as follows:

- They use long range weapons, with telescopic sight (lens with a long range scope).
- They hide themselves far away from their target, on top of hills, trees or buildings, in positions with a broad visual field that do not reveal their presence, except for the effect of their shots.
- Because of the foregoing, the trajectory of their bullets is downwards, that is, they have an up-down angle.
- Cold blood, calm pulse and systematic training, as well as time and perseverance takes to get to be an outstanding precision shooter.

Firing from the heights

Guillermo García Ponce, a journalist and a revolutionary leader, tells that in the afternoon of April 11th, 2002, he was at Miraflores when he heard gunshots.

It was anywhere between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ García Ponce, Guillermo: *El golpe de abril* (The April's Coup). Second edition, corrected and expanded. Caracas, 2002. P15-18.

CHAPTER IX: THE SNIPERS' MYSTERY

In his youth, García Ponce was the Communist Party's responsible for military operations —during the 60s, the years of the popular armed struggle in Venezuela. He wrote the book *Las armas de la Guerra de independencia* (The Weapons of the Independence War). Unlike those with inexperienced ears, he can distinguish very clearly between the sound of fireworks and gunshots.

At that time, García Ponce went out to find out what was going on. He approached the stage installed very close to the Palace checkpoint entrance number 2, and close to the corner of Bolero.

Then I saw the first persons falling down dead or wounded.

The demonstrators were pointing at the roofs.

They tried to protect me and shouted that there were snipers firing against us from *Ausonia Hotel*.

García Ponce got on the stage and Adina Bastida, by then Vice President of the Republic, passed him the microphone.

He doesn't remember exactly what he said, but he still has the clear image of his telling the crowd that the people "always irrigate with their blood the path to freedom, as fascism only knows of brutal killing procedures".

I didn't claim for revenge, but that blood and those victims demanded justice. Those crimes could not go unpunished.

García Ponce has no doubts:

The participation of snipers and the dead in the surroundings of Miraflores Palace revealed even more clearly the coup plotters' plan.

According to the journalist, those murderers were there not by chance.

They were part of the premeditation. An excuse was needed, dead people, blood, extreme violence, to justify the coup d'état.

Captured and entered into Miraflores

Guillermo García Ponce witnessed when a group of men, suspected of being snipers, were caught and taken under arrest into the Palace.

They have been detained by a commission composed of DISIP agents and one officer of the Military House, at the *Ausonia Hotel*.

Although several testimonies also refer to the *Edén Hotel* and *La Nacional* building —located in Miraflores' vicinity— as the snipers' hiding place, there is evidence only of the arrests at the *Ausonia Hotel*.

By the moment García Ponce saw them; the seven detainees “had been beaten by their captors”.

Somebody frisked them and said:

These are the ones. One has Panamanian papers and the other one is a Colombian citizen.

García Ponce remembers that somebody proposed to show them to the press, but the rest disagreed “because they were seriously beaten”.

Afterwards, they disappeared from my sight. I didn't see them again.

CHAPTER IX: THE SNIPERS' MYSTERY

Inside Miraflores, in an outdoors section, photographer Orlando Ugueto captured the image of a Presidential Guard's soldier taking with him a civilian prisoner. The man, however, didn't show signs of having been beaten.



Photographer Orlando Ugueto used to work for *El Nacional*; this national newspaper refused to publish this picture. Photo: Orlando Ugueto

The picture was taken in broad daylight, so this individual is not a member of the group captured at the *Ausonia Hotel* around 7:30 p.m.¹⁸⁹

The guards prevented the photojournalist from taking him more pictures.

Ugueto worked at *El Nacional* at that time. The newspaper never published the picture.

¹⁸⁹ This time was taken from the final decision pronounced by the Control Court XIV of Caracas Metropolitan Area, on April 15th, 2002.

From “snipers” to “gunmen”

On Friday April 12th, 2002, *El Nacional* opens its front-page with a huge picture by Tom Grillo showing the inert body of an opposition protestor. He is lying on his back and covered by a national flag.

The main headline, in big letters, reads:

Chávez resigned

The kicker:

Pedro Carmona Estanga is the man in charge of the transition

Above, in the upper edge:

Bolivarian Circles caused 10 dead and almost 100 wounded

Under the big central picture, appears another one much smaller showing excerpts of *Venevision*’s video where several people are taking cover behind a wall. On this wall there is the following inscription:

Peña is a CIA agent. M-28

Along with these persons appears a man shooting from *Puente Llaguno* railing, at an invisible point in Avenida Baralt.

The caption reads:

One of the subjects who fired an automatic pistol from Carmelitas’ bridge at the opposition rally is Richard Peñalver, MVR metropolitan councilman. The leader mercilessly discharged his gun, along with the members of the Bolivarian brigades.

On one side, the editorial of the newspaper is headlined:

Hugo’s dead

In the interior pages, the opposition rally takes all the positive comments. All the negative considerations fall down on the *officialism* and the way it organized the grassroots: the “Bolivarian circles”.

The *City* section opens with cheerful pictures of the opposition's demonstration when it was in the east of Caracas.

The headline:

The families were the leading characters of the opposition rally

In the *Politics* section, the main note opens with a six-column headline:

Snipers dispersed the march with gunshots

The review is signed by Rafael Luna Noguera and its lead reads:

Yesterday, *officialist* armed groups, including snipers, put an end with gunshots to the pacific march carried out by thousands of opponents to Hugo Chávez's Government...

On one side, the newspaper publishes a picture of Richard Peñalver with the following headline:

Councilman ready to kill

In turn, the late-afternoon newspaper *El Mundo* published on its Friday April 12th edition a characterization that is also replicated in other media: it uses the word “sniper” to refer to Rafael Cabrices, one of the men who appeared firing his gun from *Llaguno*.

Later, the media agreed on calling them “Puente Llaguno's gunmen”, and set aside the reference to the “snipers”.

Peñalver, Cabrices and Henry Atencio were not the only ones who were called that way since they fired their arms in *Puente Llaguno*. The other men in that place who appeared in *Venevisión*'s video were also called gunmen even though they did not carry any gun or fired any weapon whatsoever.

This was the case of Nicolás Rivera, producer of the community radio station *Radio Perola*, and Carlos Rafael Fernández, commentator and a captain of the fire brigade.

Rivera spent one year in prison, along with Peñalver, Atencio and Cabrices. His place was searched by DISIP officers who beat his wife. Fernandez stayed for the same time in Germany, where he lived with his daughter, until he appeared before court and was released on probation. He was dismissed from the Capital District Fire Brigade by Metropolitan Mayor Alfredo Peña. And he is still waiting for his reinstatement despite his case was eventually dismissed.¹⁹⁰

Other pro-Chávez militants were also formally charged, based on several pictures. They were:

- Jorge Farnún
- Aníbal Espejo
- Amílcar Carvajal
- José Antonio Ávila, and
- Miguel Mora

¹⁹⁰ Fernández was reincorporated to the Fire Department of the Capital District in 2015, when, by appointment of President Nicolás Maduro, who writes this was serving as Head of Government of the Capital District.

Farnún is a retired Metropolitan Police deputy inspector who worked as the head of the General Services department of Libertador Municipality, in 2002. The officer claimed that he was at his office during the events.

He showed a widely publicized picture of Carvajal aiming his gun to the south of Avenida Baralt. The press, as well as the opposition's lawyers, pointed at him as the person responsible for killing and wounding opposition marchers.

The Prosecutor General's Office, however, did not charge the aforementioned citizens with murder, but with public intimidation and some of them with illegal bearing of firearms, because as in the case of Cabrices, Atencio and Peñalver, the prosecution didn't find evidence to individualize their responsibility in relation to the dead and wounded.

Carvajal, Ávila and Mora led a clandestine life for three years, until they appeared before the court, on February 2nd, 2005.

In 2008, the prosecutors Sonia Buznego and Turcy Simancas requested the dismissal of the case before the Criminal Judicial Circuit of Aragua in favor of Espejo, Carvajal, Ávila and Mora, which dismissal was accorded by the court.

The first mention

On April 11, 2002, Vice Admiral Héctor Ramírez Pérez was the first to talk about "snipers" when he read the pronouncement against Hugo Chávez:

Venezuelans: the President of the Republic has betrayed the trust of his people. He's massacring innocent people with snipers. By this moment there are six dead and tens of wounded in Caracas.

During his appearance before the National Assembly's Politic Committee that investigated such developments, Ramírez Pérez attributed this data of the dead and snipers to the journalists covering the April 11 pronouncement who, according to him, received the information through their walkie-talkies. He failed to specify a single name.

Pedro Carmona Estanga also mentions the snipers to justify his decision to abandon Caracas downtown.

In his book, Carmona tells that, once the rally had arrived downtown Caracas, he walked up to the O'Leary square fountain and used a megaphone to ask the crowd not to continue to Miraflores, but to move towards the National Assembly building.

My colleague Vicente Brito recommended me to go down from the fountain for I was an easy target for the snipers and he told me that he had observed somebody behind me with a shining object, with the possible intention of marking me.

Carmona says that he learned about the casualties in Avenida Baralt at 3:30 p.m.

At that time I received a second phone call from Carlos Ortega, who insisted that I had to leave the march and warned me that, according to trustworthy pro-Chávez sources, I could

be the target of snipers who were looking for me in order to kill me, as they had planned to do the same with him.

Two motorcyclists took Carmona and his wife out of the place.

That is how we get out of there, with a helmet, amongst the crowd in the Avenida Bolívar.

Enrique Mendoza, governor of Miranda state, was riding another motorcycle.

The *Ausonia Hotel* men

The seven individuals captured at the *Ausonia Hotel*, under the suspicion of being the snipers of April 11th, 2002, are the following:

- Nelson Rosales
- Roger Lugo Miquilena
- Franklin Rodríguez
- Roberto McKnighth, Jesús Meneses, Jorge Meneses and John Garzón (Colombian passport).¹⁹¹

191 The names were taken from the book *Los documentos del golpe* (The coup documents), edited by Fundación Defensoría del Pueblo, which published the picture, complete name, card of identity number and police record of each one of the detainees. The book, an excellent hemerographic compilation about the coup, makes a mistake when it points out that the Ausonia men were released on April 12th, 2002, as this really happened on April 15, 2002. The decision of the Court XIV of control of Caracas's Metropolitan Area, dated April 15th, 2002, which decreed freedom without restrictions of these citizens contains another mistake: it identifies Nelson Rosales as "Nelson Morales", although the citizen signs with his real family name.

Five of them were at the eight floor of the hotel. The other two were at the fourth floor.

The report prepared by the police agents in the place indicates that they were detained at 7:30 p.m., on April 11th, 2002. The resulting seizure of this operation was:

- A .38 hand-gun, serial 1527323, with five not fired cartridges.
- 97 figures allusive to a golden star.
- A firearm license allegedly issued by the Arms and Explosives Division, authorizing Nelson Rosales to bear a firearm .38.
- A passport of the Republic of Colombia numbered AH944139.
- A Colombian identity card number 79651733, issued to Luis Alberto Mogollón. Seemingly, this was the real identity of the detainee who claimed to be named Lugo Miquilena.
- Three cellular phones (1 Nokia, 1 Panasonic and 1 Motorola).

Besides Rosales's handgun, there is no record of any other arm seized at the place.

Other detainees

Three persons were placed to the custody of the Miraflores Palace guards.

According to a report dated May 15th, 2002, attributed to

Colonel Almidien Moreno Acosta of the presidential Military House, the detainees names were:

- Darwin López
- Edgar Becerra, and
- José Guillén

These citizens had been brought by a group of unidentified persons who said that those citizens were snipers and that they had been caught in the surroundings of *Edén Hotel*.¹⁹²

Guillén was wounded and had no identification. According to the report, he was moved to a healthcare center by Civil Defense agents.

The rest was under custody at the disciplinary room of the Presidential Guard Regiment.

The document also points out:

There are no reports about firearms seizure.

The officer adds these three persons to the other seven captured at the *Ausonia Hotel* and further writes:

Currently, I am unaware of the destination, status or location of the aforementioned citizens.

The head of the Presidential Guard speaks

Four years after the coup, on April 12th, 2006, I asked Jesús Morao Gardona, head of the Presidential Guard Regiment in 2002,

¹⁹² Questioned by the public attorney Héctor Villalobos. Quoted in Olivares, Francisco: *Las balas de abril* (April's Bullets). Grupo Editorial Random House Mondadori, Caracas, 2006

about the alleged snipers detained at the *Ausonia Hotel*.

The Intelligence Staff of the Presidential Guard Regiment and of the Military House captured some persons there. They were placed at the disposal of the Prosecutor General's Office. Thenceforth, I don't know what happened to those individuals.¹⁹³

It has been said that Carmonas' Military House let some of them escape.

No. They were captured. One of this group was a hot-dog vendor; another one was a magazines vendor. This one almost got killed. I had to take these three persons and send them to the Military Hospital and to ordinary hospitals.

Weren't they snipers?

No, no. I'm talking about three of them who were captured and almost got killed by the people who thought they were the snipers. Others were also captured there and were placed under the custody of the Palace (guards).

So, they captured snipers as well as people who had nothing to do with that?

According to the enquiry on this event, those three people were not [snipers].

The mysterious guest at *Edén Hotel*

It's possible that the persons mentioned by Morao were López, Becerra and Guillén, that is, the three persons captured separately

193 VTV, program *En Confianza*, April 12th, 2006

from the *Ausonia* group. Probably they are the same who, according to journalist Francisco Olivares, were apprehended at *Edén Hotel* by pro-Chávez demonstrators believing they were snipers, “but eventually they happened to be people that worked in that sector”.¹⁹⁴

In his book *Las balas de abril* (April's bullets), Olivares mentions the case of a man who, in the morning hours of April 11, booked a room at *Edén Hotel*. He quotes the testimony of the receptionist, Aura Josefina, who reported that that morning the guest was assigned room 25. But in the afternoon he asked for a room change and he was moved to room 45.

The guest, writes Olivares, “went out in the afternoon and checked out during the evening”.

And the journalist adds:

When the night clerk was checking the room, he found five cartridges that had been fired.

According to Olivares, the cartridges —four .9mm and one .380— were delivered to the CICPC. The guest is allegedly identified in the registry ledger as Eduardo López, with a card identity number that, in fact, coincides with somebody named that way in the files of the National Electoral Council.

As we can see, journalist Olivares suggests that this person fired from *Edén Hotel*. Nevertheless, there is no other known reference about him or about his hypothetical criminal responsibility in

194 Olivares, Francisco: Op. Cit.

connection with the dead or wounded persons.

What we find in abundance are testimonies indicating the *Edén Hotel* as the source of the bullets fired against the Bolivarian gathered on *Puente Llaguno*.

In general, Olivares' book argues in favor of the opposition performance on April 11, particularly the actions of the Metropolitan Police's commissioners and agents who were convicted for the death and injuries caused to pro-Chávez demonstrators.

Francisco Olivares was my first direct boss when I began to work in *El Universal*, in 1991. Later, he went to coordinate the newspaper research unit. He's the author of some articles on April 11 that are commented on these pages.

Guilty or not guilty?

Only 7 out of the 10 citizens detained at *Ausonia Hotel* as suspect snipers appeared effectively before the Prosecutor General's Office. Nobody knows anything about José Guillén, the wounded who was picked up by the Civil Defense, or about the other two, Darwin López and Edgar Becerra, who remained in the disciplinary room of the Presidential Guard Regiment.

Discrepancies prevail about the guiltiness or innocence of the *Ausonia* group, and they do not exactly result from the pro-Chávez and anti-Chávez polarization.

The priest Juan Vives Suriá and José Ignacio Arrieta were appointed by Venezuela's Prosecutor General as Special Delegates

to make a follow-up of the investigations about the April's events.

Vives Suriá was a revolutionary priest, now deceased. He was the president of the ecumenical NGO Fundalatin. For his part, José Ignacio Arrieta belongs to the Jesuit Order and Centro Gumilla, a group characterized by a critical stance vis-à-vis Chávez's Government, with a social-democrat or center position.

The designation was a gesture of Isaías Rodríguez, the Prosecutor General, to strengthen the credibility of the investigations amidst a campaign that had been set in motion immediately after the coup to discredit the Prosecutor General's Office suitability to conduct the enquiries on April 11 developments.

The opposition claimed for a Truth Committee.

Without adopting that name, fathers Vives Suriá and Arrieta accepted the appointment and committed their prestige to the task of accompanying the investigation. Inexperienced on legal and criminological matters, they based their work on a technical secretariat composed of lawyers Nelly Meneses, Diocelis Aponte, Oscar Torres and Harald Allheimer, who on behalf and under the supervision of the priests studied the case files of the 19 casualties of April 11th, 2002 kept by the Homicides Division of the Scientific Criminal Police (CICPC).

In their second partial report, addressed to the Prosecutor General, the priests mentioned the case of the six alleged snipers who were detained at the *Ausonia Hotel*.¹⁹⁵

195 Vives Suriá, Juan y Arrieta, José Ignacio: Second Partial report to the Prosecutor General. September, 2002.

The Vives-Arrieta document points out that the group “does not exhibit an apparent circumstance”, and mentions a number of confusing aspects related to the situation of these men.¹⁹⁶

Vives Suriá and Arrieta underline:

Notwithstanding, their participation in the events has not been proven in any manner whatsoever.

If such participation happened to be true, the authors add, “the disappearance of evidence would have required the active complicity of some of those who participated during their detention”.

196 The Vives-Arrieta report asserts: “One of them (the faked Lugo Miquilena) usurps someone else’s identity. His clothes, as those of the brothers Meneses, have traces of gunpowder. The same way, traces of a highly explosive material are found in his bedroom. One of the occupants (McKnight) of room 809 has 31 migratory movements between 1990 and 1999. Garzón Muñoz, one of the men detained at the 4th floor, presents an identity card which number does not correspond to the document, as well as a criminal background in Colombia such as felonies against property and in the specialized circle of terror. The receptionist, who disappeared, states that five of the detainees (he didn’t specified their names) are customers of the hotel, but the cleaning service of the hotel, probably intimidated, state that they don’t know the men. The addresses, commercial relationships and telephone numbers stated by the detainees are false or non-updated”. Note that, although this report asserts that “traces of gunpowder deflagration” were found in the clothes of three of the detained men, later on the Prosecutor General, Isaías Rodríguez, will say that the DISIP did not carry out the Gunshot Residue Analysis requested by the Prosecutor General’s Office

Fourteenth Court sets them free

The Constitution sets forth that the citizen who has been apprehended *in fraganti* committing a criminal offense shall remain for the following 48 hours under arrest and the custody of the police, before he/she could be presented before a court.

In the case of the *Ausonia* men, this period of time was exceeded by much, as they stayed four days at El Helicoide, the DISIP headquarters, from the night of April 11th to April 15th, 2002. They lived there the rest of the events related to the coup and the countercoup.

On Monday 15, when the constitutional order was already restored in Venezuela, the *Ausonia* men were transferred to the office of Norma Ceiba Torres, incumbent judge of the Fourteenth Court of Control of the Lower Criminal Court for the Judicial Circuit of Caracas Metropolitan Area.

Jesús Quilarte Bolívar, sixth prosecutor (district attorney) of the Prosecutor General's Office, requested the judge full freedom for the seven men. And she decreed so.

Quilarte based his petition on the fact that, according to the police record drawn up *in situ*, the seven men were "evacuated" from the *Ausonia Hotel* to safeguard their physical integrity, "in view of the intentions of aggression shown by the people around the Presidential Palace".

Quilarte said:

It is not clearly indicated, beyond any doubt, what was the

motive to apprehend them. There is only a vague indication by some people who stated that there were armed men at the hotel. But there is not even one single testimony given by any of the eye witnesses. There was only a threat against their physical integrity.

The prosecutor also argued the violation of the limit to bring them before the court and, in general, of Articles 43, 44, 46 and 49 of the Constitution during that procedure.

He explained:

The Prosecutor General's Office does not pre-qualify the facts because the arrest record is plenty of inaccuracies and provides no legal support so as to attribute criminal responsibility to the detainees.

Molina defends them, Isaías condemns them

Antonio Molina, who later will gain fame as the lawyer for the Association of the 2002 Coup d'état Victims, was the defense lawyer of the seven men captured at the *Ausonia Hotel*, before the Fourteenth Court. Molina supported Quilarte's stance and highlighted that so far his defendants had not been charged with any criminal offense. He also underlined that the time elapsed "renders the detention unconstitutional".

Based on such reasons, I supported the prosecutor's request.

Judge Norma Ceiba Torres adjudged that in view of the expiration of the legal term of detention, and as no incriminatory elements against the detainees appeared from the records, they

had to be released “without any kind of restrictions whatsoever.”

The ruling reads:

It is hereby ordered to continue with this inquiry following the regular proceeding.

Isaías Rodríguez, former Prosecutor General of Venezuela, criticized both the judicial decision and the conduct of the judge who heard the case and, above all, the role of the DISIP intelligence police in the case.

In his book *Abril comienza en octubre* (April begins in October), Rodríguez includes a chapter entitled *Los Tiros Telescópicos* (The Telescopic Gunshots), where he takes for granted that the seven detainees of the *Ausonia* were, indeed, snipers.

He described that the men had been lodged for several days at two hotels: *Ausonia Hotel*, located alongside the White Palace, and the *Edén Hotel*, in Avenida Baralt.

From both places, says Rodríguez, those subjects “fired against all the demonstrators, regardless of the side they were supporting”.¹⁹⁷

In the book, Rodríguez includes an uncaptioned picture showing two individuals wearing bullet-proof vests, one of them carrying a gun-machine in his hand and a pistol in his belt, both with mustaches, barefaced and with a general appearance of police agents, in front of *Edén Hotel's* doors

197 Rodríguez, Isaías: *Abril comienza en octubre* (April begins in October). Caracas, 2005.

Both of them are going out from the building. They look as if they had just seized the hotel. They don't look worried about the presence of a photographer.

Isaías Rodríguez sustains that the investigators found bullets caliber 7.62 in a terrace to which the three detainees had access. He does not mention in which one of the two hotels the aforementioned terrace is located.

The bullets, according to Rodríguez, were for AR-15 assault rifles.

It is understood that the investigators found the bullets, but not the gun.

Although all of them, except for one, produced a Venezuelan identity card, the former Prosecutor General Rodríguez affirms that among the detainees there was a Panamanian and a U.S. citizen, besides the Colombian Garzón Muñoz.

He further adds:

It has been assured that there were two Israeli citizens among them.

Rodríguez listed the proceedings carried out by the Prosecutor General's Office in connection with this case on April 11th, 2002:

- Collection of the clothes the detainees were wearing.
- Filing of a Request of the Gunshot Residue Analysis with the CICPC Scientific Police for each piece of clothing.
- Filing of a Request with the Public Defense Office at the DISIP headquarters to witness the taking of samples from the hands of each detainee.

- Order to the DISIP to add those proceedings to the apprehension record.
- The DISIP was instructed to “correct visible flaws, irrelevancies and deficiencies in the police reports evidencing the events occurred”.

Rodríguez writes that the DISIP disregarded those instructions. The Law confers to the Prosecutor General's Office the direction of investigations, but ordinarily police officers resist any subordination to the prosecutors; especially, amidst a coup d'état.

Isaías Rodríguez points out that the day after, Friday April 12th, a commissioned prosecutor went to the DISIP headquarters to look for the original proceedings, the documentation with the request of expert tests and proceedings, to no avail. She also found that the corrections requested by the Prosecutor General's Office had not been included.

Not one of the instructions given on April 11 had been fulfilled.

Rodríguez criticized the petition of full freedom filed by the sixth prosecutor, Jesús Quilarte, and points out:

The prosecutor was removed, but the hitmen had already departed the country. We still don't know what happened to the judge.

The mysterious deaths of Zambrano, Molsalve and Caro

For years, pro-Chávez authorized voices attributed the release

of the supposed snipers captured at *Ausonia Hotel* to the brief Carmona's government.

That's why it was a real finding to discover that Antonio Molina, a militant committed to the Bolivarian cause, was the lawyer who defended these persons. Taking into consideration his career and political stance. It seemed a contradiction.¹⁹⁸

When I contacted Molina by phone to ask him about this case, the lawyer immediately confirmed his position. He told me:

They were detained because of the confusion reigning there.

According to Molina, such confusion resulted from the mysterious gunshots that started to take lives amongst the Bolivarian demonstrators gathered around Miraflores Palace, as from 4:00 p.m., on April 11, 2002.

The bullets came from the heights, apparently from the buildings surrounding the Palace, and they spread terror, disarray and anger amongst the Bolivarians.

There are snipers! They are killing us!

From 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. of April 11, those bullets caused the death of:

- Nelson Eliézer Zambrano Echeverría, a 23-year old student. Resident of La Pastora parish, he was an intern in

¹⁹⁸ Antonio Molina was the lawyer who defended Richard Peñalver, Henry Atencio and Rafael Cabrices, the men who appeared in a *Venevision's* video firing their guns in the confrontation with MP agents and the *Edén Hotel*, supposed refuge of the snipers. The three of them were stigmatized by the opposition and the media as "Puente Llaguno's gunmen". More recently, Antonio Molina was the speaker of the private prosecutors in the trial that concluded with a sentence for three former directors and several officers of the MP involved in these events.

Miraflores. He received a gunshot on his jaw around 4:00 p.m., at the central garden of the White Palace, a building located opposite to Miraflores Palace.

- Luis Alberto Caro, aged 57. He was an MVR union leader. He was shot down close to the stage where García Ponce and other pro-Chávez leaders were speaking, in front of Miraflores, around 4:30 p.m.; and

- Luis Monsalve, a Colombian citizen, left-wing militant in his homeland, who was expressing his support to Hugo Chávez at Avenida Urdaneta, also opposite to the Presidential Palace. He was shot in his chin, around 4:40 p.m.

A year after the April coup, in April 2003, the newspaper *Últimas Noticias* published a piece indicating that “at the beginning it was thought that at least three supporters of the Government could have got killed by bullets shot from *Ausonia Hotel*”, but the journal adds, referring to the hooded men at that hotel, that “the investigators discarded a link between them and the events”.¹⁹⁹

Nevertheless, never again any other media informed about this. In this sense, Molina says:

During all that period of time the belief has prevailed that the people captured at the *Ausonia Hotel* were members of the snipers' group responsible of those three dead. But the investigations conducted by the CICPC Scientific Police officers determined,

199 *Últimas Noticias*, 04-07-2003.

based on planimetry and ballistic analysis, that it was impossible that the source of the bullets was the *Ausonia Hotel*.

Antonio Molina explained that four days after their detention, on April 15th, 2002, he exercised the defense of the detainees, who would have contacted him through a colleague of his. In the past, he said that that lawyer had worked for one of them (Nelson Rosales), but at that time he was unable to do it again, as he was a civil servant.

Molina said that during the hearing of April 15th, 2002 at the Fourteenth Court, it was demonstrated that the handgun seized from Rosales had its corresponding firearm-bearing license.

Given that there were no links with snipers' activities, the Prosecutor General's Office proceeded to request his release.

He referred that, long after that, he had tripped with two men of the *Ausonia* on the street:

Nelson Rosales and Roberto McKnight are in Venezuela. They have gone many times to the Prosecutor General's Office to clarify their legal situation.

If they are not the culprits, who then fired from the heights towards the pro-Chávez gathering? Who killed Luis Alfonso Caro, Luis Monsalve and Nelson Zambrano?

A National Guard colonel accused of killing *chavistas*

To argue in favor of his defendants, Antonio Molina presented an episode of April 11 practically ignored by the Venezuelan press,

about which had been published few and incidental references. It is about the criminal investigation against a National Guard colonel, named Juan José Gómez Angulo.

Only Últimas Noticias, in the aforementioned note published in April 2003, gave a front page headline to the news about this officer, although without mentioning his name and with apparent inaccuracies.²⁰⁰

By April 2002, Gómez Angulo was the Custody Director at the General Division of Inmates Custody and Rehabilitation, subordinated to the Ministry of Interior and Justice.

Colonel Gómez Angulo was held suspect (in 2006) and then formally charged (in 2008) for allegedly having fired against the pro-Chávez demonstrators on April 11th, 2002.

The Prosecutor General's Office attributed to Gómez Angulo the deaths of Luis Alberto Caro, Luis Monsalve and Nelson Zambrano

200 Últimas Noticias's version mixes the facts for which were accused Gómez Angulo and others who acted in downtown Caracas, on April 11th, 2002. The article is titled "Five NG officials fired against both crowds on April 11". Among others things, the article points out: "The five agents, under which authority was an officer, were linked to insurrectional plans that developed on that day and in the afternoon hours, when the riots had already began , took control of the General Direction of Custody and Rehabilitation of the Inmate, attached to the Ministry of Justice, located at the Bolero building, few meters away from the Presidential Palace, from where they would have fired against the supporters of both crowds with the intention of producing violence and anarchy". In rigor, the other NG agents alluded by the newspaper are indicted in a criminal case filed separately from that of Gómez Angulo and about which there is no systematic follow-up by the press: the death of the opposition demonstrator Johnie Obdulio Palencia, in the vicinities of Fermin Toro High School on April 11th, 2002, as we will see further on. Últimas Noticias's version also attributes to these other members of the NG the death of the opposition demonstrator Juan Querales. Colonel Gómez Angulo denies any relation to these NG effectives and argues that by then he occupied a civil position.

–the same deaths for which the alleged snipers of *Ausonia Hotel* were deemed suspects–, as well as the serious injury against José Antonio Navas Majano.

Navas Majano saved his life miraculously: It was 5:00 p.m. of April 11 when a projectile entered into the base of his skull through the right occipital region and went out through the right malar bone region. He was protesting in front of Miraflores in favor of President Chávez.

The Prosecutor General's Office accused Gómez Angulo of having acted from the heights of the Bolero building, headquarters of the General Division of Inmates Custody and Rehabilitation, located opposite the Presidential Palace.

National prosecutors 39 and 38, Turcy Simancas and Sonia Buznego, attributed to Colonel Gómez Angulo the crimes of aggravated homicide and illegal use of war weapon.

In their brief of charges, they indicate:

There are clear grounds about the defendant's intention, which was no other than put an end to the lives of the victims.

Seven years after the facts, in April 2009, the Seventh control Court admitted the charges filed by the Prosecutor General's Office against Gómez Angulo and committed him to trial, without depriving him of liberty.

The official remained active until he was passed to retirement in 2008, when he completed 30 years of active service. Several letters of good conduct, signed by his superiors, are part of the file.

Antonio Molina referred that Colonel Gómez Angulo acted under the orders of General Luis Camacho Kairuz (NG), who at that time was Deputy Minister of Citizens Security.

Camacho Kairuz, who was Gómez Angulo's hierarchic superior, was one of the generals who pronounced himself on April 11 disowning President Chávez's authority and was the speaker of the movement that ousted him, along with General Rafael Damiani Bustillo, also a NG official.

According to counselor Molina, the expert analysis determined that, in fact, gunshots were fired from the Bolero building, a piece of data that, as we will see further on, denies the military officer's defense.

Molina affirms:

This ended the charges for "snipers" filed against the persons detained at *Ausonia Hotel*.²⁰¹

201 José Gregorio Piña, who was in the pro-Chávez demonstration in April 11, in front of Miraflores, says he was one of the persons who pointed to the Ausonia Hotel as the supposed refuge of the snipers: "I helped to locate those who fired from the Ausonia. I saw when the Presidential Guard soldier entered the building to take them out, when they took them down and took them towards the White Palace. I saw when one of the guards searched one of them at the external stairs and then showed us the content of the wallet he took out of the back pocket of the detainee's pants and he had a MP badge. Before that, a civilian MP officer to whom I knew by sight, because I had worked the previous year at the Metropolitan Mayorality, have told me that some colleagues of them, by orders of Iván Simonovis, were acting as snipers against the gathering in front of Miraflores and if that Chávez would take the stage they would fire against him". Piña sustains that if the Ausonia men did not kill Caro, Monsalve and Zambrano, "they did fire or wound or killed others". He affirms that "the snipers were many and they were at different places". He argues that the MP agents at Avenida Baralt were not the only ones to attacks the pro-Chávez demonstrators. "When I worked at the Metropolitan Mayorality, in 2001, Acción Democratica militants opposed to Alfredo Peña had informed me that Iván

“I’m innocent”, says Colonel Gómez Angulo

Since he was a second-lieutenant, Juan José Gómez Angulo worked in jails, where he followed a penitentiary service career.

In 2001, he was promoted to Custody Director, one of the branches of the General Division of Inmates Rehabilitation and Custody, headed by Aurora Angarita.

On April 10th, 2001, one day before the coup d’état, the Minister of Interior and Justice, Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, suspended Angarita from her duties, but keeping her salary, while the Internal Auditors carried out an administrative inquiry.

The following day, April 11, the Deputy Minister of Citizens Security, General Luis Camacho Kairuz, appoints Colonel Juan José Gómez Angulo as acting Director of the Inmates’ Custody and Rehabilitation Division.

Camacho Kairuz, as it is well known, rebelled that day against the Government.

Gómez Angulo gave his version of what he did on April 11th, 2002 in an interview that I conducted in March 2009, after a partial publication of this book in my column at the weekly *Quinto Día*.²⁰²

On April 11, I was doing some personal errands and arrived at 2:30-2:40 p.m. to Bolero building, where my office was located.

Simonovis was training the special group Fénix as snipers”. He takes for granted that a group of the MP in civil clothes lodged at the *Ausonia Hotel* days before April 11 and he wonders why they would do something like that. “I also saw gunshots fired from the *Edén Hotel*”, he adds.

202 Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *El misterio de los francotiradores* (The Snipers’ Mystery), column “Contra la corriente”, published in the weekly *Quinto Días*, 03-05-2009.

I was the Director of Prisons, subordinated to the Ministry of Interior and Justice. By then there were no officers there, except for 10 agents to safeguard the building. I stayed there until 7:40 p.m. of April 11, with those agents.

He denied having taken over the building, as it is described in the file.

At no moment I took over the facilities. I stayed there in order to maintain security, although the Military House had taken custody of the building since the morning hours.

Gómez Angulo explained that, as a part of his POV (Operating Procedure in Force), the Presidential Guard takes control of the buildings surrounding Miraflores Palace in case of any exceptional situation advising this operation.

As per the file, the general director of Inmate Rehabilitation, Aurora Angarita, stated that you took over the building.

Dr. Angarita said to the CICPC Scientific Police that I had taken over the facilities and the armory of the division on April 11. But it's not logical, because she had already left when I arrived. She says that at first in a police report, but in a later statement she clarifies this. There is confusion here. I never took over the facilities because these were my headquarters. She had no grounds to say that because she was not there.

The colonel added:

The Prosecutor General's Office has no elements in its accusation pointing at me as the responsible of such casualties.

He stressed that the maceration test carried out by the CICPC Scientific Police at Bolero building did not detect traces of gunpowder in any floor of the edification.

The expert tests were conducted in 2002 and the results are recorded in the file. They were negative.

The big question

Just to observe his reaction, I asked Gómez Angulo if he was or not compromised with the coup d'état.

Never. What I did on April 11 was working. I assumed the responsibility as Director of Prisons and kept communication with all the prisons of the country, which were under my responsibility. I went to the 9th floor of Bolero building, where is the radio office located, the telephones and I was calling all the jails to keep order. As I was a colonel and Director of Prisons, I was able to talk to the captains and tell them that I didn't want flights from the jails, as the country was going through a difficult moment. That day there were no dead, wounded or failures in the jails.

Have you got peace of mind?

Excellent ... excellent...

Gómez Angulo's voice broke with emotion. He contained his tears with a sip of water.

I didn't do anything. I'm innocent. It bothers me to live these moments because I have devoted 30 years to the National Guard. Now, I'm going through a difficult moment because I have been

involved in something that I didn't do. It's complicated. My children, my family, they suffer more than I do. My mother, who is old, she suffers when she hears this. But I swear on my deceased father that I'm innocent.

If you are innocent, why have you been involved?

I don't know what happened to the prosecutors of the case. I was deemed suspect four years after April 11. They told me not to be worried, that it was normal. Two years afterwards, in 2008, they filed charges against me, to my surprise. I don't know why the Prosecutor General's Office did this. I don't know if they were under pressure so that they send that file to the court. Because the charges were read a week before April 11th, 2008.

What happened to you after April 13?

On April 13, I still was Director of Prisons. Later, the 16 or 17, Dr. Aurora Angarita was reinstated as General Director and I talked to Minister Rodríguez Chacín to return to my component. I took the position of Head of the Penitentiary Services Division at the NG General Command. In September, the FAN General Inspector asked me to go to work with them and I stayed there for six years. The last four years I was the head of the Inspectors Corps, in charge of the inspection of all Venezuela's military commands.

Have you had news about Gen. Camacho Kairuz? What have you heard from him?

I want to make something clear. He was Deputy Minister and I worked at the Ministry of Interior and Justice, because I have

experience in [the management of] prisons. I'm widely known at the National Guard as an expert on penitentiary services. I was commanding officer of Caracas and Miranda state prisons; commanding officer of the 54th detachment of El Rodeo and, finally, I was Director of Prisons. I worked as penitentiary advisor for Gen. Vasily Kotosky Flores, who brought me to work with him before Camacho Kairuz. As military officers cannot disobey orders, I worked with him. And it happened what it happened, but I don't know what happened to the general. We were not friends. I only was his subordinate and he was my superior.

What do you know about the alleged snipers of April 11?

According to the information I have received, many witnesses saw snipers firing from *Ausonia Hotel*. Nobody saw, ever, gunshots fired from the Bolero building. Those who claim to have seen something, they saw it at *Ausonia Hotel*.

César Rodríguez Urdaneta, defense attorney of Gómez Angulo, participated in the interview to say that the Prosecutor General's Office included "erroneous factual basis" in their brief, "because it attributes to experts things that they have not said at all".

Gunfire residue tests were applied in all the rooms of the building and no evidence was found on gunshots fired from that place. Col. Gómez Angulo's service weapon was at the armory of the NG headquarters, in El Paraíso, and the arm assigned to him by the Ministry of Justice had been left in his car, which was parked at La Planta penitentiary. All the weapons of the Custody Division

armory were submitted to expert tests and it was concluded that none of them had been fired. Not one of the officers who accompanied him saw Gómez Angulo armed or firing. They rather attest that he was in permanent contact with the prisons to avoid a massive prison break, as it was the case at the *Retén de Catia* penitentiary, on February 27th, 1989.

If the taking of the buildings surrounding Miraflores by the Military House is an ordinary procedure, how can we explain the presence of snipers at the *Ausonia Hotel* or any other building around the Presidential Palace?

That is the big question. On April 11, the armed institutions cracked. Up to that moment it was no clear who were in favor or against the President. If the snipers were there because somebody allowed them to do so, it's something that should be investigated.

At the end of the interview, Gómez Angulo asked for my opinion about his case:

Now that you heard me, do you believe that I'm guilty or innocent?

A little embarrassed, I answered him:

You are either innocent or cynical.

Four NG agents indicted of killing a *Bandera Roja* militant

On April 9th, 2009, in a news release summarizing its actions on several cases related to the 2002 coup, the Prosecutor General's

Office informed about the accusation filed against four NG officers, allegedly responsible of Johnnie Obdulio Palencia's death, an opposition demonstrator.

The NG officers are:

- Luis Alberto Carrero, 2nd corporal (NG),
- Carlos Díaz Pérez, distinguished guardsman (NG),
- Elys Jaimes Navas, distinguished guardsman (NG), and
- Luis Rodríguez Valera, distinguished guardsman (NG)

The deceased Johnnie Obdulio Palencia (29) was a *Bandera Roja* union leader.

On April 11th, 2002, he received a rifle shot on his chin, at the surroundings of *Fermín Toro* Secondary School, where he arrived along with the opposition march.

Presumably, before falling dead, Palencia fired with a gun towards the Bicentennial Square, adjacent to Miraflores, where there was a squad of the National Guard to which the officers indicted by the Prosecutor General's Office belonged.²⁰³

The Prosecutor General's Office accused them of aggravated murder in degree of co-respective complicity and illegal use of war weapon.

On April 7th, 2003, *Últimas Noticias* quoted extra official sources mentioning Juan Querales, another opposition military officer, among the dead attributed to the aforementioned NG officers.

203 *Últimas Noticias*, 04-07-2003.

Juan Querales was 25 years old. He worked as a CANTV telephone State-owned company operator and he got killed close to the *Fermín Toro* Secondary School, as a result of a gunshot in his thigh. According to the reports, he bled to death.

The bullet that killed Tortoza

No doubt, the highest profile case among the casualties of April 11th, 2002, was Jorge Tortoza, photojournalist of the Venezuelan newspaper *2001*. From the very beginning, the media linked his death, as well as all the rest, to the men who appeared in the *Venevisión*'s video, firing from *Puente Llaguno*.

The images of the moment when Tortoza was shot on April 11, close to the corner of Muñoz, downtown Caracas, were captured by Liliane Blaser's small camera. She is the principal of the documentary film school *Cotrain*.

Later on, unease with the biased opinions about Tortoza's case, Liliane started an individual private enquiry to find out if that was a reasonable version or not.

She returned to the scene, posed her camera exactly on the site where she saw Tortoza falling down, and raised the lens to the north, that is, towards *Puente Llaguno*. Surprise! She stumbled on a building.

Then, she walked to her left, with her camera on. Only after several meters she was able to see the bridge far distant.

On September 11th, 2002, one year after the Twin Towers tragedy in New York, Liliane Blaser was a guest of the VTV program *En Confianza*.

There, she presented the images with her audiovisual finding. She said:

Unless the bullets could turn round the corners, or be guided by remote-control, the projectile that killed Tortoza could not come from Llaguno.

The bullet that put an end to the photographer's life came from somewhere, but not from the place so categorically indicated by the private media.²⁰⁴

When Tortoza fell deadly wounded on the pavement, two sons of the newspaper managing editor where he used to work—Nelson and Israel Márquez—approached to Tortoza's body still alive, instead of helping him or asking for help, they picked up his camera.

Nobody knows if Tortoza realized that atypical behavior.

MP agents detained one of the brothers when the officers saw them trying to leave the place with Tortoza's belongings. They were bearing 9 mm pistols.

The private media coverage almost discarded this relevant detention, as well as the circumstances surrounding it. The poor

204 On Sunday August 4th, 2002, *El Universal* published an infographics intended to demonstrate that "Tortoza was killed from Llaguno", as reads the headline of the review, available at: http://archivo.eluniversal.com/2002/08/04/ccs_art_04190AA.shtml.

coverage of this event was aimed, in general, at exculpating the detainees, as it was finally done by a court.

The MP took over *La Nacional* building

La Nacional building, located at La Pedrera corner, Avenida Baralt with Avenida Universidad, was searched by the Metropolitan Police on April 11th, 2002, looking for the snipers. But no arrests were made there.

In the surroundings of the building, headquarters of the Libertador Mayor's Office, photographer Jorge Tortoza and four opposition demonstrators were deadly wounded: José Antonio Camallo, Alexis Bordones, Orlando Rojas and Jesús Arellano. Jesús Espinoza Capote fell dead a bit further up to the north of the avenue, at corner of Muñoz.

Camallo, Tortoza, Bordones and Espinoza were shot in the head. Rojas was shot in his neck and Arellano in his thorax.

Questioned by the Politics Committee of the National Assembly investigating the April's developments, superintendent Henry Vivas, the Metropolitan Police's director, explained that the opposition protesters who had reached there after the deviation of the march, reported gunfire from the heights of that building.

People indicate that there is a group of people firing from the upper part of that building. I cannot certify this. I leave this to the appropriate agencies.²⁰⁵

205 Interpellation to police superintendent Henry Vivas, before the Politics Committee investigating the April's events. May 9th, 2002.

As expected, the Metropolitan Police lacked a search warrant to proceed, but Henry Vivas pointed out that it is a legal requirement, except when the procedure is indispensable to prevent the perpetration of a crime.

The police officers decided to get in through the parking gates of the aforementioned building, through a hole in the fence which had been used moments before by lots of people to break into the building. That is, not only the Metropolitan Police was at the place. There were lots of people. Police officers were even telling people to take cover in the building so as to avoid getting injured.

Inside the building, Henry Vivas explained, the police officers “interviewed the head of security” [of the building] and searched the mezzanine along with him.

According to the director of the police corps, a fence prevented his men to take the stairs to go up to floors of the building, but his presence was enough for the shooting to stop.

What about the snipers? They probably jumped from building to building, as in Hollywood films.

This is how Henry Vivas explained it:

Once the police officers got in, although unable to reach the rooftop, news about gunfire from that building ceased to be broadcast.

Congressman Juan Barreto asked him:

Why if the police took over *La Nacional* building, it failed to capture the snipers inside?

And here's Henry Vivas' literal answer:

Look, *La Nacional* building has several fences. One example: in case there were snipers there, upon learning that another security corps is getting in or in any other building; there is nothing upstairs and it's very easy to escape jumping from building to building.

During his investigation about the crimes of April 11, prosecutor Danilo Anderson requested the directors of the Metropolitan Police a copy of their radio communications during those hours. But he only received evasive answers.

On November 25th, 2003, police superintendent Leonardo Navas disclosed the recordings of the Metropolitan Police Operations Center (COP) of April 11th, 2002.

According to this piece of evidence, the police officers were the ones occupying the rooftop of *La Nacional* building.

Leonardo Navas broadcast the sound of these recordings through *VTV*, during an interview conducted by my brother Vladimir Villegas, by then president of this State-run channel and conductor of the program *Tribuna de cambio*.

Navas invoked freedom of thought set out in Article 61 of the Bolivarian Constitution.

He commented that the recordings "compromised some police authorities in a conspiracy related to the facts of April 11"²⁰⁶

206 *VTV* program *Tribuna del cambio*, 11-25-2003. Also available at: <http://www.rnv.gov.ve/noticias/?act=ST&f=28&=1742>

Leonardo Navas presented some excerpts out of 120 hours of recordings available.

In one of those excerpts the following exchange among non-identified officers stands out:

We already took over *La Nacional* building, I was told the 4th floor.

(...) come in here. The forces who got in, be attentive. I'm aiming to the roof.

We have 24 wounded and two KP29, twenty four KP28 and two KP19, according to the sequence we have here in our Control.

Control, that's what I said, I'm in the upper part of *La Nacional* building, just forces. They are all forces. 2-41.

Understood. We're going to avoid confusions; we're going to avoid confusions over there.

In another segment of the recordings, deputy director Lázaro Forero, identified as *Sol-2*, refers that there are police officers in plain clothes in the building:

Control to *Sol-2*: Apparently, a group of officers who are there in *La Nacional* are in plain clothes. Be very careful so as to avoid confusions among us.

Sol-40 Suárez, *Brión-15*: They are firing against us (unintelligible). Officers, those who are at *La Nacional* building right now are our officers. Then 16 [watch out? Forbidden?] to fire there against our officers who are those who have taken over (sic) the rooftop of *La Nacional* building. Then, let's take precautions.

CHAPTER IX: THE SNIPERS' MYSTERY

The transmissions are indicated for that, we must be in 12.

Landaeta Control: As a suggestion there in order to avoid confusion, if *La Nacional* building was already taken over. Well, [among] those who are there some of them have bullet-proof vests beneath the shirt and jacket. Let's wear the vests over the shirt, so as they can be identified as officers.

We have forces of ours infiltrated there in that building; we have infiltrated personnel in the said building. Level 16 acts there in the place. There is a commission there of 1-5-5 on the site.

In another segment, Henry Vivas, code Sol-1, asks for news to Forero:

How is the situation going? Where should it be?

Sol2: Copied, control. We are sheltered. The Taliban are upstairs. But if you pop out, you get shot with sub-machine guns. The Fénix Group should be installed in all those upper blocks, trying to see if they neutralize all those people that prevent us to get out of here. I'm already seeing here two more wounded leaving Padre Sierra corner.

Finally, a recording pick up a radio message addressed to police Chief Emigdio Delgado, Director of Operations, whose code name was Sol-6:

Sol-6: If you have a chance, Zeus-32-americana is asking you a 28-4-2 as soon as possible, to give information.

Zero, fifteen, copied.

“Zeus-32-americana”, according to Leonardo Navas’ statement, was the code name of the U.S. Ambassador, Charles Shapiro, who had access to the MP network of internal communications, a fact that raised eyebrows everywhere. The code “28-4-2” means “phone call”.

Chief Navas said during the interview:

It’s somewhat suspicious that at this point, the U.S. Ambassador is asking Delgado what is going on. This is a meddling in the country’s domestic affairs. This looks like a follow-up of what was going on.²⁰⁷

These recordings were presented as evidence by the Association of the Coup d’état Victims in the trial against police chiefs Iván Simonovis, Secretary of Citizen Security of the Metropolitan Mayor’s Office during Alfredo Peña’s administration, Henry Vivas and Lázaro Forero, and a group of 8 officers for the April crimes.

According to counselor Antonio Molina, lawyer of this association, ten witnesses saw the police officers going into *La Nacional* building, around 2:00 and 2:30 pm.

Building workers would have told them:

There are no snipers in here, nobody is firing.

²⁰⁷ The MP command post, located in Cotiza, was taken over by agents disgruntled with the way the Mayor Alfredo Peña and his police chiefs used this corps. The taking was carried out along with an intervention by the Executive Power, through the FAN. Amidst those events, chief Emigdio Delgado temporarily joined the disgruntled police agents and said: “I’m not going to continue killing people”. Some hours later, he changed his stance and appeared at *Globovisión* studios hugging Henry Vivas.

Molina says that the MP agents “subdued the workers who were at the 7th floor; brought them down to the 5th floor and the people were asking why”.

The people there began to hear shots inside the building. Then, a man called García goes out and confronts the officers, along with a mister who is a lawyer, and other man on a wheelchair. To their surprise, the police officers who were allegedly looking for snipers had opened the window that precisely has the view towards La Pedrera corner and also dominates the Muñoz corner. The opposition demonstrators were at La Pedrera, while Chávez’s supporters were at the corner of Muñoz. These men (MP agents) were firing downwards. Ten witnesses said that. They were firing towards the opposition and the pro-Chávez’s protestors.

The episode at *La Nacional* building was fundamental to charge Iván Simonovis, Henry Vivas and Lázaro Forero as the responsible of the general participation of the Metropolitan Police in April’s crimes.

However, the responsibility of the direct perpetrators of the crimes and injuries against the opposition demonstrators around *La Nacional* has not yet been individualized. The same is true in relation to Jorge Tortoza’s death. The police agents imprisoned and condemned in Maracay, in April 2009, were sentenced for the crimes perpetrated further up north of Avenida Baralt: three Bolivarian demonstrators deceased (Josefina Rengifo, Rudy Urbano and Erasmo Sánchez) and injuries against 29 more.

The defense of the MP officers assures that these recordings have been subject of “political use”,²⁰⁸ but does not challenge them.

They claim that this piece of evidence is a proof that pro-Chávez’s demonstrators were shooting towards south of Avenida Baralt.

“I sent for sergeants who were snipers”

Five sergeants who were snipers arrived to Caracas on Wednesday April 10, 2002, one day before the coup d’état, and they were left under the orders of Efraín Vázquez Velazco, Commander General of the Army.

Vásquez Velazco himself recognized this before the National Assembly’s Politics Committee investigating the April 2002 events.

During the appearance of Vázquez Velazco, congressman Pedro Carreño revealed that the by then General Commander of the Army ordered the commanding officer of the Special Operations Battalion, stationed in El Guayabo, Zulia state, to send to Caracas the following sergeants of professional troops, specialized as snipers:

- Sergeant 1st Danis Rivas,
- Sergeant 2nd Nelson Reyes,
- Sergeant 2nd Nilos Díaz
- Sergeant 2nd Emery Belis

These military personnel arrive to Caracas on Wednesday April

208 Olivares, Francisco: Op. Cit.

10 and were “left under your orders since that moment on”, said Pedro Carreño addressing to Vásquez Velazco.

The congressman asked the General:

What was the reason for these snipers to be under your orders, if you counted on your escorts provided by the O’Leary Battalion? Why did you bring them on that date and what was the mission they accomplished?

Vásquez Velazco answered:

I asked the commanding officer of the Special Operation Battalion to send some snipers, to send some men to employ them as my escorts.

Vásquez Velazco explained that “I sent for them” knowing that “these men are trained sergeants who are able to accomplish a mission better than the enrolled troops, for my protection.”

Why did I send for them? Because I was informed in those days that a sort of attempt was being orchestrated against me. The Search Department knows that. Which one? God, I don’t know. But the information was there.

Vásquez Velazco said he had been threatened.

I received a phone call, and I confirmed it, [telling me] that my daughter was going to be planted with drugs in order to discredit me. That was a month before this. They told me where my daughter was. I went to look for her and she was at the place they have indicated.

Vásquez Velazco said he had a document signed where he communicates this news to General-in-Chief Lucas Rincón, the FAN General Inspector and his superior by then.

I was trying to protect myself, as the information was quite valid.

He referred that three or four weeks ago an explosive was tossed against his house.

Why? What have I done? Do I deserve this?

During the questioning, no certification was left that the five sergeants snipers brought from Zulia state have had a role in the April crisis, beyond providing security to the Army's General Commander.

“Shoot to kill, Guevara”

One month after the coup, the Venezuelan TV stations broadcast the sound of three thrilling recordings.

The TV viewers heard, in shock, the voice of a “commander” giving the order to shoot “to kill” to a sniper under his orders.

The first news was broadcast through the program *Vox populi*, conducted by journalist Nelson Bocaranda Sardi in *Venevisión*, as an alleged evidence of the Government's responsibility for the deaths of April 11, 2002. The recording was “rebounded” by several media.

El Universal published the transcription of these recordings in a review with a blunt headline:

*Orders were given to shoot to kill during the march.*²⁰⁹

Obviously, the journalistic piece alluded to the opposition march of April 11. The article was published along with a picture showing NG officers firing gas bombs to contain the advance of the demonstration in downtown Caracas.

The journal explained to its readers:

A recording supposedly of a radio communication captured during the April 11 events, where several would-be officers participated, gives accounts of how the orders were given to the snipers to shoot to kill against the demonstrators of the massive march that tried to reach to Miraflores.

The first recording contains the following dialogue between the “commander” and a sniper called Guevara:

Man 1: On the sidewalk over here, with a white T-shirt and a backpack. Do you see him over there?

Sniper: That’s affirmative, affirmative, on my left side, my commander.

Man 1: OK. Aim to his/her head. From here to there. You fix it here.

Sniper: That’s right my commander.

Man 1: From there to here. Do you think you can hit the guy?

Man 1: AAA3-53

Sniper: Affirmative, my commander.

Man 1: OK, you count then, 3-53.

209 *El Universal*, 05-11-2002.

PART III THE LOOSE ENDS OF APRIL

The second recording contained the voices of other individuals:

Man 1: Go, go, Alfa 4 copy you, go. Alfa 4, by the transportation area, there goes a bunch of soldiers who are getting in the vegetation, by those broken cars. Be attentive.

Man 2: Spotted. Spotted.

Man 3: OK, 353, the citizens want to jump the fence.

Man 1: Shoot him, shoot him, shoot him, shoot him.

Man 2: My commander, the instruction is to the air, right?, to the air?

Man 4: If you fire, there's going to be big troubles.

Man 1: Shut up! Hit him hard... Shoot to kill...Guevara, Guevara, watch out. But, not all of you, Guevara, Guevara, are you attentive? Guevara, Guevara, do you hear me? Shoot to kill, Guevara!

Man 3: Commander, I don't hear you. Repeat the order... repeat the order over my commander.

Man 1: This is to leave just one alone. Send the rest to their positions. Guevara, please, calm down. One soldier at each position. You arrange yourselves along the wall there. Only referred shots, referred shots. I give you the order if you have to fire. Look, who the hell is that on the rooftop?

Man 2: free channel, free channel.

Man 1: Guevara, you have them referred. Don't lose him. Be attentive to the fence. Buddy, I'm going to give you the order. The

first one to cross by here you take him out...you take him out. Did you copy, Guevara? Over.

And the third recording includes the voice of a fifth man:

Man 1: RR

Man 5: 555558. This is bloodshed. And the Army?

Man 1: 35335358. Watch out, the front snipers turn back. Those in the front turn back here, Guevara. Make them take the aiming position, because what I see is that they look as if they're watching what's going on. Guevara, did you copy?

Man 2: RR353-353.

Man 1: The attitude of the front snipers must be in visual, visual to... watch out. Attentive.

Man 2: OK, copied.

Finally, an “unquestionable” proof of the snipers’ acts against the opposition march. But...

The recordings were made on the 13th in *Fuerte Tiuna* and not the 11th in Chuao

When the TV stations broadcast the recording, they were identified with the inscription “April 11th, 2002”.

Indeed, they were taken two days after Thursday April 11, on Saturday 13, and corresponded to the instructions that a Lieutenant Colonel of the “Luis Muñoz Tébar” Military Police Battalion communicated by radio to a group of sergeants snipers belonging to that unit. Who were the human targets the commander made

reference to? Bolivarian demonstrators gathered around *Fuerte Tiuna* demanding the liberation of Hugo Chávez and his return to the presidency of the Republic.

Luis Tascón, an *MVR* congressman, presented the original audios to his colleagues at the National Assembly, on May 17th, 2002, during the appearance of Gen. Ovidio Poggioli.

Tascón said:

The date of the recording was Saturday April 13th, during the afternoon hours, and not Thursday 11th, as the media intended to make people believe.

Representative Tascón explained that the name “353” alludes to the Luis Muñoz Tébar Battalion of the Military Police, belonging to the 35 Military Police Regiment located at *Fuerte Tiuna*.

The “Guevara” mentioned in the recording is a sergeant stationed at that military unit.

By April 13, the battalion was under the command of General Efraín Vásquez Velazco, Commander General of the Army, underlined Tascón.

He commented that the recording is useful “to demonstrate again that the information is still biased here for conspiracy-related purposes”.

At least the segment reproduced before the National Assembly specifies if any military sniper finally fired against the protestors claiming for Chávez’s return in front of *Fuerte Tiuna*, on Saturday April 13th.

CHAPTER IX: THE SNIPERS' MYSTERY

General José Luis García Carneiro, who was the chief of the 3rd Infantry Division in April 2002, also referred to the moment when he was questioned by the National Assembly's Politics Committee investigating the coup, on May 22 of the same year.

García Carneiro pointed out:

I know who Mr. Guevara is and [who] the commander that gave the order [is].

García Carneiro confirmed that the facts took place “when the people, heated, wanted to break into *Fuerte Tiuna* and the commander of the Muñoz Tébar Battalion was giving orders that are not established by the Garrison Rules of Service to stop that group of people”.

That enraged people believed that the President was in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

By Saturday 13, Chávez had already been taken out from *Fuerte Tiuna* and moved first to Turiamo naval base, in Aragua state, and then to La Orchila island.

García Carneiro said that when he heard the recordings he identified the voice of the battalion commander, located and told him:

Commander, you are the responsible of this communication. Where is Guevara?

The commander, who García Carneiro failed to identify by his name before the parliamentary committee, presented Guevara to him.

García Carneiro said that they both were the responsible of their actions and ordered them “to go and make the corresponding statements before the War Council and the Court Martial, where the events were being investigated”, according to his account to the congressmen.

García Carneiro tried to moderate the facts:

It was an event caused perhaps by the euphoria of the people, who wanted to jump over the fence and get into *Fuerte Tiuna*.

The General estimated in 200,000 the amount of people who were demonstrating around the fort in Caracas.

That’s why my need of going to checkpoint 3, got unexpectedly on top of a tank and told the truth to the people: “The President is not in *Fuerte Tiuna*. We are faced with a *de facto* government, with a coup d’état. The Army is not going to recognize that government”. That reassured the people and contained the situation there, in front of checkpoint number 3, under the pressure of the Military Police.

The private TV stations, as well as the written press in general, did not compensate or corrected the false information about these recordings. The same way, there is no official information about an investigation of the actions by these Military Police members, on Saturday April 13th.

That’s what they said about the snipers

During the appearances before the National Assembly’s

Politics Committee on the April 2002 events, several officers were questioned about the snipers, as it is established on the final report.

This is what they said:

Jesús Morao Gardona, Chief of the Presidential Guard Regiment:

Amidst the developments [the shooting against the pro-Chávez demonstrators around Miraflores], I coordinated support with Carlos Aguilera, the DISIP Intelligence Police director, to request a counter-sniper tactic team and a helicopter in order to locate and resist the snipers' actions. As a response to this request, approximately half-an-hour later, the helicopter flew over the area where the events were unfolding.

Carlos Aguilera, DISIP director:

We heard about the snipers when one of our officers assigned to the Vice President's Office [Tony Velásquez] got shot. Actions? Minister Rodríguez Chacín managed this information. At that moment we did not receive orders to evaluate the situation. An internal decision was made to withdraw all the DISIP personnel in the march looking for information, as we considered that at that moment intelligence gathering was not a priority. There was a conflict situation there. For that reason, the NG and MP were on the streets. At 5:00 p.m. we received a phone call from the commander of the Presidential Guard Regiment, reporting about the snipers' situation. I proceeded to give the order and armed the counter-sniper teams. They got on two helicopters of ours, departed to the

site under my specific order of trying to locate and dissuade the snipers. And, if the life of third parties was jeopardized, a drastic decision was to be made: neutralize the target, which is one of the functions of the counter-snipers team. The helicopters returned to the DISIP facilities without having observed any sniper.

Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, Ministry of Interior and Justice

If we adjust to the term “snipers”, a very specific one, I have provided data which could lead to snipers. Undercover shooters yes, there were undercover shooters. In that video of the Avenida Baralt which was being broadcast before we can see clearly and I have the picture of a person who from my building (sic) of *Edén Hotel* was firing from *Edén Hotel* (sic) with a gun. He was an undercover traitor. He was not a sniper in the classical meaning of the word. He was showed his hand and in several occasion this person can be seen shooting in that video. From *Edén Hotel*, shooters of this kind yes, there were some of them undercover. Yes, there were several snipers with special rifles, especially trained. That is under investigation.

In another segment of his questioning, Rodríguez Chacín said:

The custody of Mr. Carmona Estanga was assigned to the Special Operations Unit of the Navy, which has snipers and expert staff on this kind of activities. That unit arrived to Maiquetía on April 11, during the morning hours, and was available there to go and occupy their positions as Carmona’s presidential guard. I provided these details to the Prosecutor General’s Office. That is

not by chance. Nobody can tell the future or anything like that. Something happened.²¹⁰

Henry Vivas, MP Director:

Regarding the snipers, some people were seen on some buildings. There are videos over there and people armed in different buildings. Were they snipers or not? There we can see they were armed. But a sniper is someone who is calmed, very calmed, waiting the moment to fire a gun. We didn't detain any sniper. I don't know if other institutions did it. Because, the first time they said there were 6; then that they were police officers. And here I...

Henry Vivas did not complete the sentence and went on to answer another question. During the questioning, the police chief complained because the military authority prevented a Metropolitan Police helicopter to fly over downtown Caracas.

Luis Camacho Kairuz, Vice Minister of Citizen Security

The MP Director reported to me that there were some snipers at the area. I don't remember at what time exactly. Henry Vivas was in contact with me and he moved away the police officers so that they may take precautions, because there were shots from the rooftops and he alerted them to avoid getting killed by those snipers located somewhere. Of course, precautions were taken. What time did I learn about this? Perhaps around 2:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m.

210 3rd Sergeant Major Roberto Carlos González, one of the Uope members moved to Caracas on April 11, disagrees with Rodríguez Chacín. See footnote 67.

Elías Santana: Shots from anti-Chávez activists against the march?

One year later, one of the leaders of the April 11 rally, Elías Santana, also a head of the *Queremos Elegir* NGO, published on the weekly *Quinto Día* an article entitled *El juego duro de los extremos* (The Hard Game of the Extremes).

There, he talked about a detachment of the opposition democratic sector from the most radicalized ones, which insisted on the insurrectional way to put an end to Chávez and his political project. In describing them, he revealed his suspicion that among them some could have been firing against the opposition crowd to justify the coup. This is what Santana wrote about this:

At least in the opposition movement, two ways are clear (...). Two ways of approaching poverty and how to pay social debt or the relationship with the U.S. and Colombia. And there is not any possible unity of actions with those who were the leading actors of April 12 and 13 acting behind the back of everybody else; with those always willing to create doubts about the [Democratic] Coordinator, lying brazenly; with those able to make any decision (such as for example, firing against the April 11 march) so as to carry out their plans.²¹¹

Shocked by this last assertion, I invited Elías Santana to the *En Confianza* program, on April 25, 2003. There, I quoted the preceding paragraph and commented:

211 Santana, Elías: *El juego duro de los extremos* (The Hard Game of the Extremes), opinión column *Ciudadanos Activos*, published in the weekly *Quinto Día*, 04-08-2003.

This means that there are opposition people who have been marching with you so far, who could have fired against the April's rally.

The same way that there are democrats in the universe of people supporting President Chávez, in the opposition movement there are also nuances and diversity. It's our duty and responsibility to keep our distances.

I have been subject of potbanging from people calling me a “murderer” when, indeed, the murderers were marching with you.

On April 11 there was a march in solidarity with PDVSA workers, from *Parque del Este* to *Chuafo* (...). I participated in that march. I was there up to the end, next to Fermín Toro High School, to exercise a constitutional right of demanding the President to resign.

That march was deviated to Miraflores, knowingly that there were lots of people with a different political stance stationed in the surrounding of the Palace.

When the march started, we didn't know that there was a gathering in Miraflores. By the way, some congressmen like Juan Barreto and cabinet members such as Aristóbulo Istúriz through VTV screen rallied the marchers to defend with their lives and to appeal to any mechanism in order to stop the march.

It was a matter of common knowledge that many people had been there for several days and nights. It would be naïve to think they didn't know that.

[This thing] can happen in any country... I have witnessed

in the U.S. moments when there are different demonstrations of different signs and this does not necessarily mean they are going to clash. There was a confrontation here, with the complicity of some military sector.

When you talk about people in the opposition ranks who could have fired against the marchers, who are you talking about?

I spoke of this upon recognizing that Chávez's supporters instigated that confrontation. All I ask is an investigation about this.

But, who are you referring to when you say "who could have..."?

To anyone who could have done it.

Do you have elements to suspect they could have?

I do and I take on full responsibility for supposing that some agendas coincided.

This and other positions gained him number of recriminations from the most radical sector of the anti-Chávez movement. Later, Elías Santana would abandon his central role as opposition leader and focus on his former role of community leader through his opinion column *Sociedad Civil*, published in *El Nacional*.

Part IV:

The after-coup

CHAPTER X

THE WITNESS'S TESTIMONY

Rafael Arreaza tells everything

Two years and five months have elapsed since the coup d'état. It is the morning of September 27th, 2004. Rafael Arreaza has just arrived to the headquarters of the Public Ministry in Avenida Urdaneta, downtown Caracas. He produces his ID card at the reception desk in the ground floor. Counselor Gustavo Enrique López Maza goes along with him.

We come to the office of Prosecutor Danilo Anderson.

The elevator takes them to the floor of the Fourth National Environmental Prosecutor's Office. Danilo Anderson is the Prosecutor.

A lawyer and a geographer, Danilo Anderson has competency to investigate environmental crimes and any other types of crime. A leftist militant in his college years, he is passionate with criminal investigation, he earned the trust of Prosecutor General Isaías Rodríguez who has placed on his shoulders the burden of the cases with the highest political and media impact.

Rafael Arreaza has voluntarily appeared.

The clock strikes 08:40 a.m. when Danilo begins to draw up the record of the interview. He checks the witness's identity and records his appearance:

“(...for the purposes of) giving his testimony in connection with the inquiry conducted by this Office referred to the developments of last April

PART IV: THE AFTER-COUP

12th, 2002 when a de facto Government was established presided over by Mr. Pedro Carmona Estanga.”

Rafael Arreaza’s account, in first person, is extensive enough so as to cover seven legal size pages.

Upon closing his statement, Danilo Anderson asks four questions only. The first refers to the meeting held by Pedro Carmona and some of his immediate collaborators with the group of media owners and directors in Miraflores on April 13th, 2002:

“ – Please state the names of the media representatives who met with Mr. Pedro Carmona Estanga.

Gustavo Cisneros, Marcel Granier, Calvo Otero, Miguel Henrique Otero, Patricia Poleo, the president of Globovisión named Zuloaga, Alberto Federico Ravell. There was someone from Televen. The one who mostly spoke was Marcel Granier.

Please state if such persons made an information policy at that time.

Yes – Not to broadcast any development until further notice. And another one, invading channel 8 (VTV) signal.”

There is an aspect of Rafael Arreaza’s statement Danilo Anderson failed to insist – by Saturday April 13th, when the aforesaid meeting took place, VTV’s signal was about to be blacked out during 48 hours. Since the night of Thursday 11th it remained silenced and its premises in *Los Ruices, Caracas*, were seized by a police squad. Why did the media owners and the chiefs of the private television stations agreed to “invade” a silenced signal?

What did it mean in that context the term “invade”? Broadcasting something through that frequency? But Anderson continued with the brief questioning addressing other issues.

“ – Please state if you heard Mr. Daniel Romero call those present to sign the decree as a sign of adhesion to the process.

Yes, many times. In fact, he told me I had to sign because I was a minister, but I didn't do it. Then, a girl holding some sheets of paper to collect the signatures was sent to me. It was known that they were going to be attached to the decree. At that time an uncle of mine took me to sign one of those sheets, which I signed.

Please state if you have anything to add to this statement.

Yes, during my stay there I received indications by army officers to look for and safeguard all politically incriminating documents for purposes of opening a trial against President Chávez. As I said before, I always kept such documents.”

Summoned to render testimony

Based on such statement, prosecutor Anderson served summons to the owners and editors of the media mentioned above so that they appear to make statements in his office as witnesses.

Alberto Federico Ravell, director of *Globovisión* was the first one to appear before Anderson's office on October 4th, 2004, one week after Rafael Arreaza's statement. He was escorted by a group of anti-Chávez militants with banners and chanting slogans denouncing the summons as an aggression against journalists and freedom of information.

Upon leaving the office, Ravell told the reporters that he had

been “clear and blunt” in his appearance before Danilo Anderson:

One of the things I said is that I do not have any coup mongering vocation (...) others are coup mongers. No information policy was made there. It is not a custom that the private media receives instructions from any Government.²¹²

Alberto Federico Ravell described the meeting of April 13th, 2002, between Carmona and the media owners and directors, as “somewhat disorganized.”

He said Rafael Arreaza was the person who “snitched.”

I understand he is leaving the country today.²¹³

On his part, Danilo Anderson clarified that so far there was no intention to charge any participant of the meeting in Miraflores.

We cannot speak of crimes because these persons are rendering testimony as witnesses. If you state as a witness there is no charge for any punishable action (...). So far, there is no evidence or any element of conviction involving the need to file charges. If the enquiry shows any element to charge any media representative, he or she will be charged.²¹⁴

Anderson reported that the next persons to be summoned were Marcel Granier (*RCTV*), Gustavo Cisneros (*Venevisión*), Miguel Henrique Otero (*El Nacional*) and Andrés Mata Osorio (*El Universal*). No notice has been recorded of any related appearance.

212 El Universal. 10-05-2004.

213 Últimas Noticias. 10-05-2004.

214 El Universal, 10-05-2004.

By those days, Danilo Anderson had created a storm among the Venezuelan elites as he announced his decision to file charges against the 400 signatories of the April 12th, 2002 decree for the crime known as civil rebellion, first step for possible commission to trial. The list included militaries, bankers, businessmen, politicians, lawyers, and in short, a significant part of the economic and political power of the country²¹⁵ in addition to many opportunists who invited themselves to the ceremony.

Prior to getting to Anderson's, the case file was in the hands of other prosecutors. Over two years have elapsed after the developments without charges filed and by that moment what was in his hands was practically a case standing still.

In his exchange with the press, Danilo Anderson disclosed that on Monday that week subpoenas had begun to be issued to the 400 signatories, thereby giving them notice of the accusation.

In this connection, the prosecutor said in an interview with Sebastiana Barráez, published in the weekly newspaper *Quinto Día* as follows:

With this case I am stepping on the power's toes. All the time there was in Venezuela a society of untouchables, because many pressures are exerted against me. But one's honesty has to be more valuable. I grew up in a poor shanty town, but with a very honest mother too.

215 Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *Imputarán a Carmona-firmantes*. *Quinto Día*, issue number 410, dated 09-17 to 24-2004.

Danilo Anderson explains his decisions

The day after Alberto Federico Ravell appeared before the Prosecutor's Office, Danilo Anderson was invited to *En Confianza* program in VTV station. It was the last time I interviewed him. And the last time I saw him personally, alive.

You have reopened the April 11th case, haven't you?

Yes.

And you are summoning all who signed the decree dissolving the Branches of Government and the swear-in of Pedro Carmona Estanga?

Yes. Summons are being served to all the persons who signed the decree, approximately 400, so that they appear before the Public Ministry to be charged. As from the time they accept summons they get the status of defendants, in accordance with Article 124 of the Criminal Procedures Code and with the rights enshrined in Article 49 of the Constitution and Article 125 of the Code.

Even though he didn't sign, Alberto Federico Ravell, director of Globovisión TV station appeared and made a statement yesterday.

Yes. He was rendering his testimony as a witness because the last week someone appeared spontaneously to render a statement with the Public Ministry. A person who was in Miraflores the days of April 12 and 13, 2002.

Danilo Anderson took care not to mention the name of Rafael Arreaza. Neither had I paid due attention to Ravell's press comments so I ignore the name of the witness.

Among other things, that person said that on April 13th media representatives met with Pedro Carmona Estanga in Miraflores for purposes of making an information policy so as not to broadcast anything of what was happening in Venezuela, and further, take the channel 8 signal.

What crime would fit that agreement you are investigating?

We still cannot talk of a crime. It is presumed that a meeting was held. We are checking first this. We need to call as witnesses all the persons who were at the meeting.

Danilo Anderson said that it was necessary to take the testimony of the citizens mentioned above to clarify the facts. He anticipated he would ask the following:

What they think about the statement of that person, why they took part at that meeting, at what time they arrived and who called them to the meeting, among other questions.

By the time of the interview, the Supreme Court of Justice had handed down a decision denying a request filed by the Prosecutor General's Office to impeach four military coup leaders (Héctor Ramírez Pérez, Efraín Vásquez Velazco, Pedro Pereira and Daniel Comisso Urdaneta). The decision, which months later became null and void had accepted the thesis of the "power vacuum", which in political terms meant that there was no coup d'état in April 2002.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ The decision of August 14th, 2004, based on a presentation by Magistrate Franklin Arrieche, was annulled thereafter by the Constitutional Division of the Supreme Court which determined that the decision rendered null and void committed a "grotesque error." Successive votes on this case made apparent the polarization between the magistrates in two blocs with inevitable political

I asked Danilo Anderson if that decision, in force at that time, did not interfere with his investigation.

He explained that by that time the Prosecutor General's Office was studying the Supreme Court decision, but he underlined that the decision got people involved other than the ones he was investigating and he based on a crime other than the one handled in his own investigation.

The impeachment was based on the crime of military rebellion. In this case, the Prosecutor General's Office is investigating the alleged commission of civil rebellion, provided under Article 144 of the Criminal Code.

He mentioned that paragraph 2 of the aforesaid article punishes with 12 to 24 years of prison for those who “conspire or rebel to violently change the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.”

It is widely known that on April 12th, 2002, with that decree the name of the Republic was changed, the Branches of Government were dissolved and all members of such Branches of Government were removed from their offices, one person swore-in President before no authority and 49 laws were repealed. Further, the decree

connotations. The sector favoring the “power vacuum”, strongly influenced by Luis Miquilena, former Chávez's supporter and one of his first ministers of the Interior, achieved a majority vote in that occasion by recusing Magistrate Omar Mora. Once the decision had been approved, attorney Oleg Oropea attempted a constitutional revision appeal which was rejected by the Constitutional Division but helped the latter to clarify what the applicable procedure was so that the Prosecutor General's Office may request the revision. Subsequently the Public Ministry filed a similar appeal which did actually pave the way to annul the decision.

left the whole legal system subject to that decree because it declared the legal order in force “inasmuch it did not collide” with the decree. This means that the whole constitutional and legal system was breached. The decree signed by the people who were in Miraflores was to have more weight than the constitution or any law.

Did all signatories of the decree commit a crime?

All the persons who signed the decree shall be charged for the presumed commission of civil rebellion.

He reminded that in the footage of April 12th, Daniel Romero is seen as he ended reading the decree inviting the people present to sign thereby expressing adhesion to the process in progress.

I told him about the various arguments argued so far by several signatories to justify that: Cardinal Velasco argued in *Últimas Noticias* newspaper that he signed a sheet of paper in blank. Others said they believed that they were signing an attendance list.

Yes. Various lawyers, presumably representatives of the persons who appeared signing the decree, argue different excuses. They say, for instance, that there is a person whose name appears but never was there, who called a friend who actually was there and asked: “Hey, man, write my name and my ID card number.” Well, this will need to be proven. The people whose name and signature appear shall check and recognize his or her signature or not. The signatures will be submitted to a handwriting expertise in order to ascertain if it corresponds with the signature of the defendants.

You said to *Quinto Día* weekly newspaper that there were swindlers signing there.

Yes. When the list of persons was checked against the police information system, we found that there were people wanted for other crimes, especially scams. There are judges and a Notary Public signing the decree. There were persons who made the work easy because besides their names they wrote where to look for them. One person wrote her name, ID Card number and title: “Notary Public” of a specific Notary Public’s Office.

At the end of the interview, I asked Danilo Anderson to close with a message to the audience. Then, he seized the opportunity to talk about the group of protesters that the day before accompanied Alberto Federico Ravell, director of *Globovisión* to the Prosecutor General’s Office building.

Regrettably, the Prosecutor’s Office is under pressures. Yesterday, when Mr. Alberto Federico Ravell appeared before us a large amount of people there attacked the Office. He was giving his testimony as a witness. He was not being charged. The authority of the Public Ministry deserves a bit more of respect. Any citizen prosecuted by justice for any crime will not have high regard of a prosecutor of the Public Ministry. Yet, our job is to undertake the actions under the criminal law. That is what we are engaged in. There is a large number of highly trained law-abiding prosecutors. I just ask for respect for this institution.

And they killed Danilo

The night of November 18th, 2004, Venezuela was shocked by the news: Prosecutor Danilo Anderson was burnt to death when an explosive placed under the seat in his car was remotely detonated.

One year later, December 21st, 2005, the 20th Court convicted as co-authors of the crime brothers Otoniel and Rolando Guevara and their cousin Juan Bautista Guevara, former law enforcement officers all of them.

Otoniel and Rolando Guevara were sentenced to 27 years and 9 months of prison for homicide and criminal association and Juan Bautista Guevara to 30 years –the maximum punishment in Venezuela- for the same crimes plus the unlawful possession of firearms and weapons of war.

Earlier, Otoniel and Rolando Guevara had been in prison for a case that brought about a national and international scandal: The transport to Venezuela of Vladimiro Montesinos, the sinister intelligence adviser to former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori, and a renowned collaborator of the CIA whom the Guevaras kept hiding in the country for a long time. The opposition campaigned to demonstrate that Montesinos had been protected by Chávez's government. However, he was found and immediately deported by the Government to Perú where he was committed to trial.

The Guevaras were found with a map representing the route Danilo Anderson used to take home in Southern Santa Mónica residential zone of Caracas after his graduate course lessons in

criminalistics at the Scientific Police College (IUPOLC, Spanish acronym) in Bello Monte, Caracas.

One of the Guevaras was at the IUPOLC the night of the crime and crashed his car into another as he raced out of the place, shortly before Anderson got in his Toyota *Autana* truck that drove him to death.

The attempt caused a huge impact on the nation, as well as a landslide of posthumous acknowledgements to the figure of Danilo Anderson, the brave Prosecutor.

In the course of the investigation, the hypothesis rose, not clarified yet, according to which people close to Anderson could have established an “extortion network”, allegedly engaged in getting money from bankers who had signed the decree in exchange for impunity, as disclosed by the then Minister of Interior and Justice, Jesse Chacón, on January 5th, 2005:

Several scenarios have been checked, including the possibility that a group of lawyers, taking advantage of their close relation to Prosecutor Anderson, has intended to extort some of the people who signed the Carmona decree and their alleged relation with another group who liaised with the people who would be charged.²¹⁷

Subsequently, Giovanny Vásquez came on stage. Nicknamed the Prosecutor General’s Office’s “star witness” by the press, he offered a testimony giving rise to new accusations for Anderson’s homicide.

217 <http://www.vtv.gov.ve/noticias-nacionales/5308>.

Giovanny Vásquez claimed to come from a Colombian paramilitary group and produced a written proof of having accepted the Colombian demobilization plan.

Pursuant to his testimony, he already cooperated with the Colombian authorities when he participated, together with Colombian paramilitaries, Venezuelan anti-Chavez opposition followers and individuals with the Colombian intelligence police DAS and the CIA, at meetings where Anderson's assassination was planned. This attempt, he added, was a part of a general destabilization plan which also included the assassination of President Chávez and Prosecutor General Isaías Rodríguez. From the persons involved by the witness at the meetings, the Public Ministry accused:

- Nelson Mezerhane, owner of *Globovisión* and *Banco Federal*.
- Patricia Poleo, Associate Director of *El Nuevo País* tabloid.
- Eugenio Áñez Núñez, a retired general.
- Salvador Romaní Jr., son of a renowned leader of Cuban anti-Castro movements in Venezuela.
- Jaime Escalante, active general of the National Guard, head of Regional Command No. 1, State of Táchira.²¹⁸

The press focused on some inconsistencies in Giovanny

²¹⁸ Escalante is a general who supports the Government of President Chávez so that mentioning him as a witness brought about surprise and suspicions in the high official spheres.

Vásquez's version. For instance, he was not a psychiatrist as he claimed to be, and he was in prison by the time he said he participated at a meeting in Panama.

The legal term for the investigation elapsed and the Public Ministry announced the cases against Nelson Mezerhane and Eugenio Áñez were filed, and the case of Salvador Romaní was dismissed for lack of evidence and kept opened the investigation on Patricia Poleo, residing for a long time in the USA, where she pleaded she was a political refugee. Charges were not filed against General Escalante.

Some time later, Giovanny Vásquez appeared in *Globovisión* taking back his testimony arguing that he made such statements under the promise of money by the Venezuelan authorities.

I interviewed Giovanny Vásquez for VTV when he still had not changed his version and his argument about why he trespassed the Colombian-Venezuelan borderline to seek contact with the Prosecutor's Office drew my attention: A matter of conscience. He was conflicted, he said, for not having prevented the death of an innocent person.

I couldn't sleep or look in the eyes of my child and my wife...²¹⁹

You come from the paramilitary groups who kill on daily basis. Why so much sensitivity about the crime of Danilo when you certainly have seen so many killings?

Because I want to help justice. I didn't feel I was a paramilitary. I

219 VTV program *En Confianza*, 02-03-2006.

felt I was a cover agent, collaborating with Justice so that everything could be done well. When the attempt took place, I felt I was partly responsible. I didn't do anything possible to prevent it.

Weren't you rather a CIA agent?

No, I am not a CIA agent. I also spoke about then, so you cannot be a CIA agent if you speak against them.

CHAPTER XI: A NEW YEAR'S EVE GESTURE

Chávez decrees an Amnesty

On December 31st, 2007, President Hugo Chávez enacted an Amnesty which benefited some of the people involved in the April coup and other politically violent facts that took place during his tenure.

The President had just endured his first election defeat on December 2nd, 2007 as he failed to achieve the approval of a draft constitutional amendment to implement socialism in Venezuela.

In terms of ballots the difference was thin in favor of the NO option, but the political repercussions were broad: The opposition resumed the way of the ballots after a long practiced abstention, which helped them win several governorships in the regional elections the subsequent year.²²⁰

The term amnesty stems from Latin *amnes*: oblivion. It means the State forgets the punishable actions committed by the beneficiaries of the law. These persons are acquitted from criminal responsibility for their actions to such extent that before the law

220 In the 11-23-2008 elections the opposition regained the Caracas Metropolitan Mayor Office and the governorships of Miranda, Táchira and Carabobo, and the mayoralties of Sucre Municipality, in Caracas, as well. It also withheld the governorships of Zulia and Nueva Esparta. Chávez called another referendum by 02-15-2009, where with a favorable vote of 56% a constitutional amendment was passed which eliminated the limit to the times an official may run for an office, so that Chávez can become the candidate for the presidential popular elections in 2012 and in the subsequent elections.

they are as if such actions had never been committed.

The benevolent gesture is usually made by the victors after a conflict has concluded. But Chávez broke with that practice.

Legally speaking, the way chosen was little orthodox. Amnesty is a power of the Legislative Branch of Government, but Chávez chose to apply it himself invoking the special powers he had under the Enabling Law.

In this manner, he discarded resorting to presidential pardon, which is proper of the Executive Branch of Government, as it was used, for instance, by Rafael Caldera under the 1961 Constitution to dismiss the cases of former guerrillas in the peace process of the 60s and, later in 1994, to release Chávez and the rest of the prisoners of the military rebellion of February 4th, 1992.

The amnesty favored those persons who “confronted the general established order” who by the date of the decree were being committed to trial or had been convicted for:

- Drafting the *de facto* government decree of April 12, 2002;
- Having signed such decree;
- The violent seizure of Merida Governor’s Office on April 12, 2002;
- The illegitimate deprivation of the liberty of Ramón Rodríguez Chacín, Interior and Justice Minister, on April 12th, 2002;
- The commission of instigation to commit crimes and military rebellion until December 2, 2007;

- The crimes involved in the developments of April 11th, in *Puente Llaguno*, save for those involving crimes against humanity;
- The violent seizure of the Junin Municipality Mayor's Office in State of Táchira, in April 2002;
- The violent seizure of the Governor's Office in State of Táchira to the prejudice of Governor Ronald Blanco La Cruz, in April 12, 2002;
- The illegal search of the domicile of Representative Iris Varela in April 2002;
- The seizure of the Palace of Justice of State of Táchira on April 12, 2002; and
- The facts constituting a civil rebellion until December 2, 2002.

The decree establishes that the resulting “criminal, judicial, military, and police actions conducted by any of the bodies of the State, regular or military criminal courts exclusively in connection with the facts referred to in the preceding paragraph are hereby terminated.”

Further, it orders the military courts or the police corps keeping records about the persons subject of the amnesty to “eliminate the records related to them,” following due notice to and authorization by the Prosecutor General's Office.

The persons favored by the Amnesty, it notes, shall appear before the Prosecutor General's Office.

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Article 1 already provides that only those citizens would be favored who by that date had responsibly faced the criminal procedures by the Prosecutor's Office or the courts. Those who left abroad, thus freezing their respective trials, like the cases of Pedro Carmona, Daniel Romero and Allan Brewer-Carías, are excluded from such benefit, so that their cases remain open awaiting their presence in the country to be reactivated. The Venezuelan legislation does not provide for *in absentia* trials.

Article 4 provided for a second exception, anticipated in the item corresponding to the developments occurred in *Puente Llaguno*, which exception is based on Article 29 of the Constitution:

Those persons who may have incurred in crimes against humanity, serious violations of human rights and war crimes shall not be benefited by this law.

The President made the announcement unexpectedly during a telephone conversation with a TV program in VTV station, at 05:00 p.m. on December 31st, 2007. The program, conducted by journalist Vanessa Davies and Jorge Arreaza, a specialist in international affairs, was aimed at following up the imminent liberation of a group of hostages of the FARC Colombian guerrilla, a process for which Chávez had been collaborating. In the TV studio were present as guests Rear-Admiral Luis Cabrera Aguirre and Juan Carlos Tanus of the NGO "Colombians in Venezuela."

The idea of the amnesty, said Chávez, was "demonstrating that we want peace."

A strong ideological and political debate, but in peace.

Vanessa Davies asked him about how the pro-Chávez people would interpret such decision and Chávez underlined that this is a noble people “and will receive it with the same spirit I am conveying.”

I am sending a signal in representation of those who want to undertake the path of peace.

He upheld that “it is a matter of turning the page” and stressed that it was a gesture “to the sectors who want to lead us to the path of violence and destabilization.”

The Prosecutor's Office requests dismissals

A press release of the Prosecutor's Office, dated April 9th, 2008, informed about the dismissals that, in enforcing the decree-law on Amnesty, and upon request of the Public Ministry, several courts of the Republic hearing the cases associated to the April coup d'état accorded to:

- Former Governor of Miranda State, Enrique Mendoza, and the journalist Milagros Durán López. Both were committed to trial for the seizure of *Venezolana de Televisión* (VTV) TV station on April 11-12, 2002.
- 49 citizens under investigation for signing the decree of April 12, 2002. Among the people granted amnesty, the press release mentioned Cecilia Sosa, José Gregorio Vásquez López and Carlos Ayala Corao, under trial for having drawn

up the decree, and Guaicaipuro Lameda for having signed it. By that time, the Prosecutor General's Office awaited information about the remaining 45 dismissals requested, among them those concerning José Rodríguez Iturbe, José Rafael Huizi Clavier, Vilma Petrash Rangel, Sergio Omar Calderón, Alberto Quiroz Corradi, María Corina Machado and Albis Muñoz Maldonado.

- 25 citizens charged with the violent seizure of the Governor's Office in Mérida, April 12th, 2002.

- Former Judge Mónica Fernández and the then Mayors Leopoldo López and Henrique Capriles Radonski, tried for the illegitimate deprivation of the liberty of Ramón Rodríguez Chacín on April 12, 2002.

- José Hernández, Marcos Benítez and María Ramírez, charged for seizing the Legislative Council of Trujillo in April 2002.

- The Prosecutor's Office also informed about other cases dismissed as accorded by the courts resulting from the amnesty but connected with cases other than those of the April coup.

- Four out of the nine defendants for seizing the ship tanker Susana Duijm, of PDVSA, during the oil sabotage called by the Business Association *Fedecámaras* and the Workers Union Confederation CTV in December 2002.

- To the then Mayor of Chacao Municipality, Leopoldo López, and 40 militaries charged for the pronouncements

made from Altamira square, Caracas, where they declare it a “liberated territory” as from October 22nd, 2002 in the second political and military offensive against Chávez. From the military subject of the benefit, the Prosecutor General mentioned eight only, including General Alfonso Martínez, former general inspector of the National Guard, General Marco Ferreira, also of the National Guard, rebels of April 11th, 2002 both of them. The case against General Felipe Rodríguez, of the National Guard, was also dismissed “but solely and exclusively as to the crimes of conspiracy, civil rebellion and instigation to rebellion.” This General, nicknamed “The Raven” ended up being sentenced to 10 years four months for attempting against the diplomatic missions of Spain and Colombia, perpetrated on February 24th, 2003 and which the opposition from the onset tried to attribute to the Government.

“If I forgive, I die”

Three days after the amnesty was decreed, I invited to the TV program *En Confianza* in VTV the president of the Association of Victims of the Coup d'état, Yesenia Fuentes, and her counselor, Antonio Molina.

Fuentes had taken a bullet in her face on April 11th, 2002. She was very shocked and expressed her disagreement.

I had been stationed around Miraflores for three days. Around 04:30 p.m. I took the bullet. I was taken to Catia Hospital. They

couldn't remove the bullet because the Metropolitan Police broke into the hospital asking "Where are the damned Chavistas? We are going to kill them!" I ran away to *Los Flores de Catia*.²²¹

It must be difficult for a direct victim to forgive those who caused her or him damage.

I don't agree with the pardon. The President has to see inside his heart. He knows us. He knows about this Association, that our attorneys have waged a battle in the IV Court of Aragua State.

Yesenia was talking about the trial against former Metropolitan Police officers, led by sheriffs Iván Simonovis, Lázaro Forero and Henry Vivas for some of the casualties and injuries during April 11th, 2002, who would be sentenced on April 2009.

Fuentes said the Association had been working without means to follow this trial, where she acted as private accuser.

Amnesty is "forget it, and turn the page." We don't want to turn the page without justice. Since 2002 we say without justice there will never be peace and we will stick to that motto until such felons pay their time."

I allowed myself to note a paradox:

If there is a pardon for those who, for example, drew up the April 12th decree, don't the small fish end up paying the consequences? Couldn't those cops say: "We comply with orders by those who led the coup without staining their hands with blood or smelling the gun powder"?

221 VTV program *En Confianza*, 01-03-2008.

Attorney Antonio Molina said:

Article 25 of the Constitution warns about fulfilling orders that are openly unconstitutional. So, superior orders cannot be used as an excuse.

That is to say that the cops could have refused to shoot.

Exactly. That was a very special situation. It is not that a few cops grew mad and began to shoot against the people. It was a planned operation. For over 5 hours they were shooting against the people concentrated in *Puente Llaguno*.

Do you understand the political reasons of this decree?

No, I don't understand. On January 1st I watched the statements by Mónica Fernandez of the so-called Penal Forum organization, who very proudly said that in December they won three victories: That of the December 2 elections when the NO option in the referendum won by a whisker; that of December 24th, when General Francisco Usón²²² was released; and the "triumph" of December 31st. I tell her not to claim victory because the cops are not coming out. They will pay for the *Puente Llaguno* massacre. The

222 General Francisco Usón Ramírez was released upon compliance of sentence for the crime of offence against the National Armed Force during his statements on TV where he blamed some men of the Army to have used a flame-thrower against soldiers that were arrested in Fuerte Mara, State of Zulia, who died as a result of a fire. On April 11th, 2002, Usón resigned to his office as Minister of Finance and invited Chávez to do the same. In his book, Pedro Carmona says that two days later, on Saturday 13th, Usón reproached him the letter of Chávez where he denied having resigned to his office. Leisbeth Berríos, a journalist and a Captain of the Air Force and who was assigned to the Military House in Miraflores, impeded him to join those who awaited Chávez's return to Miraflores the early hours of the 14. "Please, go away, my General", she told him. Usón took his case to the Inter American Human Rights Court.

survivors will fight for them to pay for the wounds inflicted, for the tears shed by Dalila Mendoza for the absence of her husband and for all the victims suffering the pain not to have their beloved ones.

How about you, Antonio Molina, do you understand the political reasons?

I think the decision was made to enable reconciliation in the country. But it cannot occur if crimes that have no connection with political issues go unpunished. It is not the same a few persons protesting against any Government than (some officers) shooting from their armored cars against unarmed people.

Molina reminded us that through decision number 051899, dated April 13th, 2007, the Constitutional Division of the Supreme Court of Justice ruled that such facts configured “grave violations to human rights.”

Therefore, they may not be subject of procedural benefits.

Freddy Gutiérrez’s remarks

Back to those days, a statement by Freddy Gutiérrez, an attorney, university professor and revolutionary militant, former member of the National Constituent Assembly and member of the Inter American Human Rights Commission was published in *El Universal*.

Gutiérrez, an old companion of President Chávez, with whom he conspired for the February 4th, 1992 rebellion, expressed his discrepancy with respect to the exception contained in the Amnesty decree-law:

A general amnesty cannot be applied excepting the people who had committed grave crimes against the human rights or against humanity.²²³

Freddy Gutiérrez thinks Human Rights is a “generic” term.

The crime of closing a media station, involving an apology to violence or instigation to commit crimes should also be deemed Human Rights violation.

He notes that if the concept is understood this way, then “Mayor Henrique Capriles Randonski or Mr. Pedro Carmona Estanga o Daniel Romero or the people who shot guns that day cannot be beneficiaries (of the amnesty).”

Otherwise, if it is a generic issue, the amnesty would cover whoever incurred in a punishable action, without any exclusion whatsoever.

He explained it with simpler words:

That is to say, it is either enforced in a general manner or simply the decree-law might become an unenforceable rule under the Law.

He also complained because the Prosecutor's Office and the courts had failed to hand out a decision after five years of the April developments.

This is the first reason why, in his opinion, the President was forced to decree an amnesty.

The court decides against the Metropolitan Police officers

In early April 2009, the Seventh Combined Lower Criminal

223 El Universal, 01-20-2008.

Court²²⁴ of Aragua State handed down a decision against sheriffs Iván Simonovis, former Security Secretary of the Metropolitan Mayor's Office, Lázaro Forero and Henry Vivas, former directors of the Metropolitan Police, and eight former agents of that police corps, involved in the developments of April 11th, 2002.

The decision contained a conviction in all cases, save for one acquittal.

Simonovis, Vivas and forero were sentenced to the maximum punishment provided under the Venezuelan legislation: 30 years of prison. Their crimes: necessary accomplice in the execution of aggravated and consummated homicide; frustrated homicide; very serious, less serious and non-serious injuries. The victims: Josefina Rengifo, Rudy Urbano and Erasmo Sánchez, all died in the surroundings of *Puente Llaguno*, and other 29 persons who were wounded on April 11th, 2002.

The decision rated the facts as grave violations of Human Rights, as defined in Article 43 of the Constitution, and contextualized it as a part of the development of a coup d'état.

The court involved 230 hearings, 265 expert reports, 5,700 pictures and 20 videos, 198 witnesses gave their testimonies and 48 experts gave their opinions.

With Simonovis, Forero and Vivas the officers listed below were also sentenced to 30 years of prison:

- Luis Molina Cerrada

224 A combined court is the one that is made up by one professional Judge and two lay judges.

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- Erasmo Bolívar
- Julio Rodríguez Salazar

To 17 years and 10 months:

- First Corporal Arube Pérez Salazar.

To 16 years for being necessary accomplices for grave, consummated, frustrated homicide; serious and very serious injuries and other crimes:

- Deputy Sheriff Marco Hurtado, head of the Fénix Group of the Metropolitan Police.

Three years for covering up:

- Ramón Humberto Zapata

Acquitted for lack of evidence:

- Rafael Neazoa López.

The group had been in prison for five years, so Zapata had paid beyond his time of three years. The cover-up attributed to Zapata in the decision is based on the fact that even though the officer did not shoot on April 11th, he witnessed the conducts of his workmates and failed to denounce them during the trial.

Officers Zapata and Neazoa were released after the decision was handed down. They were represented in court by public attorneys José Bujanda and Domingo Naranjo.

In his request for acquittal, Bujanda challenged the Prosecutor General's Office for having multiplied the investigations on April 11th, because in his opinion it had to make one single inquiry in connection with a single fact. And he noted:

But placing a higher emphasis on the mass media upon which the heaviest burden of responsibility should rest for the developments of April 2002.²²⁵

The defense of the other police officers was conducted by attorneys José Luis Tamayo, Theresly Malavé, Igor Hernández, María del Pilar de Simonovis, wife of Iván Simonovis, and Yhajaira de Forero, wife of Lázaro Forero.

The representatives of the Public Ministry were prosecutors Ana Beatriz Navarro, Jessica Wolmand, María Alejandra Pérez and Haifa El Aisami.

The Combined Court was made up by Judge Marjorie Calderón and three lay judges.

Once the decision was disclosed, the members of the court and the prosecutors were subject of a fierce press campaign with open retaliation threats and insults of all kinds, especially Judge Marjorie Calderón.

Aramita Padrino and Antonio Molina were the attorneys representing the accusing victims.

An open wound, dimmed truths

On this case I moderated a debate in the TV Program *Mediodías en confianza* which I hosted at VTV for two months in 2008, long before the decision was handed down.

The debate was attended by attorneys José Luis Tamayo,

225 Últimas Noticias, 03-31-2009.

defender of the police officers, and Antonio Molina, representative of the Coup Victims Association who acted as a private prosecutor in the trial.

Tamayo insisted in the core argument of the defense: There is no evidence directly connecting the police officers with the deaths and injuries of April 11th.

It may have been proven that they shot. The one who is on top of the water spraying armored car admits he had shot, but there is no cause-effect relationship between the shot and the wounds.²²⁶

The casualties and injured people among Chávez's supporters, according to Tamayo, was the result of the work of snipers.

On his part, Antonio Molina said that the responsibility of the cops was demonstrated in trial and discarded at once the actions of snipers:

We are fully convinced that the snipers never existed. They were members of the Metropolitan Police *Fénix* Group.

Antonio Molina read the transcript of the internal communications of the Metropolitan Police showing that they had taken the rooftops of *La Nacional* building.

Tamayo deemed Molina's opinions mere "assumptions and hypothesis."

Molina noted that the eight Metropolitan Police officers were identified in pictures by their own superiors.

When it became public, in April 2009, the decision against the

226 VTV program *Mediodías en confianza*, 08/11/2008, adapted by <http://www.aporrea.org/ddhh/n118640.html>

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sheriffs and the officers of the Metropolitan Police caused a strong political impact in Venezuela. The reactions confirmed that, seven years after the coup, the wound still was opened and many truths remain dimmed.

In general, for the country supporting President Chávez, it was an enlightened decision, because despite the commonplace accusing the Executive of controlling all other Branches of Government, the truth is that most of the violent adventures undertaken by the opposition in Chávez's years, including the April coup, the oil industry sabotage, and the widespread riots known as *La Guarimba*, among others, have been surrounded by an irritating impunity. That the people responsible face the courts of justice is the exception. And when they do, they escape in spectacular fashion (like Pedro Carmona and Carlos Ortega), with accomplice or corrupt officials. The Amnesty enacted on December 31st, 2007, startled the Chávez's supporters in general for it confirmed that sense of impunity.

In contrast, and as expected, to anti-Chávez opposition the decision against the police officers was received with irritation, not only because of the polarization that had grown typical these days, or because of the long duration of the trial (five years), but especially because of the media coverage which, generally speaking, rallied for the cops and for the arguments of the defense and distorted the evidence filed by the Prosecutors and the private accusers.

Cardinal Urosa Savino, Archbishop of Caracas, intervened in favor of the cops. Amidst the religious emotions that normally rise in Easter, he stated:

The inmates are the cops who had the mission to preserve the public order and the life of Venezuelans. It is difficult and sad.²²⁷

Most media widely covered the reactions of pain and rage of the relatives of the convicts, an unusual thing in the coverage of court cases, and echoed the explicit threats against Judge Marjorie Calderón.

The victims complained as well that during the trial they were insulted by the attorneys defending the cops.

Amidst such controversy I wrote in my column in *Quinto Día* weekly newspaper that the decision was historically necessary but quantitatively questionable. The decision cut the historic fog making the facts look spontaneous when they are a part of a plan to oust a constitutional government. However, the decision having been handed down after the amnesty decreed by President Chávez on the New Year's Eve of 2007, I expressed the opinion that may be the fair middle point would have been to average the "zero years" the white collar coup promoters would pay against the 30 years the six sheriffs and officers had to pay.²²⁸

My article brought about reactions from both sides of the political spectrum. In the revolutionary website Aporrea.org

227 El Universal, 04-05-2009.

228 Villegas Poljak, Ernesto: *Clase media, impunidad y pena máxima*. *Quinto Día*, issue number 644, week of 04-17 to 24-2009.

articles were published rejecting my opinion and Attorney at Law José Luis Tamayo, defender of the sheriffs, addressed me a letter challenging each of my arguments.

His version of the facts, as expected in a defender, points at the innocence of his principals.

As per his account, on April 11, 2002, the demonstrators of the opposition began to arrive to the surroundings of *La Gorda* and *La Pedrera* corners, downtown Caracas, around 01:30 p.m. and an unarmed security cordon of the *Ninja* group of the Metropolitan Police tried to contain them, but it was “quickly dissolved by the ceaseless fire shots coming from the North side of the avenue”, that is to say, from the Bolivarian concentration gathered there.²²⁹

The lawyer upholds that the two armored vehicles of the Metropolitan Police sprayed water and tossed tear gas canisters to make the Bolivarians retreat to the corners of *Piñango* and *Puente Llaguno*.

Noticeably, this version is radically opposite to the one identifying the Metropolitan Police as the armed vanguard of the opposition march, which had been detoured from *Chua* to Miraflores Palace without the approval of the marchers, using them to set in motion a coup d'état. This is how the Maracay court decision understands the situation.

²²⁹ Letter dated 04-21-2009 sent by José Luis Tamayo to Ernesto Villegas Poljak after publishing the article *Clase media, impunidad y pena máxima*, Quinto Día, issue number 644, week of 04-17 to 24-2009.

Pictures and footage show scenes where the Metropolitan Police officers appear with rifles, other than the ones commonly used by that police corps whose regulatory weapon is a .38 caliber revolver. One appears shooting an M16 rifle from the rooftop of an armored car at the people gathered on the bridge. Other officers are seen with HK machine guns, MP5 rifles and 9 mm pistols, some appear wearing latex surgical gloves.

In his letter, Tamayo filed a complaint for the impunity of other deaths and injuries of April, additional to the ones investigated in the trial against the sheriffs and officers:

Sixteen out of the nineteen deaths of April 11 still await justice.²³⁰

This seems to be a coincidence point of the two antagonistic sides: The responsibility of most of the deaths and injuries remains undetermined.

A few days later, the Prosecutor General of the Republic, Luisa Ortega Díaz, designated a commission of prosecutors to expedite the cases of April 11th, 2002.

Members of the commission are prosecutors:

- Alejandro Castillo,
- Rocío Gásperi,
- María Eugenia Montesinos,
- Diria Rojas,
- Said Amundaraín, and

230 <http://www.radiomundial.com.ve/yvke/noticia.php?22427>

- Néstor Castellanos.

The members of this team have the “broadest powers to revise and organize all the April 11th cases”, as the Prosecutor General told.²³¹

The idea, she said, was to complete them all.

231 <http://www.radiomundial.com.ve/yvke/noticia.php?23370>

BY WAY OF EPILOGUE

THE RECOVERY OF VTV

The people were the heroes

I wasn't among the first in arriving there. I have told this publicly many times. The people were already surrounding the headquarters of VTV station in *Los Ruices*, and its signal was already on air when I joined the spontaneous marathon communicational operation of Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th of April, 2002.

The people were the heroes. Most remain unknown.

The morning of Saturday 13th I refrained from going to my job in *El Universal* as I had done in any other moment with a hyper newsworthy situation like that one. The newspaper showed a reality that was 180° different than the one I perceived. The front page of Friday 12th showed a huge headline in exceptional capital letters with the expression:

It's over!

And on Saturday 13th:

One step ahead!

Had I gone to the newsroom, I would not have done any important thing there either.

In the afternoon, the printing workshop workers argued "security reasons" to tell the company's representatives that they would not go to work and print the paper. The people that went to concentrate in Miraflores passed by the corner of *Animas*, in

Avenida Urdaneta, and stopped in front of the newspaper buildings and chanted slogans like this one:

We demand the journalists to tell the truth!

There was an uneasy atmosphere inside due to the concern that the protesters may stay packed around the building, as it was the case of the TV stations, or worse, that they may break into the building. Indeed, nobody knows how far the rage of the heated people can get. The company could not guarantee the graphic workers, whose shift extends till early hours in the mornings, that the night would be safe enough so as to work and go back home later. Many of them shared with me the same reasons for not wanting to work that day.

Considering the circumstances, Taynem Hernández and Irma Álvarez, both reporters of the Nations and Politics sections went to the Italian news agency, *Ansa*, located in the same *Avenida Urdaneta* to help Natacha Salazar, head of the correspondent's office, to search and disseminate data of the countercoup in progress.

Irma is the one who less sympathizes with Chávez. However, her passion for this job and her firm democratic convictions fed her need to inform.

I spent the day at home, searching and receiving information by telephone, radio and TV to forward it later to my e-mail contacts.

The TV set and the radio were on. I kept on zapping the 19-inch Panasonic connected to a cable TV service: *Caracol TV*, *CNN en*

español, *Telemundo* and other foreign channels. From time to time I zapped also the local TV stations which insisted in broadcasting Pedro Carmona Estanga's CV and Lucas Rincón's statement that Chávez had resigned. I tuned *Radio Fe y Alegría* station which reported details of the counter coup, and *Unión Radio*, basically focused on the people and actions of the *de facto* Government. The voices of its anchors and some reporters sounded displeased. Later, too late indeed, I learnt that *YVKE Mundial* state-run radio station was also reporting the counter coup. *Radio Nacional de Venezuela* was reporting nothing by decision of its director, a journalist whose face often appeared on TV next to Hugo Chávez during the first broadcasts of the latter's TV program *Aló Presidente*, where he acted as presenter. From Maracay Lenín Aquino kept me updated about the developments around the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade. A book seller and a revolutionary militant, Lenín was helping mobilize people from Aragua and Carabobo's working class zones to the military garrison.

With a bold deep voice I heard him say:

Brother, let's see if this military have the balls to accompany the people in this rebellion!

From the surroundings of Miraflores, Giulio Satosuosso, a Mathematician and intellectual described with excited Italian accent the spontaneous crowd surrounding the Palace.

This is incredible! Direct democracy!

From the working class slums of *Antímano*, *23 de Enero*, *Catía*,

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Caricuao, El Valle, Carretera Panamericana and the neighborhoods of the old path to *La Guaira*, among others, news came over the phone about spontaneous demonstrations, some of them involving lootings of stores and confrontations with the Metropolitan Police.

In the Eastern and most populous parish of *Petare*, the crowd gave birth to a new leader, Miriam Caripe, a street vendor residing in *Guarenas* satellite city who sensed the advisability of taking the demonstration to a more neuralgic area, where it may have a higher impact on the developments in progress. Unlike the February 27th, 1989, when the protests revolved around lootings and riots, the April 13th rebellion was motivated by political reasons, conscience and objectives. Miriam recalled that the headquarters of VTV were relatively close to Petare, in *Los Ruices* main avenue, and since the first demand of the protesters was for information, she proposed to march to the channel to demand the resumption of its activities. In fact, before any other thing, the people asked for respect to their right to information. They wanted to confirm from direct sources if Chávez had truly resigned. Later, as the people learned the news was false, they proceeded to demand the return of the President and their hope of justice and redemption, a seed he had planted in their hearts. The women of Petare led the demonstration, found buses and, shortly after, they arrived at the gates of the TV station blocked by officers of the Metropolitan Police. Earlier, Miranda Police had left that task to the Metropolitan Police. I was afraid the coup leaders could seize the information

blackout to suffocate the popular demonstrations with bullets, a fear I shared with my contacts. That happened on February 27th, 1989. Indiscriminate repression hampered by the suspension of the constitutional guarantees. Such guarantees were no longer in force with Carmona's coup.

Civilian-military confluence

The morning of Saturday April 13th, in the dorm of the officers taking the General Staff course of the Army, a group of majors and lieutenant colonels held a meeting: Jesús Zambrano Mata, Francisco Espinoza, Paúl Lugo, Rafael Gil, Leopoldo Amundaraín, César Figueroa and Carlos Kancev.

None of them had command over any troops for they were participants of that course. But they felt they had to do something to face that shameful situation. As they passed by the entrance of *Fuerte Tiuna* in front of the working class slums of *El Valle* and the Panamerican Road, where the people were stationed in ever increasing numbers and in a combative manner, they found the key. After embracing each other and swearing "Homeland or death", each left with a specific task. Some would go contacting other militaries, including generals and urge them to "do something."

The task of Major Jesús Zambrano Mata, who had been Vice President of VTV was to contact national and international media to denounce the coup d'état and certify that there were military opposing Carmona.

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I called Francisco Gozon who had worked with me in Channel 8. We explained to him what we intended to do and he contacted several community-based radio and TV stations where he had friends. He told me he was going to *Catia TV* and asked me to keep in touch. (These lines come from a personal conversation.)

Gozon was production manager of Channel 8 during the term when Elías Jaua, then Minister of the Secretary of the President's Office, also held the office of President of VTV.

The group decided to pass by the headquarters of *Los Ruices* and was surprised as they checked that the Metropolitan Police custody did not exceed 8 or 10 men, too small a number for such a strategic point. The recovery of such facilities came up as a real possibility. If controlling communications is crucial for a coup d'état, logically the same is applicable in the case of a countercoup. They went then to an apartment in the East of Caracas, place of residence of Natacha Castillo, who later became Elías Jaua's wife. They called their companions in *Fuerte Tiuna* asking for troops to take the channel over. Zambrano Mata believed that a few soldiers were enough to submit the police officers.

But everybody told me that there was a prohibition of leaving *Fuerte Tiuna* or Miraflores with troops.

One of his companions recalled that Captain Rodolfo Marco Torres was in the presidential residence *La Casona*, in *La Carlota* residential area, close to *Los Ruices* as a part of the Presidential Honor Guard.

Troops were stationed there, and they were neither in Miraflores nor in *Fuerte Tiuna*.

Torres was encouraged by the phone call and agreed to make the arrangements for a military operation.

Let's keep in touch.

Zambrano Mata telephoned Francisco Gozon and told him:

The plan changed. You'd better look for useful companions, knowledgeable in technical issues so as to resume the signal of the channel.

Right away!

His next call was for Jesús Romero Anselmi, President and living icon of VTV. Romero Anselmi was hidden in a "shell" where he kept continuous contact with Mario Pizzo, a make-up artist working at the channel who, in turn, was the liaison with Anselmi's convalescent wife, Leila. From time to time, he phoned her to let her know that her husband was safe and sound.

Romero was still wearing the same clothes of the night of April 11th when he was the last to leave the building in *Los Ruices* as the Miranda Police arrived to seize the channel station. All that time he cloaked his well-known face (ironically) under a New York Yankees cap. The journalist and the military agreed to get together.

At a given time, Zambrano Mata received a call from Captain Marco Torres who told him that he was in front of the channel, and urged him:

Major, come down here, I got the troops.

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When he returned to the site, he was surprised by the crowd surrounding VTV which broke in a round of applause when they saw him in the olive green fatigue.

But I don't see the soldiers!

Marco Torres, Frigate Lieutenant Luis Mariño, National Guard Jaspe Ramírez and Second Corporal Armando Beltrán, all in plain clothes.

Marco, where are the soldiers?

Right over there! Major... Over there.

His hand pointed at the men and women in the crowd. There were no soldiers. Just the people.

After an instant of annoyance, he said:

Well, they will be our troops!

Zambrano Mata approached to the crowd and neared to Miriam Caripe, the spontaneous leader of *Petare* who, ignoring the military hierarchy told him:

Listen, Mister, we want channel 8 to be back on air and report what is happening. We don't buy the story that the President resigned. We will not go.

A handshake sealed the confluence of people and Army around a single purpose.

The military, then, approached to the gates of the channel and asked to talk to the police officer with the highest rank there and with a very serious voice and face, he lied to him:

President Carmona appointed me Vice President of the channel and I need to enter with my employees to restore the signal.

The police officer replied that nobody could come in without the express authorization of the Metropolitan Police director, Sheriff Henry Vivas.

Call him, then. I will talk to him.

Francisco Gozón, Ángel Palacios, activists of *Catia TV*, *Radio Perola* and Iván Garí, among many other volunteers were already there.

Zambrano Mata told Iván Garí that he was unarmed, and Garí calmed him down.

I am with my brothers here, we all are armed.

As he learned of the situation, colonel Morao Gardona, head of the Honor Guard, called the militaries in *Los Ruices* and their faces grew happier when he said he would send an officer and troops as soon as possible.

All of a sudden, someone recognized Jesús Romero Anselmi under the baseball cap.

Look! The President of the Channel has arrived!

The crowd felt their demonstration began to reap fruits and welcomed him with hugs, cheers and kisses. It was a sign that the channel could actually resurrect... and Chávez as well.

Earlier, in the morning, the journalist and the retired lieutenant José Gregorio Zambrano –one of the young officers who rebelled

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with Chávez on February 4th, 1992- had contacted Zulay Rosas, Grecia Pineda and Vanexza Camargo who, like him, were reporters with VTV.

He asked the three of them if they agreed with the course of events in the country. The common answer was “No!”

Well, let's do something.

They met at José Gregorio's apartment and printed flyers denouncing Carmona as a usurper and the events as a coup d'état.

With a *handycam* they went to Miraflores and tape recorded images of the people gathered there. They managed to enter the Palace where they saw the Minister of Education, Aristóbulo Istúriz, sitting in the President's chair- The *handycam* was the only camera present there. A reporter of the Colombian channel *Caracol* was interviewing Istúriz with a mobile phone. Later, Efraín Castro a cameraman and other VTV technicians arrived to record images of the outcome of the events.

Once the interview was over, the Minister told José Gregorio: Dude, we need to take over Channel 8.

Well, I am ready.

An Army Major is going there with 50 soldiers.

A motorcyclist of the Honor Guard dropped the journalist close to *Los Ruices*. When he arrived there were just 40 or 50 people, according to his estimations. Someone exhorted them with a megaphone.

Sometime later, José Gregorio will remember:

I took the megaphone and spoke to the Metropolitan Police officers who were a bit scared for they ignored what was happening.²³²

When the cops managed to contact Henry Vivas, Major Zambrano talked with him as if they were very old friends:

My brother, I need to come in.

It's not possible

The military gave up the lie, but not the informal treatment, and told him:

Listen, Henry. There are over five thousand people here. You have just 8 or 10 cops only and I am coming in. If there are casualties here, they will be yours because we are coming in.

Two mustached dark haired men arrived to the headquarters of *Los Ruices*. They were wearing black jackets marked with big letters in the back reading: "Public Ministry." They were prosecutors Sader Chanto, Director of Environmental Crimes of the Prosecutor General's Office and his deputy, Danilo Anderson, then absolutely unknown to the crowd. They had been sent there by Deputy Prosecutor General Hilys López de Penso, who took the reins of the institution as the holder, Isaías Rodríguez, had to protect his life in an unknown place. After the press conference of April 12th, Rodríguez was not seen in public again until the early hours of the 13th when he was in Miraflores together with the other members of the Citizen's Branch of Government: the People's Attorney, Germán

232 VTV program *En Confianza*, 02-04-2008.

Mundaraín, and the Comptroller General, Clodosbaldo Russián.

In the meantime, José Gregorio asked the crowd:

Is there anybody here with expertise in TV-related trades?

All those present raised their hands in a magnificent token of volunteerism. Many managed to enter and provide moral support at least. Most stayed outside.

A while later, someone came from inside the channel with a TV set mounted in a metal rolling table and connected to a very long cable. He told the demonstrators:

Don't go until you see the Channel 8 signal on air.

Shortly afterwards, the troops promised by Morao Gardona arrived under the command of Captain Oscar González Ortiz and took over control of the premises. Prudently yet swiftly, the cops left.

At home, I received a phone call from Lelis Páez, a leader of the *PPT* (Spanish acronym for Homeland for Everybody) party. She was had suffered from a seizure of labyrinthitis which made her stagger, but she went to Miraflores with Aristóbulo Istúriz and José Albornoz, her party companions. She was calling me from the Palace.

Get ready because they are recovering VTV.

After Lelis told me that, amidst the dizziness associated to that pathology, she had been in a room in the Palace with several people with emaciated faces. She stood next to a cross-armed man sitting with his jacket resting on his laps. When he stood up, Lelis recognized him:

Hey, aren't you the man who read the decree?

Yes, he was Daniel Romero. The others were also officials of the technically failed government of Carmona and guests attending the swear-in ceremony of his ministers which was scheduled for that day Saturday 13th. The master of ceremonies had announced that the act would be called off and they had to leave the Palace. Some hurried up and managed to run away. The rest were there, sunk in a bitter uncertainty.

Immediately I tuned Channel 8 and a while later Jesús Romero Anselmi was on the screen surrounded by Prosecutors Chanto and Anderson.

I listened how Romero made a call to all workers to go to the channel premises. I raised the volume and went to the toilet to shave myself. I had not done so in two days.

When I heard the voice of Juan Barreto and the voice of my brother, Vladimir, journalists both of them, I came out to watch them on TV with my face covered up with foam and with the razor in my hand.

Barreto called the representatives of the National Assembly for a special session at VTV headquarters.

Vladimir, I learned later, had arrived with the Labor Minister, María Cristina Iglesias, on board of an armored van of the Military House, from Miraflores, facilitated by Commander Jesús Suárez Chourio, one of the men President Chávez trusted most.

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Aristóbulo Istúriz, Minister of Education, had told them:
Go to Channel 8 at once!

At the time of that instruction, a paradox was developing – Carmona was holding on to the power in *Fuerte Tiuna*, forces loyal to Chávez controlled the Palace, Aristóbulo Isturiz was sitting on the President's chair, but the world and the Venezuelans as well knew nothing about the U turn of the political events in the country. Without the control of communications neither the coup nor the countercoup could proclaim victory.

Carmona, contacted by CNN over the phone, was juggling to explain why he was in *Fuerte Tiuna* and what was happening in Miraflores.

The first political leaders who arrived to Channel 8 were Jesse Chacón, director of the National Telecommunications Commission, José Albornoz, Secretary-General of *PPT* party, and Juan Barreto.

When Barreto and Vladimir proclaimed the return to constitutionality the signal suddenly went off. The screen was invaded by gray stripes and I feared for the life of my brother due to the general course of events.

Maybe the station was under attack.

It was neither attack nor sabotage. Rubén Hernández would tell me later that amidst the improvisation, technician and volunteers tried to identify in the master control room the cables necessary to set in motion a higher number of cameras and microphones.

By that time they had been able to activate one camera and one microphone like the ones used by reporters in their street jobs. In connecting and disconnecting cables from a web of wires they disconnected the one they shouldn't have. The signal returned as soon as they noticed the mistake. The plateau was the same that, two nights before, *Globovisión* had shown deserted as a sign of how *VTV* workers had "abandoned the ship."

Jorge Abreu, a producer of the private TV station *CMT* joined the few *VTV* technicians and community media activists. Much earlier, Adolfo Torres, a *VTV* cameraman had gone to the headquarters of that private channel, located in the neighboring sector in the East of Caracas, *Boleíta Norte*, asking for support: Video cassettes were needed, he had run out of them. There, he found the solidarity he looked for and, thanks to simple workers like himself, he could go back with his camera to record the images of those hours. Eliseo Siso, another *VTV* cameraman, felt much more committed to the task when he saw Jesús Romero Anselmi pulling a very long cable, as another hand on the deck.

At home, my wife noticed I was shaving myself. Shedding tears and holding our eight-month baby, she said with resignation:

You are leaving, aren't you?

I don't know.

So, why are you shaving?

Aurora Morales, a leader of the *MVR* party, called me by phone. She told me about the National Dignity Rescue Operation

the military loyal to the President were undertaking from Maracay to go pick up Hugo Chávez in *La Orchila* Island and reinstate him. I know Aurora since my childhood times. She was, like my father and brothers, a leader of the Communist Party. She is the daughter of Víctor Hugo Morales, an old left-wing military who rebelled in the 60s to join the armed struggle.

Journalist Hindu Anderi, my classmate at the Central University of Venezuela, also contacted me to claim my presence on the screen.

The same did another friend and colleague, Isbemar Jiménez, who warned me:

It is a political decision. Nothing will be the same for you from this moment on.

Besides Vladimir, my sister, Asia, was also inside *VTV* in her capacity as an official of the People's Attorney Office. I called her mobile phone and I was surprised to know she was there. I told her I would go there. Amailín Riveros, a friend who also worked with the People's Attorney, passed by to pick me up in her beige Ford Fiesta.

She dropped me one block away from the channel amidst the euphoria of the crowd.

Many were acquainted with my face. They hugged me as if it were New Year. Some showed me cameras and videocassettes with footage recorded by themselves about the April 11th developments, knowingly that the private TV stations were not broadcasting anything.

The gate was shut. A soldier armed with a rifle and an arid face decided who could come in and who couldn't. I showed my identification card but he denied me access with a severe gesture. I insisted. He finally told me:

Stand up here.

I stood there where he asked me to, and I received such a strong push that I ended up one meter backwards. I understood crystal clear that we were amidst a war and these men were not joking.

Next to me I could recognize the face of a person who, like me, was interested in crossing the threshold.

What's up Luis?

It was Luis Fuenmayor Toro, former rector of the Central University of Venezuela. A physician and a leftist militant, Fuenmayor had shaved his characteristic beard. With decades without exposing them to the sun rays, his cheeks showed sunburns.

Fuck! You recognized me!

The fascists were going to recognize you as well!

We broke in laughter in such a unique circumstance.

Shortly after, someone inside the channel identified me and spoke with an officer who ordered the soldier to let me in. I passed by him without making a reproach for the blow.

Inside, Angélica Méndez, a VTV producer who had come to work after three days at home zapping the various channels as she recorded everything in a VHS recorder, welcomed me. Thanks to

her, the images were recorded for history. Her recordings were used for future reports and documentary films about the hours of the coup.

In a sample of Latin American magic realism, Mario Pizzo, powder compact in hand, removed the bright zones off my face with some make-up. He did the same with anyone prior to stand in front of the camera. Even in such dramatic circumstances, aesthetics has some importance. Mario was one of the first *VTV* workers arriving to the site. Yuri Saldeño, from the engineering division, and other technicians such as audio technician Isidro, aka “El Tuti arrived almost simultaneously.” A book on the specifics of the recovery of *VTV* should present all the names, even though, indeed, they are part of the anonymous people who took the streets with their open chests to defeat the coup d’état. They are all named Venezuela.

I hardly made my way into the studio. It was packed as never before.

Vladimir spoke in the camera when he spotted me among the crowd. Several times, in agreement with Major Zambrano Mata, had made calls to Admiral Chetro Romero to protect President Chávez’s life, who was a prisoner under his responsibility in *La Orchila*. His voice trembled when he announced my presence there and I entered the set to shortly hug him. In that moment, Samuel Ruh, José Albornoz, Aurora Morales and José Gregorio Zambrano were next to Vladimir.

There were no epaulettes there. María Teresa Gutiérrez, a journalist, and Iris Varela, a National Assembly representative, saw to those needing food or water. From a restaurant in *Las Mercedes*, the pro-Chávez owner had sent enormous amount of supplies. Rear Admiral Luis Cabrera Aguirre and Commander Pérez Issa awaited their turns to talk to the country.

The previously recorded image of Colonel Jesús Morao Gardona, Commander of the Honor Guard was broadcast with this message:

I ask the Bolivarian people of Venezuela to stand by this decision made by the National Armed Force to attempt to reinstate the Branches of Government lawfully constituted by the State and that have been violated. There is confusion because the people do not know that the Army has joined the Honor Guard Regiment to understand that the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been breached. Therefore, this is not a Transition Government. The existing Government in Venezuela is the one headed by Mr. President, Hugo Rafael Chávez Frías, and we are not going to negotiate, but to enforce what is precisely established in the Constitution: The President has to appear on TV, radio, and all the other media to say if he really signed what they claim is his resignation. The people does not accept that the President is detained, imprisoned. We don't know what his current situation is.

Morao addressed to the officers with responsibility of command in the National Armed Force, as follows:

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We ask you to reconsider so that our people can keep their confidence in their Army, so that we can consolidate a beautiful Venezuela as we all wish.

In Maracay, General Raúl Baduel had read to the crowd gathered outside the garrison Hugo Chávez's letter denying that he had resigned.

But such images would arrive later because VTV had no microwave equipment in the place and it had no way to use it right away.

By phone, a lady who identified herself to Mayor Zambrano Mata as the Secretary of Lara State's Governor, Luis Reyes Reyes, asked for a fax number to send a very important document. He gave Romero Anselmi's fax number.

Later, the woman called again, she was anxious.

Listen, Major, the Governor has not watched anyone mentioning the document. What is going on?

Then, they went to the Anselmi's office and there they found an entire fax roll of paper had been consumed with the same document repeatedly faxed: the letter written by Chavez's own hand clarifying that he had not resigned.

Ricardo Durán was interviewing María Cristina Iglesias when Zambrano Mata interrupted him to pass him the fax. The applauses burst spontaneously both inside and outside of the studio as they listened the voice of Ricardo Durán reading the content of the letter.

When I joined the *VTV* operation I couldn't help stating my position in front of the cameras, taking off my hat as a journalist:

For long hours the freedom of speech was confiscated by private economic interests that violated such a dear right to the freedom of press. I urge the Inter American Press Society and the Inter American Human Rights Commission to make a categorical pronouncement on the communicational phenomenon that gripped Venezuela today, when private economic interests confiscated the freedom of speech.

I said that in my opinion a revolution had taken place in Venezuela on April 13th, something that in the past I myself had doubted. I addressed the middle class sectors that two days before had marched massively against Chávez, and invited them to accept the Constitution. I reminded them that the Constitution provides for the figure of the presidential recall referendum for which they just had to abide by the constitutional term set forth and gather the sufficient amount of signatures to activate it. I advocated a space inside the revolution for such sectors and allowed myself to urge the President to call for a national dialogue.

Aristóbulo Istúriz, sitting next to me since he arrived to *VTV* from Miraflores, supported that idea and called to correct the mistakes made. Later, senior leftist militant Guillermo García Ponce came to the plateau and joined the panel. He warned of the threats involved in reconciling with the right wing and against the trend to forget what had happened.

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He called not to reedit the history of the First Republic, which Simón Bolívar called the “dumb republic” in the Angostura Congress in 1819.

A conspiracy was followed by a pardon, and the pardon was followed by a new conspiracy.

García Ponce asked for a deep “cleansing” in the Prosecutor General’s Office and the high spheres of the State, a part of which officials had served the purposes of the coup and the fascist persecutions.

History eventually said that the senior leftist leader García Ponce was right: Eight months later, the same protagonists of the April coup were executing a second attempt against the Government, in that occasion under the form of a 63-day long oil strike, from December 2002 to February 2003. A Venezuelan popular proverb reads: The devil knows more because he is old rather than because he is the devil.

Journalist José Gregorio Zambrano announced to the people in the studio that there was a call from Deputy Prosecutor General Hilys López de Penso, who read on air a letter she addressed to the General Commander of the Army, Efraín Vásquez Velazco:

As we have learned that the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez Frías, is under your custody to be transported abroad, thus violating our legal system and the international treaties, I request you the immediate suspension of the aforesaid procedure and order his immediate transfer to

the Palace of Miraflores under the corresponding custody of the commander of the Honor Guard Regiment. Otherwise, I will deem you responsible for any social outburst or bloodshed sustained by the Venezuelan people, and of course, for the life and security of the President of the Republic.

At that time, contradictory reports arrived to the channel as to the whereabouts of the President. Some affirmed that he had been rescued already and that he was at the 42nd Paratroopers Brigade, in Maracay, others that he still was in *La Orchila* Island.

At VTV studio, Ricardo Durán interviewed General Arrieta, the one who gave account of the control of *Fuerte Tiuna*, taken over by the loyal forces.

From Miraflores a microwave signal arrived conveying Diosdado Cabello being sworn-in as “temporary” President of the Republic by the President of the National Assembly, Willian Lara. Shortly thereafter, Pedro Carmona “resigned” to the Presidency of the *de facto* Government. A group of militaries, commanded by Colonel Montilla Pantoja arrested him along with the generals supporting him.

You are under arrest.

But why?

For violating the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

José Vicente Rangel, Minister of Defense, arrived to *Fuerte Tiuna*, heavily surrounded by a military custody, He scolded

Carmona and his generals strongly. When he noticed that among them was José Hernán Sánchez Porras, bishop of the military chaplains, he said:

I am sorry Monseigneur.

And he lowered the tone of his words.

Rangel tells that he had called by phone Admiral Chetro Romero, in charge of La Orchila Island, to brief him about the new situation, making him responsible for the integrity of President Chávez and asked him to put him on the phone. When Chetro tells Chávez that the Minister of Defense wanted to talk with him, the prisoner refused:

I don't want to talk with that dick.

He thought it was Ramírez Pérez, Carmona's minister.

No, Mr. President. It's José Vicente Rangel, your Minister of Defense.

Chávez took the phone and asked where he was.

In the Ministry of Defense.

It's not possible! Did the coup fail?

Yes, and I have here a big surprise, I got Carmona as a prisoner.²³³

In a given moment, in VTV studio everybody took for granted that Chávez came by helicopter to Miraflores, so we began to repeat this in the cameras all those who participated in the operation.

During a broadcast from Miraflores, when our words were not

²³³ An account by José Vicente Rangel during the presentation of the first edition of this book in Teatro Teresa Carreño de Caracas ("Teresa Carreño" Caracas Cultural Complex, 11-14-2009).

coming on air, I told my brother Vladimir:

Hey dude, I hope these militaries are telling the truth. Can you imagine? We are saying here that Chávez is coming. If he does not return, we'll get out of here in black bags.

When, at last, images from Miraflores were broadcast showing the President get off the helicopter amidst a massive and disorderly welcome reception, in the *VTV* studio everybody stood upright and began to chant the National Anthem. Soaked in such a contagious excitement I told someone:

If the people used to light candles to Chávez as if he were a saint, imagine what they are going to do now that he has just resurrected.

Attachments

ATTACHMENT I: THE SIGNATORIES OF THE CARMONA DECREE:

Albelardo Pinedo	Alfredo Ortega Rubio
Abraham Pulido	Alfredo Rangel Mata
Adalberto Jiménez	Alicia Sepúlveda
Adolfo Pastrán Matute	Alicia Taormina Parra
Alba Teresa Parra	Alicia Uzcátegui de Zambrano
Alberto Blasini	Alida Lasar de Medina
Alberto Gibs Gil	Álvaro Caballero Fonseca
Alberto José Fernández Arribilla-	Américo Martín
ga	Ana Karina González
Alberto Mariño	Ana Patricia Laya
Alberto Quirós	Andrea Daza Tapia
Alejandro Goiticoa Ramírez	Andrea Gabriela Gómez
Alejandro Peña Esclusa	Andrés González Herrera
Alexis Garrido Soto	Andrés Rojas
Alexis Martínez	Andrés Rojas Cubero
Alexis Rodríguez	Ángel Irigoyen
Alfonso Albornoz Niño	Ángel Prato
Alfonso Riera	Antonio Isaac Pardo Guilarte
Alfredo Chaparro	Antonio Nicolás Briceño Brown
Alfredo Fernández Gallardo	Aquiles José Rojas Salazar
Alfredo G. Dominisio	Armando E. Cuello Adrianza
Alfredo Larrazábal	Armando León

ATTACHMENTS

Arturo Calderón	César Ramírez Morales
Asdrúbal Pulido Salvatierra	Ciro Belloso
Arnaldo Antonio Vásquez Rivas	Corina de Machado
Belkis Yépez	Cristín Nicolás Núñez
Bernardo Corredor Ramírez	Daniel Fernández
Betty de Martínez	Darío Bander Fonturbel
Blas Antonio García Núñez	David López Henríquez
Brionet Michel	David Meneses
Carlos Alberto Guevara Solano	Diofante Torrealba (Vicealmirante)
Carlos Cadavieco	Dolores Piña de Nieto
Carlos de Seda Rojas	Douglas León Natera
Carlos Enrique Gutiérrez	Edecio Brito
Carlos Enrique Quintero	Edgar Linares Machado
Carlos Fernández	Edgar Monserrate
Carlos Fernández Gallardo	Edgar Villarroel
Carlos G. De Seda	Eduardo Arturo Gámez Quintero
Carlos Grimaldi	Eduardo Galavis Añez
Carlos Julio Ostos	Eduardo José Cabrera
Carlos Redondo Morazani	Eduardo Marín
Carlos Rodríguez Matosa	Eldar Levi Pascal
Carlos Salvatore Mariscalco	Elías Bittar Escalona
Carmen América Oropeza	Elio Andrés Delamo Chacón
Carmen Gedel	Eliseo Sarmiento Pérez
Castor González	Ely López Quijada
César Camejo Blanco	Emilio Peñaranda Pita

ATTACHMENTS

Enrique José Cedeño	Gisela Gómez Sucre
Enrique Yéspica Alvarado	Giusepe Grunfio
Ernesto Amado Villasmil	Gloria Janeth Istifano
Escales Díaz Aguiar	Gloria Pacífico de Bustillos
Felipe Brillembourg	Gonzalo Colimodio
Félix Aranguren	Gonzalo de Guruceaga
Félix Duarte	Gonzalo Medina Valery
Félix Francisco Figuera Valdés	Gonzalo Mendoza
Félix Pérez Avilés	Gonzalo Pérez Hernández
Fernández Galíndez Díaz	Gregorio Rojas Salazar
Fernando Albán	Gretel González Penzo
Fiderela Fórmica	Guillermo Alcalá Prada
Fidias Marcano	Guillermo Colimodio
Flavio Passano Mauri	Guillermo Velutini
Francisco Alvarado Ordóñez	Gustavo L. Velásquez
Francisco Briceño	Gustavo Nagen
Francisco Márquez Velasco	Haidee Deutch
Francisco Martínez G.	Héctor Atilio Pujol
Gabriela Domínguez	Héctor Sabatella
Gerardo Omaña	Heidi Andreina Flores Palacios
Germán Barreto	Heidi Engelberg
Germán Barreto H.	Herminio Fuenmayor
Gerson Rabanales	Hugo Aranguren Quintero
Gilberto Carrasquero Araujo	Hugo Arrioja
Giovani Otaviani Vera	Hugo Hernández Raffali

ATTACHMENTS

Hugo Rodríguez Rausseo	Jorge Paparoni M.
Ibeth de Bustillos	José A. Ciriliano
Ibraín García Carmona	José Alberto Zambrano G.
Ignacio Salvatierra	José Ángel Urbina
Ignacio Velasco	José Antonio Gil Yépez
Ismael Jiménez Velásquez	José Antonio Navarro Evia
Ingrid Gómez	José Castro M.
Isidro Díaz Infante	José Curiel
Iván Morales Valles	José D. Bravo
Iván Sanoja Martínez	José De Sousa
J.M. Magro O.	José del Carmen Montilla
J.R. Chacón Mogollón	José Gabriel Izaguirre Duque
Jaime Manso Manso	José Gregorio Correa
Jame Eisleiman	José Gregorio Vásquez
Javier Muñoz León	José Javier Martínez
Jesús A. Cabezas Castro	José Martínez Franco
Jesús A. Jiménez Galvis	José Martli Saqui
Jesús Alberto Fernández J.	José Rafael Berroterán Esculpi
Jesús Francisco Figueras	José Rafael Márquez Avendaño
Jesús López Planchart	José Ramón Chourio
Jesús María	José Rodríguez
Jesús María Ponce	José Rodríguez
Jesús Nicolás de Fino Montes	José Santiago Romero
Jhonny José Barrios	José Valentín Liscano Coron
Jorge Hung	José Vicente Carrasquero

ATTACHMENTS

Josefina Quintero Sanabria	Luis Contreras Laguado
Juan Andrés Sosa B.	Luis Horacio Vivas Peña
Juan Antonio Goliat	Luis Manrique
Juan Carlos Arreaza	Luis Miguel Fajardo
Juan Carlos Barroso	Luis Morales Parada
Juan Carlos Varela Ramos	Luis R. Contreras Laguado
Juan Carlos Zapata	Luis Rafael Fajardo
Juan Enrique Aister	Luis Rafael Hernández
Juan Luis Rico Chayet	Luis Reyes
Juan Moreno Gómez	Luz García
Juan Pablo Borregales Delga	Manuel A. Pulido
Juan Brazón	Manuel Mendoza Villarreal
Julio César Cabrera	Manuel Rosales
Julio César Pasarelo Golding	Marcel Caraballo
Julio Lesa Arreaza	Marcial Lara Ortega
Laura García Gómez	Marcos Acosta
Laura Rivero	Marcos Oviedo
Leopoldo López Gil	Marcos Torres
Lourdes Alcalá de García	Margarita Rodríguez B.
Luis Antonio Molina	María Alejandra García Gómez
Luis E. Servando	María C. de Huizi
Luis Eduardo González del Castillo	María Corina Machado
Luis Enrique Ball	María Cristina Parra
Luis Gerardo Ascanio Estévez	María del Amparo Parejo
Luis Gerardo Ventura	María Eugenia Chacón Moreno

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María Rodríguez Ramos	Nelson Albornoz
Marianela Dorante de Aguiar	Nelson Dagama Suárez
Maríanela Mata B.	Nelson Mendoza P.
Mario Caputo Cesarani	Nelson Morales Caraballo
Mario Tepedino	Nestor Col
Martha de Briceño	Néstor González González
Maximiliano Magil	Nicole Michele Moreli
Maye Primera Garcés	Noel Álvarez Camargo
Michael Gogarizan	Octavio Delamo
Michel Biondi	Orlando Mangliani
Miguel Ángel Castillo	Oscar Eduardo Moratino
Miguel Alejandro Alfonzo Ruiz	Oscar Francisco Mora Endara
Miguel Ambrosio E.	Osías Señor
Miguel Ángel Luna	Osleida Arévalo Montilla
Miguel Ángel Martínez	Oswaldo Cocne
Miguel Antonio Hernández	Pablo César Marín
Miguel Ardanas	Pedro Enrique Piñate Bermúdez
Miguel Enrique Corso Corso	Pedro Francisco Arroyo
Miguel Méndez Fabiani	Pedro J. Mantellini
Miguel Mónaco Gómez	Pedro Jesús Castro Torrealba
Miguel Pupio Pizani	Pedro José Figueras
Miguel Valle Herrera	Pdero Luis Ravelo
Mimi Yaneth Aseti	Pedro Palomino
Mireya Valderrama	Pedro Perdomo Alberto
Nancy Figueroa Yánez	Pedro Rafael Betancourt

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Pedro Rojas Villafaña	Roberto Mendoza L.
Porfirio Tamayo	Rocío Guijarro
Rafael Montero Revette (GD)	Rodolfo (sin apellido)
Rafael A. Jimenez Márquez	Rodolfo León Nobel
Rafael Antonio Ramones Montero	Rodolfo Lovera Pérez
Rafael Arreaza Padilla	Rodolfo Rabanales
Rafael Castellanos	Rodríguez Meijaró Iturbe
Rafael García P.	Roger Guillén Castro
Rafael Huizi Clavier	Rómulo Otaso Pérez
Rafael Méndez Díaz	Rosaura Aguiar Aranguren
Rafael Mendoza Rivera	Rubén Barboza
Rafael Ojeda Henríquez	Rubén Darío Bustillos Rábaco
Rafael Orlando Chacón Prada	Rubén Flores Martínez
Rafael Varela Gómez	Rubén Ortiz Córdova
Ramón Álvarez Viso	Rubén Piña Zaa
Ramón Rodríguez	Sammy Jesús Landaeta Millán
Reinaldo Casanova	Sergio Contreras
Remo Alejandro Pasarelo Golding	Sergio Omar Calderón
Ricardo Álvarez Uzcátegui	Sergio R. Sucre
Ricardo García Enríquez	Silvino José Bustillos
Richard David Figueras	Simón Uzcanga Lovera
Richard Toquer Loero	Sixto Díaz Miranda
Roberto Campos Silva	Thaís de Gibs
Roberto Henríquez	Ubilerma de Jesús Brito Useche
Roberto Marrero	Valentina Leseur

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Vicente Brito

Vicente Dávila Arreaza

Víctor Escobar

Víctor Hernández Dépori

Víctor José García

Víctor Manuel Dálamo

Víctor Mendoza

Víctor Ruido Medina

Víctor Sequeda

Vilma Hernández

Vilma Martínez

Vilma Petrash

Vladimir Castellanos

William Chávez

Weles Sacarías

Yaniret Suárez Mujica

Yeikok Abadi

Yuly Penet

ATTACHMENT II: CARMONA'S CABINET

Candidatos.

MRI: Gral. Damián ✓

(Cipriano Heredia
Juan Foo, Mejía
Gerardo Arellano
Leonor Filardo
Norman Pino
José Antonio Gil Y.

MRE: José Rodríguez Iturbe ✓
Fernando Garbani

✓ Patricia Polo

Min. Finanzas: Domingo Fontiveros
Maxim Ross
Leopoldo Martínez ✓

Min. Agricultura: Raúl De Armas ✓

Min. Trabajo: César A. Carballo ✓

(Andrés Velásquez
Luis Araque
Oscar Meza)

Min. Producc. y Comercio: ~~Walter Escobedo~~ ✓

Min. Planificación y Desarrollo: León Arismendi ✓

Min. Infraestructura: Ing. Juan Andrés Sosa ✓

Min. Defensa: Héctor Ramírez Pérez ✓

Min. Salud: Rafael Arceiza ✓

Min. Ambiente: Luken Quintana

Min. Ciencia y Tecnología: Ignacio Avalos

Min. Energía y Minas: Alberto Quirós Corredí
Eduardo Praselj ✓

Min. Secretaría Presidencia: Jesús E. Bricetto G. ✓

Bandes: Maxim Ross

BCV: Domingo Fontiveros ✓
Nelson Ortiz
Carlos Hernández Beffino

~~Idem~~
~~Idem~~
Educación:
Fernando Carrizosa

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Francisco Faraco
Marcos Sandoval

PDVSA: Guacaipuro Lameda

Contraloría: Liliana Hernández

Procuraduría: Nelson

Fiscalía: Gerardo Blyde

Defensoría del Pueblo:

TSJ:

Alan Brewer Carias
Román Duque Corredor
Carmen Elena Crespo
Carlos Ayala Corao

BANCO VIV.: David Morán

DISIN: Cuidio Peggion
P.N. Ivan Simchen

ATTACHMENT III: ARREAZA'S TESTIMONY

BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA
PUBLIC MINISTRY
FOURTH PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE WITH
NATIONAL COMPETENCE

RECORD OF INTERVIEW

On this 27th day of September, 2004, at 08:40 a.m., Mr. **ARREAZA PADILLA RAFAEL OCTAVIO**, holder of Identity Card number V-5565351, domiciled at *Av. Central, Quinta Los Cascarones, La Lagunita, El Hatillo; Caracas 1082, telephone number (0058-2-12) 9637059*, a physician, voluntarily appeared before this Fourth Prosecutor's Office of the Public Ministry for the Environmental Defense with National Competence for the purposes of giving his testimony in connection with the inquiry that is being conducted by this Office referred to the developments of last April 12th, 2002, when a *de facto* Government was constituted presided over by Mr. Pedro Carmona

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Estanga. The interviewed is assisted by Attorney at Law GUSTAVO ENRIQUE LOPEZ MAZA, registered with the Attorneys Bar Association under number 64298. As to the matter he stated as follows: "In the early hours of the morning of April 12th, at 04:30 a.m. I received a telephone call at my place from a sister of Pedro Carmona, who is my cousin, and she asked me to go to the Palace of Miraflores to help him with the situation at hand; I left immediately for Miraflores and by the time I arrived, Pedro Carmona was entering. Time: 06:30 a.m. I entered the Palace of Miraflores with Carmona and we found all doors open and Daniel Romero and Pedro Carmona's PA in Fedecámaras (the Association of Business Chambers), Rear Admiral Molina Tamayo and a National Guard Colonel named Carrasquero were there when we arrived. They briefed him about the situation and tell him that only one telephone was working, and that the computers were inactive. A few minutes later, Vice Admiral Ramírez Pérez arrived. Other Rear Admirals, the Brigade General of the Air Force Pedro Pereira, the Division General of the National Guard Alfonso Martínez arrived as well, they communicate to Carmona that President Chávez

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was locked in a room in the Army General Headquarters. From that moment on many military officers begin to arrive to the Palace, among them, the army general Lugo, and colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas who demanded immediately the Sun (*T.N. equivalent to a “star” corresponding to division general*) for one of them– and his appointment as General Commander of the Army because he had risked his life. Further, he ranked first in his promotion to general. The other one, Julio Rodríguez Salas, demanded his immediate promotion to general because his participation in the developments was decisive. In that moment, Carmona tells them not to be aware of military matters and asked them to address to the Minister of Defense he had appointed, Ramírez Pérez who, in turn, tells them that the time was improper for these matters. Military officers and civilians continued to show up asking for soft, cushy jobs and offices. I had the chance to see discussions among persons who proposed themselves to offices of minister or ambassador. It seemed an open-air fair where people scrambled for offices. General Guaicaipuro Lameda also showed up and offered to chair PDVSA. It became necessary to control the

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access gates to Miraflores because they were open and access was not restricted. A few hours later, Admiral Ramírez Pérez said this was the outcome of a nine-month long military conspiracy where Division General of the Army Enrique Medina Gómez and General Rommel Fuenmayor were involved. The latter was pleased to comment that he was the one who conducted the psychological operation to call President Chávez over the phone and threat him to bomb Miraflores in 15 minutes if he failed to sign the resignation. All the officers I mentioned before were telling about the negotiation process with the President demanding him to resign; that the President had set a sole condition for the resignation, that he would be sent to Cuba and that they protect his family. Likewise, General Rommel Fuenmayor said that he himself and General Néstor González González did not agree with the President leaving the country. On the contrary, he had to be kept prisoner in Venezuela so that he could pay for his crimes. At noon, Eduardo Fernández showed up with a mobile phone in his hand shouting I got Aznar (referring to the Spanish president) waiting here, he pushed the doors into the office and gave the phone to

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Carmona and stayed inside for a while. Immediately afterwards, Rafael Marín showed up. He was aware of the decree and of the formation of a National Consultation Council which was to supersede the National Assembly. He looked very calmed and the only concern he showed was that AD maintained the same proportion of representatives in the Consultation Council than it had in the National Assembly, and he demanded Carmona so. I felt that all the political parties present in Miraflores did not care about the dissolution of the Assembly as long as they could keep the proportion of seats in the Consultation Council.”As from 2:00 p.m. doctors Cecilia Sosa Gómez, Nelson Socorro and Gustavo Linarez Benzo came to the President’s Office and told me that they wanted to talk with Carmona.

When I inquired about the purpose of their visit so that I could inform Carmona, they told me that they had serious questions about the decree⁸⁸ and they asked me if I had read it. I told them I knew nothing about the decree and they showed it to me. As soon as I read it, I immediately say that it was an outrage, legally speaking, because you cannot dissolve with a decree offices elected by ballots.

I asked for a copy of the decree to make sure with

Carmona if that was the right version. When he saw it he told me at once: Yes, that is the decree. I told him then: Look, there are Magistrates and lawyers outside with very serious criticisms, which I share, about that draft decree. He tells me: Well, let them come in. When Cecilia Sosa begins to talk about the unconstitutionality of the decree I make the following comment: You cannot dissolve the Assembly because its members were elected by ballots. Further, it is a political mistake for a transition government to fight all the political parties represented at the Assembly and fight all governors. Carmona says: The thing is that Allan (referring to Allan Brewer Carías) says that if we do not dissolve the Assembly immediately, sooner or later that Assembly is going to dissolve me. Someone said that the Supreme Court of Justice could be dissolved without any problems, as well as the Prosecutor General's Office, The State Attorney's Office and the People Attorney's Office, because they could be temporarily designated until a new Assembly designates such offices in a legal manner. Carmona ends up saying: Let's call Allan. Right in that moment, Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas and General Romel Fuenmayor entered the office and

joined the meeting. Carmona takes out his phone book where I could read: "Brewer Allan" and a Movilnet telephone company number, Carmona phones and tells him: Allan, we are gathered here with a group of lawyers who question the dissolution of the Assembly and the removal of governors and mayors by decree. Allan answered with the same version: The matter is, man, Carmona, that if you don't dissolve the Assembly sooner or later that Assembly is going to dissolve you. We, the ones present there, replied that it was not like that. Carmona conveyed such comments to Allan Brewer-Carías, who, according to Carmona ends up saying: Convince yourself, Carmona, this is the decree. Not a single step backwards. We all there realized that as from that moment, Carmona who firstly had become hesitant with regard to the decree was fully persuaded that he had to follow Allan Brewer-Carías' recommendation. The military present say, Julio Rodríguez Salas say, well, Mr. President. We have the power in our hands with that decree. We'll amend it along the way. After that, lawyers began to leave. Thereafter, General Vásquez Velasco and colonels of both the army and the National Guard got in the office. They explained

to somebody in the Presidential Office who asked how come a Civilian-Military Junta had not been formed and they answered that that is what had been anticipated, but that the recommendation at that time -given that they had thought of invoking the OAS Democratic Charter- was not to have any military participating in a Junta because it would smell like a coup d'Etat, thus rendering the relations with the OAS and the UN complicated. This could be prevented if the military component would refrain from participating in the proposed Junta, which would be composed by Efraín Vásquez Velasco, Pedro Carmona Estanga and Carlos Ortega. Vásquez Velasco decides that the Church should occupy the seat of the Armed Force in the Government Junta and they asked Cardinal Ignacio Velasco who refused to take part in the Junta because the Church does not approve of such participation. Then a meeting of militaries of the Army was held at their General Command Headquarters and referring to Pedro Carmona and Carlos Ortega concluded: A Junta made up by two is not possible. We need to decide and count. Who votes for Ortega? And nobody raised their hands. Who votes for Carmona? More or less half of them

raised their hands. Then, they sent for Carmona to appoint him President of the transition. In this connection, Carmona told that he had gone to a hotel in Altamira where he registered with a phony name, the reason why he was not found when they were looking for him, that he had simply gone to take a shower and change clothes to subsequently go to the Army General Command to take part in the Government Junta. People kept on parading asking for offices and positions. Suddenly, Pedro Carmona calls me to a corner and tells me: Would you accept the ministry of Health? You are knowledgeable and your administration chairing the Social Security Institute was brilliant. I replied that I couldn't refuse. From the moment I accepted the Ministry of Health, physicians, the Metropolitan Area Health directors begin to pass by to explain the serious and precarious situation faced by the hospitals due to the lack of supplies and medicines. I then undertook the task of contacting immediately pharmaceutical labs and health related companies so that they helped relieve the situation, which immediately responded with donations. I likewise called private clinics so that they attend the seriously wounded people who had no chance to be attended

at the hospitals. Over 30 persons were moved to El Ávila, La Floresta, Urológico, Metropolitana and Hospital de Clínicas Caracas private clinics. Fortunately, none of the seriously wounded patients died from lack of medical assistance. I never spoke of that. It is the first time now. At around 03:15 p.m. a group of militaries order to throw away everything in the President's Office. A colonel takes down the Honoris Causa Doctorate Diploma of President Chávez off the wall and throws it to the floor. Carmona came in at that moment, and the Colonel tells him: Mr. President I ordered to clean and throw away everything here. Then Carmona told him: Don't throw away everything. We need to sort the political and the administrative things which should keep moving forward. Carmona asks me then to please sort everything out and to deliver to him the most relevant or political compromising stuff. I then engaged in performing this task. I called two waiters of the Military House to bring empty cases. They told me there were no cases and brought black garbage bags. I started to sort out as follows: personal stuff of the President since I found identity cards of the President, his wife, children; original birth records of his children, his clinical background

and the ones of his children, diplomas, decorations, books and letters from collaborators and friends. I sent all such personal stuff with an emissary to him in the Army General Command. When he came back from delivering his stuff to the President, he told me that Chávez was thankful for sending the stuff that was found there. I continued with the sorting of documents, beginning with the administrative stuff. I sorted the documents by state and by ministry placing everything in a piece of furniture inside the President's Office. Then, I sorted out the political stuff and found all the letters that Fidel Castro had addressed to the President from the time before he won the elections until the most recent one related to the Costa Rica Summit that had taken place in those days. I likewise found letters from Saddam Hussein, originals and Spanish translation, letters from Ghadaffi and other left-wing leaders. As I read the letters from Fidel, Carmona came in and read one of them and the content alarmed him. I sorted all those letters out. I had the chance to read them all. Colonel Julio Rodríguez Salas asked me to give him the letters to forward them to the U.S. State Department so that they declare President Chávez a terrorist. I replied

to the Colonel that the letters were under my responsibility, that he should ask Carmona's permission and that he himself had to directly instruct me. I concealed them in a drawer of the President's desk, under a stack of papers so that they could not be seen. Around 04:00 p.m., Daniel Romero, with the decree in his hand, begins to call everyone to the hall where the document would be read. All those present entered the Ayacucho Hall. When I came in they placed me next to Cardinal Ignacio Velasco and Carmona's wife and son. Thereafter, Daniel Romero read the grotesque decree, and since I was seated next to Cardinal Velasco, he asked me: My son, how do you see everything? And I replied: Very bad, Cardinal, and he further inquired: Why? And he engaged in a conversation with me and is surprised by all the things I told him as to the dreadful decree and the military situation that by that time was delicate as a result of the everybody-for-himself attitude; there was no consistency, and the thing began to show cracks. Upon swearing in, Carmona called the members of political parties to sign the decree. The first who signed was Cardinal Ignacio Velasco; then, the governor of Zulia State, Manuel Rosales,

in representation of the governors; José Curiel, Secretary-General of Copei party, in representation of the political parties; and the business representations. As from that moment Daniel Romero began to collect signatures from among the public and tells me that I was a minister and that I had to sign the Decree, which I didn't do. I went back to the President's Office and I found Ramírez Pérez and Julio Rodríguez Salas, very annoyed both of them. Ramírez Pérez was saying: We needed to comply with the condition of sending the President to Cuba so that he signed the resignation letter, because if the President failed to resign, this was a coup d'Etat, some said that the thesis he had to uphold was that of a power vacuum, and he replied that if there was no resignation signed by the President, it was a coup d'Etat; then, it happened to me to ask him why General Lucas Rincón had announced to the country the resignation of the President, and he answered: By the time Lucas Rincón was giving the press conference with the announcement of the resignation of the President, that was true because General Rincón had gone to Miraflores to talk with President Chávez at the time when he was

negotiating the resignation, when General Manuel Rosendo and General Eliécer Hurtado Soucre were present. But immediately after Lucas Rincón leaves for the Ministry of Defence the game rules were changed to President Chávez. In response, Chávez refused to resign and proclaimed himself an imprisoned President. In this manner, when Lucas addressed to the country he told the truth. Around 6:00 p.m. Manuel Cova arrived along with other unionists. When Carmona sees him, he offers him the Vice Presidency, which he neither accepted nor rejected. Yet he was asking for some deputy minister offices. When Manuel Cova sees that I come in the President's Office, he tells me: Arreaza, what are you doing here if you are a Chavista? Everybody laughed. I replied: I have always had the problem that Copei partisans say I am an AD follower and the AD partisans say I am a Copei follower. The truth is that I have never belonged, do not belong or will ever belong to any political party. He, then, stared at me. Later, around six or seven post meridiem, I went to my place very concerned and, if you wish, sick with all what I could watch that day – Nobody was there for the country but, on the contrary, everybody just kept an eye on his own

interest, trying to fish in troubled waters. The day after, Saturday, I went once again around seven in the morning to the Miraflores Palace where I found that all the documents sorted out and absolutely everything in the President's Office had been picked up by the Military House loyal to President Chavez. They had picked up everything. I got ready to follow up the situation of the wounded people in hospitals and private clinics. I checked that all the help I requested had come on time. At around 09:00 a.m., somewhat upset, Vice Admiral Ramírez Pérez got in the President's Office and says that the situation is not under control and that a bloodshed could happen. One of the persons acting by that time as secretary of Carmona tells him: Mr. President, representatives and owners of the media are here. Carmona answered: Take them to the Council of Ministers room. I'll be there in a minute. Carmona asks Ramírez Pérez, whom he designated Minister of Defense, to make a presentation about the current situation to these gentlemen. He asks me to join him to talk about the control of the situation of the wounded people. Then, we walked to the Council of Ministers room where Representatives and owners of Venevisión, RCTV, Globovisión, El

Nacional, El Universal and others waited. Patricia Poleo was also there, and then Ramírez Pérez begins: Gentlemen, the situation is extremely delicate. They (the army) did not allow us to meet the condition of sending Chávez to Cuba, and therefore, Chávez refuses to resign, which means this is a coup d'Etat. The military situation, especially in the army, gets more complicated per the hour. As from this moment, the casualties will come from the Armed Forces. Of course, everybody was alarmed and began to talk about possible strategies. To me, who was present, each one sounded more absurd than the other. Suddenly another discussion broke which had nothing to do with the serious situation at hand, because Carmona told Patricia Poleo that he was going to appoint her to the Central Information Office (OCI). Immediately, the media representatives replied and demanded Carmona to appoint the candidate they already had. They had a brief argument with Patricia Poleo. After that, all the media people stayed in the Council of Ministers room as we left. In our way out I tripped with Julio Rodríguez Salas, with red spots everywhere in his face, openly unsettled and, according to him, talking with General Baduel.

Thereafter, we headed for the President's Office where I gave Carmona an overview about how to successfully handle healthcare in Venezuela jointly with the Ministry of Environment in order to correct the water supply problems and environmental sanitation as a source of the main diseases and child mortality in Venezuela. In that moment, Julio Rodríguez Salas and Molina Tamayo came in. They tell Carmona that they want to talk in private with him. Carmona replies that there was no problem if I was present. Then, they told him: Well, they say that they will bomb Miraflores at any time and that Baduel was ready to go rescue the President regardless if he has to fight anyone. Thereupon, Carmona tells me: "I am going to the Army General Command Headquarters. Do you want to come with me?" And I replied: "I'd better go home. Call me if you need me." I actually went home. By the time I left Miraflores, the Bolivarian Circles had totally surrounded the Palace and when I got close to the gate, some of them, inebriated, recognized me and said: That is Doctor Arreaza. He is a good dick. Come with us, we will help you out of here. That is how I got out and went home. That is all. **THEREUPON, THE INTERVIEWEE IS**

QUESTIONED AS FOLLOWS: FIRST QUESTION: Please state the names of the media representatives who met with Mr. PEDRO CARMONA ESTANGA. **HE ANSWERED:** Gustavo Cisneros, Marcel Granier, Calvo Otero, Miguel Henrique Otero, Patricia Poleo, the president of Globovisión named Zuloaga, Alberto Federico Ravell. There was someone from Televen. The one who mostly spoke was MARCEL GRANIER. **SECOND QUESTION:** Please state if such persons made an information policy at that time. **HE ANSWERED:** Yes – Not to broadcast any development until further notice. And another one, invading channel 8 (VTV) signal. **THIRD QUESTION:** Please state if you heard Mr. Daniel Romero call those present to sign the decree as an acknowledgement of adherence to the process. **HE ANSWERED:** Yes, many times. In fact, he told me I had to sign because I was a minister, but I didn't do it. Then, a girl holding some sheets of paper to collect the signatures was sent to me. It was known that they were going to be attached to the decree. At that time an uncle of mine took me to sign one of those sheets, which I signed. **FOURTH:** Please

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state if you have anything to add to this statement.

HE ANSWERED: Yes, during my stay there I received indications by army officers to look for and safeguard all politically incriminating documents for purposes of opening a trial against President Chávez. As I said before, I always kept such documents.”

"I think it's very difficult to be objective in a polarized nation like Venezuela. However, Ernesto is able to touch on objectivity in this book. And that is one of the most captivating aspects of it. Because next to the vision and version of the events by those loyal to the Constitution, to democracy and to President Chávez, it contrasts with the testimony of the adventurous coup leaders of that date. And then, considering this contrast, the reader perfectly realizes on which side reason and truth were and on which side ignominy and shame were. This book is a triumph of that which we often scorn, which is objectivity.

JOSÉ VICENTE RANGEL

Teatro Teresa Carreño

14 de noviembre de 2009

"I sincerely recommend it even though I do not share many of the observations in it, but it is a well written, documented and argued book, as well as it respects the subjects of their animosities, something which is appreciated in the current insults situation in Venezuela.

RAFAEL ARRÁIZ LUCCA

El Nacional

6 de diciembre de 2009

ISBN: 978-980-7803-08-3



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