

## **Institute head says Martinelli pushing Panama into chaos**

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The government of President Ricardo Martinelli continues to get bad press coverage both locally and internationally.

First it was The Wall Street Journal, which today devoted an article about the government and "a growing chorus of Panamanians who warn that Martinelli is shifting the country towards authoritarianism."

The story compares Martinelli to Chávez in Venezuela, noting both control their unicameral National Assemblies and have tried to control the press.

"And like Chavez, Martinelli understands the power of the public purse," the article stated.

Warnings published by The Wall Street Journal echoed the analysis Cato Institute Latin America expert Juan Carlos Hidalgo, who said that "Martinelli seems to not care that he is leading the country into a situation of chaos."

Hidalgo visited Panama recently and said, "Martinelli continues his attacks against Panamanian institutions and seems to love constantly living in crisis."

He said the evidence of this was shown in the demonstrations today in the National Assembly and the march for democracy.

Hidalgo compared the situation of democracy in this country to Honduras in 2009, when there occurred a "constitutional breach" that led to a coup.

"The same could be said of Martinelli since it is he who is abusing the country's democratic institutions," said Hidalgo.

The international community - he said - is paying more attention what is happening in Panama.

"More and more people will take note that what happens in Panama is a very serious situation...it seems that President Martinelli really has designs of wanting to subvert the Constitution, of wanting re-election. This course which will lead to a major impact within the civil society," warned Hidalgo.