

HUGO CHAVEZ' BALSA WOOD DRONE

There were two very fascinating pieces of news out of Venezuela today.

First, Venezuela has officially surpassed Saudi Arabia in terms of proven petroleum reserves.

Venezuela surpassed Saudi Arabia to become the world's largest holder of proven oil reserves, a resource that President Hugo Chavez promises to tap if he gets re-elected in October.

The South American country's deposits were at 296.5 billion barrels at the end of last year, data from BP Plc (BP/) show. Saudi Arabia held 265.4 billion barrels, BP said yesterday in its annual Statistical Review of World Energy.

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Venezuela now holds 18 percent of the world's reserves, according to BP data.

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Saudi Arabia now trails Venezuela with a 16 percent share of world proven oil reserves, according to the report. Canada ranks third with 175.2 billion barrels, or 11 percent of total, unchanged from the revised number for 2010.

While Saudi oil remains a lot easier to extract and refine, the assholes holding us by the nuts in the Middle East are now officially second fiddle to the asshole we tried to overthrow a decade back. Lucky for us, the guy in charge of Canada right now is an asshole who likes to suck up to America.

This state of affairs may be one reason why Chavez just rolled out Venezuela's very own drone. In terms of capabilities, Chavez' drone

is not much more sophisticated than the balsa-wood and duck tape contraption Saddam had which Bush used to help drum up the Iraq War.

The drone has a range of 100 kilometers (60 miles), can reach an altitude of 3,000 meters (nearly 10,000 feet) according to General Julio Morales, head of the state-run Cavim arms manufacturer, which developed the aircraft.

They can stay aloft for up to 90 minutes and can transmit real-time video and images, and is currently being upgraded in order to carry out night flights, he added.

The three-by-four-meter drone was part of a system "exclusively for defense," aimed at surveillance and the monitoring of pipelines, dams and other rural infrastructure, Morales said.

But I am rather interested in Chavez' partners on this balsa wood toy.

"Russia, China, Iran and other allied countries" had contributed to the project, he added.

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Another official said the drone was made from components manufactured in Venezuela and assembled by military engineers trained in Iran.

Sure, we've known that Chavez is close to the Iranian regime. And we've known that Russia and China will help them both at times. But I've suggested that we'd be idiots if we thought China, especially, but also Russia weren't trying to do to us in the Middle East what we did to Russia: provide our enemies a way to counteract the air superiority that gives us free reign.

Maybe Chavez is blustering as he so often does. But his balsa wood drone announcement seems to be more about signaling cooperation, however meager, on an area that is central to our expansive goals than necessarily making us fear his balsa wood toy itself.