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How the "Washington Consensus" Endangers U.S. National Security

by David Sirota

Every now and again, an article comes down the pike that accidentally displays all of the innate elitist biases that help explain why anti-Americanism is on the rise throughout the world. In many ways, you have to appreciate these articles, because of their (albeit inadvertent) honesty.

Today's is a [particularly telling piece from the New York Times](#), about the upcoming presidential election in Bolivia. The article profiles Evo Morales, the Aymara Indian leader turned congressman who is running. Within the first six paragraphs of the story, we are told that he is carrying a "radical vision" in contrast to other "pragmatic" Latin American leaders - a contrast undoubtedly meant to frighten us. Then, transitioning into language that mimics Soviet-era "domino theory" hysteria/paranoia, we are told that if Morales and other potential candidates of the "left" are successful in Latin America, it could create a general "drift that could bring policies sharply deviating" from the past - policies that we are told will bring the ire of our own government.

It takes concentration to get through all the alarmism - but when you do, you suddenly see just how threatening, bought-off and self-serving our government must look to those living in other nations. Because, really - what is this frightening, "radical" vision that our government is publicly fulminating over? Just read:

"Mr. Morales vows to veer Bolivia away from liberalized trade and privatizations that have marked the country's economy for a generation, tapping into the discontent of voters upset that market reforms did little to improve their lives....He offers a range of solutions, like loans to microbusinesses and the formation of more cooperatives. He also says his government will demand a bigger take from the foreign corporations developing Bolivia's large natural gas reserves... 'The policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, under the direction of the United States government, which concentrate capital in few hands, is not a solution,' he said."

In other words, the New York Times - no doubt just reporting the sentiment of those in our own government - wants the American public to view as "radical" any efforts to reevaluate corporate-written trade deals, privatization policies, natural resource giveaways, and an overall economic system that concentrates wealth in the hands of a few. This, even though polls in America itself show the public likely supports such a reevaluation domestically.

To its credit, in a moment of candor the Times tells us that such policies "sharply deviate from longstanding American economic remedies like unfettered trade and privatization, better known as the Washington Consensus." That's an appropriate term because, as said, such an elitist consensus really only exists in the Washington Beltway's ["strategic class"](#) of lobbyists, politicians, political operatives and self-important "strategists," not in the American heartland, and certainly not in the rest of the world.

Let me be very clear - Morales obviously has some troubling traits, including his resistance to international anti-coca efforts (though, as the movie [Traffic](#) showed, America's ridiculous narcotics policy of focusing almost exclusively on halting supply, rather than demand, is really at the heart of the drug issue). But that issue is clearly not what the article or the Washington Consensus is referring to in vilifying Morales and marginalizing his politics.

Similarly, I'm not enough of a Latin American expert to know whether Morales may actually be advocating for some truly "radical," terrible or dangerous ideas that are not mentioned in this article, and if he is, then it's a different story. But if we can take this article at face value and safely assume the Times has gone

out of its way to fully detail all of Morales' supposedly "radical" policies, then what this article really is is clear, documented proof of biased propaganda from America's media-government Establishment. It is propaganda, seen both in foreign and domestic arenas, that is crassly designed to vilify any political movement that actually represents working-class people.

Using euphemisms to shamelessly fearmonger, this article blares to the world what our government's real foreign policy agenda is. It is not one focused only on stopping national security threats, as our tough-talking President and Vice President would have you believe. And it is not one designed to supposedly lift the poor and oppressed out of their plight. It is one focused on helping the corporate powers that run our government put its tentacles into every corner of the world (for a good example, just look at Iraq and the oil industry), even if that means solidifying regimes/systems that make things worse for ordinary people. And it is one that treats as a danger any nation/person who might enact policies that will restrict the corporate profit motive from running roughshod over society.

Yet, incredibly, even as all of this is well-detailed and blared to the world, we then sit back and wonder why citizens in other countries can't stand America, and see us as a threat. We think that by just [sending Republican political hacks like Karen Hughes](#) all over the world on "goodwill" trips we can make the world forget what our bought-off government's corrupt motives really are - even though by doing that we actually further insult the intelligence of those who we are trying to court.

Here is the very simple truth that few - if any - politicians or journalists ever talk about without reflexively and dishonestly screaming "weak on national security!" or worse: unless we really show the world that we are interested in more than just using our power and military might to go to bat for corporate interests, we are never going to even compete in the war of hearts and minds that is the most important battle to win if we are to actually face down our most pressing, long-term national security challenges. Put another way, unless the destructive "Washington Consensus" is challenged, and we wholly reevaluate our own foreign policy posture, we are going to continue to watch global anti-Americanism rise and our government erode - not strengthen - our national security, no matter how advanced our weapons systems are, no matter how strong our armed forces are, no matter how many military conflicts we wage, and no matter how slick our propaganda is.

David Sirota is a writer and veteran political strategist. He just completed a book for Random House's Crown Publishers entitled "Hostile Takeover" - it will be released in the Spring of 2006. Sirota is currently the co-chairperson of the Progressive Legislative Action Network ([PLAN](#)). - a position he took after finishing a two-year stint at the [Center for American Progress](#). Sirota is currently a Senior Editor at [In These Times](#) magazine, and a regular contributor to [The Nation](#) magazine. He is also a twice-weekly guest on the Al Franken Show.