

Senior Executive Intelligence Brief

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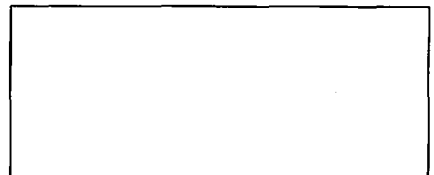
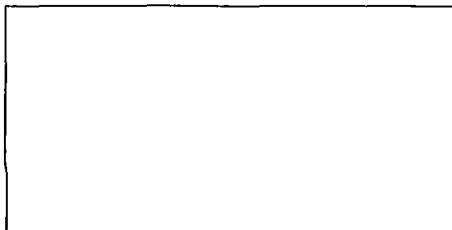
Tuesday, 5 March 2002

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AMERICAS

Venezuela:

Chavez Beleaguered, but Opposition Divided [REDACTED]

Opposition to President Chavez is mounting. A public opinion poll last month indicates 53 percent of Venezuelans want Chavez to step down, up from 36 percent last August. Calls for his resignation by public officials and private-sector leaders are becoming daily occurrences.

— *Even some of Chavez's former allies are turning on him.* Luis Miquilena, Chavez's political mentor and former Interior Minister, is working with opposition groups trying to persuade Chavez to resign [REDACTED]

The military also is divided in its support for Chavez. The high command publicly backs the President. [REDACTED]

— A successful coup would be difficult to mount. [REDACTED]

Venezuela's worsening economy will fuel additional discord. The cost of basic consumer goods—about 70 percent of which are imported—is rising because of last month's currency devaluation, cutting into Chavez's support among poor Venezuelans, his core constituency. Declining real wages will embolden already hostile labor unions.

— The opposition is planning demonstrations this spring, including a general strike scheduled for 18 March. [REDACTED]

Opposition leaders are not unified and lack a singular strategy for replacing Chavez. Most opposition leaders are seeking a constitutional mechanism for removing him, but existing legal means, such as impeachment, are cumbersome. Chavez's control over the National Assembly has helped stall legislation that would enable recall votes at the midpoint of a president's term. [REDACTED]

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