

Need to embalm a world leader? Call Russia

March 11 2013, by Luc Perrot



Picture taken on October 28, 1991, shows the embalmed body of Soviet Union founder Vladimir Lenin lying in the Mausoleum at the Red Square in Moscow. It's a process described as "not a pretty sight" that involves the extraction of all the blood from a corpse. But if Venezuela needs help embalming Hugo Chavez then Russia has expertise stretching back to Soviet revolutionary leader Lenin.

It's a process described as "not a pretty sight" that involves the extraction of all the blood from a corpse. But if Venezuela needs help embalming Hugo Chavez then Russia has expertise stretching back to Soviet revolutionary leader Vladimir Lenin.

Authorities in Caracas announced last week that Chavez's body will be embalmed "like Lenin" whose mummified relics have been on public display in the Moscow Red Square mausoleum since the Bolshevik Revolution leader's death in 1924.

It is not however clear whether Venezuela—which under Chavez forged a close partnership with [Vladimir Putin](#)'s Russia—has sought Russian specialists' help or will do so in future.

Approached on Monday by AFP, the Moscow laboratory in charge of Lenin's body declined to give any official comment on the matter.

But a member of its team, Yuri Denisov-Nikolsky said that although no official request has been made so far by Caracas, the Russian specialists were ready to help if need be.

Another Russian specialist who helped preserved Lenin's body in Soviet times told the ITAR-TASS news agency on Friday that "the Russian technologies for embalment are absolutely first rate".

"We never disappoint our customers," Denisov-Nikolsky said adding however that Venezuelan authorities might opt to use Cuban experts, who embalmed the body of the Argentinian president Juan Peron's wife Eva in 1952.

Now called the Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants, the laboratory owns the methodology which was used to embalm the bodies of a string of pro-Moscow leaders during and after the Cold War.

These included Bulgaria's Communist leader Georgy Dimitrov (1949), the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and the Czechoslovak president Klement Gottwald (both dead in 1953), the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh (1969), the Angolan president Agostino Neto (1979), Guyana's

president Forbes Burnham (1985), and North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung (1994).

After the death in 2011 of the latter's son, Kim Jong-Il, the Moscow institute specialist Pavel Fomenko, described the embalming procedure in detail.

"It is not a pretty sight," he said in a rare interview to the Moskovsky Komsomolets daily.

To begin, a team of three to seven specialists "remove all internal organs, fill veins with a solution, and extract blood from tissues," he said.

"The body is placed in a glass bathtub filled with the embalming solution, covered with a lid, and wrapped in a white cloth" as precise temperature and humidity conditions are maintained in the room, Fomenko explained.

"Gradually, the solution replaces water in the body's cells. Embalming lasts for some six months."

To ensure decades-long preservation, the process requires constant upkeep, including invariable temperature and humidity regimes.

Lenin's body is also protected from bacterial threat by a glass sarcophagus. Twice a week it is inspected and every 18 months it is immersed in an embalming solution for a month.

Lenin's mausoleum is currently closed for restoration and is covered by a huge white awning spoiling the historic view across Red Square.

The head of Russia's federal bodyguard service (FSO) Sergei Devyatov which is responsible for protecting the mausoleum told ITAR-TASS that

it would remain closed until April although Lenin's body was inside and itself undergoing "precautionary work".

According to Moskovsky Komsomolets, of those who were embalmed by the Russian specialists, only the bodies of Ho Chi Minh and Kim Il-Sung are now preserved "in their original state," like Lenin.

According to a poll in 2012 by the FOM research group, 56 percent of Russians favour the burial of Lenin's [body](#), 28 percent are against and the rest remain undecided. However in recent years the issue has rarely featured prominently in public debate.

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