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From: Stratfor Policy <stratforpolicy@stratfor.com>

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Subject: Hansen, McKibben to Speak at Bolivia Climate Conference

Without the participation of Hansen and McKibben, the Cochabamba conference would be remarkable only for the organizing of traditional anti-American and anti-capitalist organizations with representatives of national governments around a common platform. Hansen's and McKibben's participation suggests that these ideologically radical organizations have allies in the grassroots climate movement. This does not mean that the U.S. grassroots climate movement shares the strident positions of most of those taking part in the conference.

At the same time, it suggests that McKibben believes that association with these figures and ideas will not jeopardize his standing with the movement in the U.S. Further, their presence may have the effect of softening the perception among some U.S. activists that Morales, FoE-I and their allies are ideologically radical. Hansen and McKibben have not joined in calls for a dramatic reconsideration within the United States of capitalism. The bulk of the groups and individuals present at the conference, however, will be dedicated to radical change, and the effective imprimatur of figures such as McKibben and Hansen could help to spread those ideas among some of their followers in the U.S., as well as help groups such as Rising Tide North America (whose motto is "structural change, not climate change") find a more mainstream following in the grassroots climate movement.

The conference will likely receive wide coverage by the global media, and organs in developing countries are especially likely to present the conference in the terms Morales has used -- a "true" meeting of people, as opposed to the a "masquerade" that took place in Copenhagen. The impact of this coverage on the global climate change debate is likely to be small. However, it will be important to note the extent to which the ideas from this conference migrate to other conferences that will see some overlap, such as the June 2010 U.S. Social Forum held in Detroit. This will help determine the long-standing importance of what happens in Bolivia to the global climate and broader social movements.

More important are the possible linkages among NGOs and among NGOs and government representatives that might develop at the conference. The conference could result in the creation of various ad hoc coalitions, such as a reborn Oilwatch Coalition to fight global upstream oil and gas activity or a global movement in support of the Tobin Tax, a concept that has also experienced a renewed level of interest.

Finally, the idea of a standing global tribunal -- though not a new idea -- could bring negative media attention to the corporations "tried" in these "courts" (Despite the similarity of the complaints, we have not seen any indications that the Kivalina plaintiffs or their attorneys are involved in the conference or the tribunal.)