

Office of the Secretary of Defense
International Security Affairs

Press Guidance on Venezuela: 16 April 2002

Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) contacts with senior Venezuelan officials, military and civilian alike, have consistently and unambiguously reinforced the US Government's position of support for democracy in Venezuela, in Latin America, and elsewhere. OSD's senior civilian policymakers for the region have left no room for doubt about our support for the democratic process and the rule of law, and our opposition to coups, rebellion, and unconstitutional actions.

On December 18, 2001, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense-Western Hemisphere Affairs Roger Pardo-Maurer met at the Pentagon with GEN Lucas Romero Rincon, Chief of the Venezuelan High Military Command (roughly equivalent to Venezuelan chief-of-staff). GEN Rincon and his staff were unequivocally told:

- That US policy is to support democracy, respect for human rights, civilian control over the military, and "adherence to the strictest constitutionality" (The conversation took place in Spanish; the precise words were "*apego a la más estricta constitucionalidad*").
- That the US would actively oppose coups or unconstitutional actions.
- That the "Democracy Clause" adopted by the Organization of American States, in Lima, Peru, in September 2001, states that constitutional democracy is the sole legitimate form of government for the Western Hemisphere.

Senior Department of Defense policymakers have not, to their knowledge, had any contacts, direct or indirect, with persons implicated in the Venezuelan coup attempt; nor have they permitted their staff to engage in contacts with persons credibly reported to be associated with unconstitutional actions.