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Venezuela: Disturbing Echoes of History

Posted By *Maria Paez Victor* On July 31, 2019 @ 1:56 am In articles 2015 | [Comments Disabled](#)



Drawing by Nathaniel St. Clair

Amidst the cacophony of misinformation about Venezuela there are three key questions that need answers: 1) What is really happening in Venezuela, 2) Why is it happening, and 3) What will happen next?

What is really happening in Venezuela?

There is a Political Campaign against the Venezuelan Government

The United States, Canada and Europe are relentlessly attacking the legitimate, democratically elected Venezuelan government that represents the hitherto marginalized, impoverished, traditionally abandoned popular classes. It is a worldwide campaign to demonize Nicolás Maduro repeating *ad nauseam* that he is a dictator, without any evidence and despite free elections. It is similar to the “weapons of mass destruction” canard that opened the way to the devastation of Iraq. For example, social media sends out more than 3,600 false news on Venezuela daily.^[1]

It’s a curious dictatorship that, in 20 years of the Bolivarian Government, has held 23 elections for president, governors, and municipal representatives and in which the governing party has been defeated three times. And it is one of very few democracies that has a constitutional procedure for removing an elected president or governor.

The USA and its allies are backing the fascist forces in Venezuela, – the upper-class elites that governed with impunity and now lead the opposition. Since the start of the last century this comprador class overwhelmingly benefitted from Venezuela’s oil revenue bounty. Until the election of Hugo Chávez as president in 1999, the Venezuelan state was the instrument of domination by the upper classes over the lower classes, just as Marx described. It preserved the concentration of economic and political power typical of a capitalist state but contrary to real democracy.

Now there is a class struggle being fought in Venezuela. It is evident, it is inevitable, it is irreconcilable. The Bolivarian Revolution managed to wrestle the apparatus of the state away from the governing elites and facilitated participation of the vast majority in public affairs. It is not perfect, it has problems, but it is happening, hence the loathing of the upper classes and their all-out, US supported and led, opposition to the elected government.

A Hybrid War has been ongoing

The USA is applying a new war strategy: hybrid warfare, a combination of new technology (social media, drones and cyber-attacks) as a weapons test for their further domination of the region and other countries. Hybrid warfare, or war of the second generation, is “a military strategy, which employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyber-warfare with other influencing methods, such as fake news, diplomacy, lawfare and foreign electoral intervention.”^[2]

The defeat of the USA in the Vietnam War is an historic precedent that is very relevant for the situation today in Latin America.^[3] The routing of the most technologically advanced and powerful army in the world by poor but well organized and determined guerrilla fighters defending their homeland forced the USA military to realize that brute force bombing and chemical warfare were not enough to hold a country when the oppressors were not supported by the people. This caused the USA military establishment to seek a different type of war, one that would make the civilian population the main focus of violence, psychological, cultural, and economic tactics: hybrid warfare.^[4] Multitude ways are now used to distort perceptions, to create general instability, fear, anxiety and dissatisfaction and ultimately provoke civil war.

The untimely and mysterious death of Hugo Chávez and the fall of international oil prices happening together spurred the USA and its allies to intensify their war against Venezuela. During the presidency of Nicolás Maduro the aggression has escalated: with a foreign backed opposition, world-wide media demonization, sabotage, paramilitary attacks, coup attempts, street violence and an economic and financial assault that has devastated its economy.

The illegal sanctions are a crime against humanity

Venezuela's vulnerability has been the economy. The country has been subject to brutal economic sanctions that severely restrict the import of food, medicines and essential goods, drastically reduce the export of oil, and prevent Venezuela's participation in international financial markets. Economic sanctions are tantamount to a blockade, they are not "instead of war" they are war. They have caused tremendous impacts and cost to the nation. From August 2017 to December 2018 alone it is estimated that the sanctions cost the Venezuelan economy \$23 billion.^[5] At the same time, \$30 billion of Venezuelan assets have been frozen in the USA. Alarmingly, this includes appropriation by the USA of Venezuela's gasoline company CITGO worth \$7 billion plus \$11 billion incoming this year^[6], and distribution of CITGO's funds to opposition leaders. Oil exports, which accounted for 95% of the country's export income has been drastically reduced because of the sanctions imposed by the US on refineries and shipping.^[7] International banks are prohibited from carrying out transactions involving Venezuelan accounts. USA and European banks have stolen Venezuelan funds to the amount of \$5.4 billion.^[8] The Bank of England has appropriated Venezuelan gold in its vaults worth \$1.5 billion. This is a chilling message, which says that Britain's central bank can keep the gold of any country its government disagrees with. This has consequences. Germany took back its gold worth \$40 billion last year.^[9] Poland and Hungary have requested the return of their gold. Trust in the capitalist controlled banking system is beginning to waver.

Money is one thing, human lives are another. The US, Canada and their allies are truly terrorizing the Venezuelan population, trying to starve them to death and keep crucial medicines from the most vulnerable people, the infirm, children and the poor. "The Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Association reported an 85% shortage of essential medicines in 2018."^[10] Due to the sanctions, 180,000 medical operations have been cancelled and 823,000 chronically ill patients are awaiting medicines.^[11]

Two UN Human Rights Rapporteurs, Dr. Alfred De Zayas and Idriss Jazairy, denounced the sanctions on Venezuela as illegal, equating them to medieval sieges and considering them crimes against humanity.^[12] Economists Mark Weisbrot and Columbia University Professor Jeffrey Sachs estimate that between 2017 and 2018 the sanctions killed 40,000 Venezuelans.^[13] Unsurprisingly, their report has not been given the media attention it deserves.^[14]

As many commentators have noted, unilateral economic sanctions of the kind to which Venezuela is being subjected are illegal. They are a weapon of war and a crime against humanity. Sanctions negate or usurp the sovereign rights of nations, violating the principles of non-intervention and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states as expressed in numerous international agreements including:

+ Article 2 of the United Nations Charter which states that "*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state*".

+ Chapter IV articles 19 and 20 of the Charter of the Organization of American States which state that "*No state or group of states has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, in the internal or external affairs of any other state.*"

+ Article 33 of the Geneva Convention which states "*Collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited.*"

+ The Vienna Declaration which says that: "*No state may use or encourage the use of economic, political or any other type of measures to coerce another State in order to obtain from it the subordination of the exercise of its sovereign*

rights.”

+ Article 7 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which considers sanctions as crimes against humanity.

+ And any number of international commercial regulations and agreements.

This looting of Venezuelan assets has not turned out as planned. Juan Guaidó, opposition leader who self-proclaimed himself “president” of Venezuela in January 2019, has agents who are simply putting the money into their own personal accounts.^[15] This has incensed other Venezuelan opposition leaders who have been left out of this munificent distribution.^[16] US Senator Marco Rubio admitted publicly that they put \$117 million in Guaido’s personal account.^[17] The PanAm Post, which describes itself as ‘your leading source for news and analysis in the Americas’, from a mainstream perspective, reported on the misappropriation of these ill-gotten funds. They report that Colombian intelligence revealed to them that Guaido’s agents in Colombia stole the funds to help the 354 army deserters there. Guaidó’s supposed representative in Washington, Carlos Vecchio, an outlaw wanted by Venezuelan judicial authorities, has personally appropriated \$70 million.^[18]

What would be the reaction in North America or Europe if a foreign politician admitted they had put millions in the personal account of self-appointed, political opposition leaders?

Nicolas Maduro was duly elected and cleanly won the presidency

On 20 May 2018, Nicolás Maduro was re-elected with 6.3 million votes (67%).^[19] Six opposition candidates representing 16 democratic opposition parties also took part in the elections.^[20] In 2012, former USA president Jimmy Carter, after monitoring 93 world elections concluded that the Venezuelan electoral process is the best in the world. More than 150 independent, international observers testified the election in 2018 was clean and transparent.^[21] That three other opposition parties chose not to participate, or more exactly were ordered not to by the USA, does not invalidate the elections. ^[22]

It is indeed a serious blow to democracy to discount elections *before* they have taken place and urge that they *do not* take place, and yet that is exactly what the opposition and the USA and allies did: they told Venezuelans not to vote. To its shame, Canada did not allow Venezuelans living there to vote in the Venezuelan consulates – a reprehensible denial of the legal right of Canadians with dual citizenship to participate in an election in another country. So much for Canada’s often touted respect for the “rule of law”.

But let us not accept the farce that the quarrel with Venezuela is about legitimacy and democracy. This is a blatant neo-colonial war against Venezuela to reduce it to a puppet state, balkanize it and take possession of its plentiful oil, gold and other resources. These are modern pirates acting on behalf of corporate capital.

The Venezuelan opposition is a violent opposition

The Venezuelan extreme right is a violent opposition, not engaged in ordinary politics but in a desperate class struggle trying to provoke chaos and/or civil war, which would give the excuse for foreign military intervention that would then hand power over to them. If they should succeed in this manner, the only way they could retain that power would be by brutal oppression, just like Pinochet in Chile. The overwhelming majority of the Venezuelan population is black, brown, indigenous, and knows that whatever its shortcomings, the Bolivarian government is their government. It is a government that has striven to pull them out of poverty and exclusion and Venezuelans would not acquiesce to a dictatorship.

There are democratically minded opposition groups, but the extreme right opposition is prevalent. It is not interested in an electoral process that they cannot corrupt or win and want to become the government by other means.

More than 300 rural campesino leaders have been assassinated by mercenaries, as well as Chavista leaders, which the mainstream press hardly ever mentions. Between 2013 and 2017, there were 123 victims of the opposition violence who were lynched, beheaded, burnt, assassinated.^[23]

Violent opposition events are then interpreted by the NGOs as human rights abuses by government forces, and never as abuses of the paid opposition mercenaries that kill, maim, destroy and disrupt the peace.^[24] For example:

Street violence 2014-17: Leopoldo López, son of two of the most traditional and richest families in the country is leader of the right-wing party Voluntad Popular which although very small, is the most violent and extreme right wing

party in Venezuela and, not by chance, is backed by the USA. It does not want elections or negotiation, only forceful "regime change". In 2014, López before TV cameras openly instigated violence to overthrow the government causing millions of dollars in damages to public property and the deaths of 47 innocent people. For this he was given a fair trial and sentenced to 14 years in jail but is considered by the USA as a "political prisoner".

Helicopter bombing: On 26 June 2017, ex-officer Oscar Pérez, on a stolen army helicopter terrorized the city of Caracas and threw grenades at the building of the Supreme Court. Two policemen died. This crazed criminal was lauded both by the opposition and foreign press as some sort of poster boy freedom fighter.

Assassination attempt by drones: On August 4th 2018 at a military parade, Nicolás Maduro became the first head of state anywhere to suffer an assassination attempt by drones. If successful it would have eliminated in one swoop all the leaders of the government, a truly devastating blow.

Attempt at creating a parallel puppet government: On 23 January, 2019 Juan Guaidó, a CIA trained, hitherto unknown deputy for the Voluntad Popular extremist party stood in the middle of a street, raised his hand and self-proclaimed himself president of Venezuela. There were no elections and no basis in law.^[25] He did have however the complete backing of the USA for this charade. In fact, Guaidó cannot muster the obedience of a single policeman, yet the usual suspect nations close to Trump hurried to recognize him. Not so the 125 plus Non-Aligned UN member states who continue to recognize President Maduro as the only legitimate Venezuelan president and understand this is an outrageous attempt to create a parallel puppet president.

Invasion via false humanitarian aid: On February 20th, 2019, the self-proclaimed Guaidó staged a humanitarian aid stunt, which did not have UN or Red Cross support. Attempting to forcefully enter Venezuela from Cucuta, Colombia with USA and Colombian troops standing by, this political theatre proved a failure. Guaidó promised there would be mass desertion by the Venezuelan military on the other side of the unused border bridge. They witnessed instead the impressive sight of the Venezuelan army, steadfast defenders of the Constitution, standing in solid formation wall-like, impervious to insults, taunts and promises and right behind the soldiers, standing with their army, was a sea of civilians showing their support. At this point, the head of the Colombian army informed Colombian President Duque that they could not possibly invade with that powerful Venezuelan showing of military-civil strength.

Men on the Colombian side set fire to the supposed "aid" trucks revealing that they contained not food but material for street riots. Even the New York Times reported this. USA vice-president Pence and the Presidents of Columbia and Chile were there witnessing this debacle. The powerful military-civic union of the Bolivarian forces diminished any hope that an invasion of Venezuela would be an "easy" win for Trump to tout into the next US presidential elections.

Cyberattack on the electricity system

Two weeks later, on 6 March 2019, the entire electrical capacity of the country failed due to a cyber-attack on the country's main electricity generating system, causing a terrifying 6-day, nation-wide blackout. The attack severely damaged the country's electrical system in ways never imagined. No lights, no elevators, no water since pumps were not working. Schools were canceled; clinics and hospitals had to suspend medical operations. It was however remarkable beyond any expectation that no riots, no social unrest occurred: the people were calm, knowing they were under attack and that this was not the inefficiency of their government. Engineers were baffled never having considered such a blackout of this magnitude was even possible.^[26] What seemed to be only science fiction turned out to be science. The USA army branch, the Pentagon Cyber Command, has been dedicated to cyber-attack warfare since 2009.^[27] President Maduro claims to have solid evidence that the grid was indeed attacked by the USA. ^[28] Five hours before the blackout, US senator Marco Rubio, reported to the US House of Representatives that Venezuelans are just about to experience the most dramatic shortage that they have ever felt".^[29] Quite a coincidence. Guaidó next day also admitted a hand in it. Since then there have been several more cyberattacks on the electrical system that have been dealt with expeditiously by Venezuelan engineers learning what they are up against.

Attempted Coup d'état: If there was any doubt that the supposed "president Guaidó" held no authority whatsoever, it was made clear on the 30th of April, when he attempted a coup d'état. Having no popular or military following it failed. A small military unit was lured there under false pretenses and promptly left. Guaidó did manage to spring Leopoldo López from his house arrest, who fled to the Spanish embassy. Guaidó was left to wander the streets, with another failure on his hands. The government did not fall into the trap of arresting him and making a martyr out of a malcontent.

Mexican intellectual Fernando Buen Abad, has said that *"Venezuela has been the target of the most irrational and unjust attacks; all the most obscene and vile dirty tricks; all the most crude and unacceptable injustices."*^[30]

Lenin insightfully described the situation in which Fidel, Chávez and now Maduro find themselves: *"During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes have invariably meted out to them relentless persecution, and received their teachings with the most savage hostility, most furious hatred, and a ruthless campaign of lies and slanders."*^[31]

International NGOs play a nefarious role

International NGOs such as USAID, NED, NDI, IRI are agents of destabilization of the Venezuelan political order. The local NGOs that they support are spies and saboteurs that defame the government internationally and spread malign propaganda. In Venezuela alone, between the years of 2002 and 2012, NED (National Endowment for Democracy) spent more than \$100 million and created 300 new NGOs backing the opposition groups. These local NGOs "spin" accusations against the government, creating tensions within the country and criticism abroad. ^[32]

Social problems that are commonplace in other countries are blamed on the socialist policies of Maduro's government, such as, for example migration. It is not true that millions of Venezuelans have fled the country. Ironically enough the CIA World Fact Book gives Venezuela's net migration rate in 2018 as 1.2 per 1000 population. Therefore the difference between people leaving Venezuela in 2018 exceeded those arriving in the country by only 38,000 ^[33], not several million as is so often reported.

But human rights especially have become the latest weapon against Venezuela, a politicized punching bag distorted out of all recognition.^[34] Widespread killing of journalists and activists in Colombia are played down by the western media but opposition leaders in Venezuela, who are duly and properly jailed for crimes, not ideas, become human rights victims.^[35] When the opposition orchestrated street violence in 2014 they set fire to several young men who were dark skinned and "looked" Chavista. There was no outrage among the "human rights industry" when 20 year old Orlando Figuera was burned to death in front of TV cameras. Only Chavistas mourned him.

The latest human rights travesty was the blatantly biased report by former Chilean President Michelle Bachelett. 82% of those interviewed for the report lived outside the country. The report deliberately ignored copious information provided by the Venezuelan government about nutrition and all kinds of social programs. Bachelett's report contained 70 factual errors and it was rejected outright by the UN Human Rights Council on July 9, 2019.^[36]

Why is it Happening?

The Venezuelan elites are a fascist force backed by the USA

The Patriot Army that finally defeated the Spanish Empire army in the second decade of the 1800s included all the people: the slaves, the indigenous peoples, and the "pardos" mixed lower class, in the aims and practice of the War for Independence. The Venezuelan elite, which was comfortable with the Spanish overlords, resented that one of their kind, the great Simón Bolívar, was leading the independence movement and his abolitionism was threatening to deprive them of their slaves.

The USA, nor the Europeans, did nothing to aid the Patriot's war against Spain. This was not a new agenda. Thomas Jefferson said most explicitly in 1786: *"Our Confederation should be considered the nest from which all America both North as well as South, should be settled. ...For now, those countries are in the best of hands (Spain), and I only fear that they will be too weak to keep them subjected until our population has grown enough to go on to snatch them up piece by piece."* ^[37]

Immediately after independence, the USA set out to manipulate and dominate the new republics. The USA Monroe Doctrine of 1823, seemingly intended to protect the region from further European colonization, in fact asserted the interests of the USA in the region. It led all successive governments to consider Latin America and the Caribbean their "backyard" populated by backward and corrupt people who need their "guidance".^[38] The farce of the USA being any sort of "defender" of the region from Europe was clearly laid bare when in 1982 the USA backed Margaret Thatcher's unconscionable war against Argentina over the Islas Malvinas (Falkland Islands).

USA President Theodore Roosevelt's Carrot and Stick Doctrine led USA administrations to co-opt local comprador elites willing to accept any carrot offered for their betrayal. Over the years, the USA opposed each and every one of the enlightened, progressive leaders and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean and helped maintain rule by

elites. This includes at least 80 invasions, coup d'états and interventions to destabilize and even assassinate leaders of said governments. During the 20th century every Venezuelan administration that however mildly, tried to assert some degree of sovereignty over Venezuela's petroleum resources was overthrown by Washington.^[39] As Simón Bolívar observed:

"The United States appear to be destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty."

In 1999, after several decades of gross human rights violations and increasing corruption that left the democratic process in disrepute, and to the dismay of the ruling elites, a complete outsider won the presidential election in Venezuela with a landslide victory: Hugo Chávez. Yet, this comprador upper-class that now leads the opposition in Venezuela has maintained a great deal of its economic power, both commercial and financial, and media ownership. Contrary to opposition propaganda about media freedom, the Venezuelan private sector still owns most of the media, 6 out of 10 TV stations and 97.2% radio outlets.^[40]

One of the salient characteristics of this class is racism towards their own people, a legacy of their slave-owning past, which in many subtle yet real ways persists. President Chávez was ridiculed for his humble rural background and Black and indigenous ethnicity. His successor, President Maduro, is scorned for being born in a poor urban barrio and his 9-years employment as a bus driver in Caracas. Racism and classism thrive in the Venezuelan bourgeoisie. The revolutionary struggle for equality in Venezuela necessarily means opposing the ideology of white supremacy of the upper classes, many who even deny that such obvious racism exists.^[41] As David William Pear has stated: *"The US and Canada are not supporting "the return of democracy" in Venezuela as they claim... They are crushing democracy in Venezuela by exploiting class and race warfare, being carried out by an elite white-supremist minority against the poor, Afro-Indigenous, and other Venezuelans of color."*^[42]

The Discovery of Oil

The discovery of oil in Venezuela at the turn of the last century, transformed the functioning of the economy and the State. The State became the distributor of income derived from the sale of exported petroleum, doling out this bounty according to the interests of those closest to it: the upper classes. The private sector did not become an engine of economic development, employment and innovative production, as in a genuine capitalist economy. The typical dependency of the State on the owners of capital is reversed in oil exporting nations. The capitalists depend on the State, not the reverse. This is why the analysis of an oil exporting economy has to be different from the analysis of a conventional capitalist economy.

The Venezuelan upper classes want to regain the largess of the State on which they depended until the election of Chávez. The supposed "capitalist" class in Venezuela, with relatively few exceptions, is a comprador class, with strong links to foreign capital. It is a parasitic private sector dependent on lucrative import transactions with the help of state funds, loans and contracts. A private sector such as this prevented Venezuela from developing a thriving diversified economy.

Venezuela has the largest known petroleum reserves in the world. That it takes 43 days for an oil tanker to go from the Middle East to Texas, while it only 4 days from Venezuela, makes Venezuelan oil especially attractive to the USA. This is a powerful clue to the USA's desire to utterly control Venezuela. John Bolton openly stated that the goal is to gain control of Venezuela's oil.^[43] President Trump said, gangster-like, that he did not understand why they were not at war with Venezuela *"because they have all that oil and are right on our back door"*^[44].

The Constitution of 2000 created a new state

One of the most enduring legacies of President Hugo Chávez has been the Venezuelan Constitution that defined the new Bolivarian Venezuelan state. Country-wide representatives were elected to a National Constitutional Assembly to draft a new constitution. After extensive public consultations the new constitution was ratified by referendum. The Constitution is anchored in the concepts of both individual and social rights, such as the right to education, clean water and health services. It combines participatory democracy with socialist and communitarian features. It enshrines human rights hitherto muted or absent, such as the rights of women, children, all indigenous peoples, handicapped and the environment. It closed some of loopholes by which the upper classes had ruled and it asserted the sovereignty of Venezuela over its own resources. Its impact inside the country has been immense. It has also been influential in the region having inspired the new constitutions in Ecuador and Bolivia.

Now, after 19 years, the Constitution, which is a living document, is being revised by another elected National Constitutional Assembly to correct certain vestiges of the bourgeois liberal framework still there and to deepen socialist principles.

One would agree with Marx who stated that society is not based on the law but that the law must be based on society expressing its common interests and needs.^[45] Just so, the Bolivarian constitution expresses the longing for rights and sovereignty of a majority of the people that had long been marginal to the affairs of state, whose human rights were only nominally recognized, and their desire for an alternative society to "savage capitalism" as Hugo Chávez used to call it. The Venezuelan working classes recognize that, however faulty, the State now defines itself by their interests and that the anti-democratic sector of the opposition makes no promises they could possibly believe.

In 2007, Hugo Chávez was re-elected with the promise of building Venezuelan socialism, calling it socialism of the 21st century. It owes its roots not only to European thinkers such as Marx and Engels, but also to the intellectual legacy of Simón Bolívar's ideas about sovereignty, egalitarianism, abolition of slavery and imperialism, regional integration, and to other Venezuelan leaders such as Simón Rodríguez, Ezequiel Zamora and the communitarian ancient traditions of Venezuelan indigenous peoples.^[46] Hugo Chávez rooted Venezuelan socialism in its history, cultures and cosmological and spiritual traditions. Liberation theology for example, has greatly influenced the Bolivarian Revolution. This is a revolution that is recognized by the Venezuelan people as "their" socialism. This was Chavez's genius and his contribution to socialism world-wide. He dared proclaim it, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, after the dissolution of the USSR and after the false rumors that history had come to an end; and he showed the world that socialism was still a force to be reckoned with.

It is Bolivarian Socialism.

There are those who deny that what is happening in Venezuela is a revolution or that it is even socialism. Some of these cosmopolitan theorists of the northern countries have too often disdained the Bolivarian Revolution because it did not "fit" within their narrow Eurocentric theoretical framework, because it is also humanistic and spiritual, as well as socialist, participatory and democratic. Many of them who claim to know so much about the conduct of revolution, want to dictate to the Venezuelan people what is and what is not real, yet they have not been able to make a revolution in their own countries in the USA, Canada, or Europe.

History shows us that revolution occurs when the people stand up and defy empires, when they bear the brunt of their malice and yet stand firm and defend their rights, land and self-determination. The people know. As Atilio A. Boron, a Latin American writer, explains, and Marx and Engels understood, revolution is not a creation event in a single explosion of violence but an historical, dialectical process where the encounters of the class struggle and counter-revolution determine the outcomes. He recalls that Fidel Castro said: "*The main mistake we made in Cuba was thinking that someone knew how to make a revolution.*"^[47] The Bolivarian Revolution, like all strong social transformations is a historic movement with gains and losses, missteps and complexities that over-ride the status quo, the traditional forms of making politics.^[48]

President Maduro has clearly stated that Venezuela "...is decided and determined to create a world that is multipolar, pluri-polar, multi-centric. There is no one single economic model, we cannot permit that they impose upon us a single economic model, a single way of thinking."^[49]

Building socialism in Venezuela meant changing the very organization of the state designed by elite rule. The Communal Councils and Communes have been at the forefront of that transformation. ^[50] Venezuela's Revolution is real, just observe the enemies ranged against it. They certainly think it's socialism in the making and they want none of it. The Revolution is a process of revindication, of increasing consciousness of the people, and of defense of their sovereignty. It is a work in progress, "el proceso" (the process) as Venezuelans call it, and the Venezuelan people hold the key to its future.

The current USA aggression is not simply against a regime, but against the Venezuelan nation itself, with plans to dismember it, as they did in the past in Colombia (to create Panama and own the Canal), and more recently in Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Ukraine. They wish to divide it up among their willing allies: the oil rich western borderlands for Colombia, the eastern Esequibo for Guyana, the south-eastern Amazonic borderland for Brazil, and Paraguay will have its huge debt to Venezuela cancelled. In what is left of the nation, Canada gets the gold mines and the USA oil corporations get the oil. We cannot allow this to happen.

The aim is to deny Venezuela's achievements

USA aggression towards Venezuela also stems out of concern that the remarkable achievements of this emerging socialism represents a real alternative to capitalism. The Bolivarian Revolution has had many successes that in any other country would have been universally hailed as such:

- + An increase in the country's rank in the UN Human Development Index by 7 places; now rated as having high human development Venezuela out performs the majority of the Lima Group countries.^[51]
- + UNESCO declared Venezuela illiteracy free in 2005
- + A 50% reduction of poverty; extreme poverty reduced to 4.4% between 1990-2010 ^[52]
- + A reduced infant mortality rate from 25/1000 to 13/1000 (1990-2010); down to 12/1000 in 2017, which was lower than Colombia, Ecuador, Brazil and Peru.^[53]
- + Provision of universal free health services, subsidized drugstores
- + The FAO awarded Venezuela for reducing malnutrition from 13.5 % in 1990-92 to 3.6% in 2012. The illegal sanctions have increased malnutrition to 11.7% (2017)^[54]
- + An increase in food security through a food distribution network, nutrition programs, subsidized packages (CLAP), free school meals, and communes producing food for cities.
- + Free tuition for education from nursery care to university; high enrolment at all levels
- + 2.7 million housing units have been built in integrated housing zones with all public services programs between 2012-2019.^[55] 9.5 million Venezuelans have been given a new home. In 2019 the UN recognized Venezuela as one of the top countries for guaranteeing people's right to housing. This housing achievement of Bolivarian Venezuela is unrivaled in any other country to date.^[56]

The achievements have been ignored, muted, denied or disparaged by the USA, its allies and the disgraceful corporate mainstream press.^[57] Since January 2019, for example, the New York Times, Wall St. Journal and Washington Post have run a combined 800 articles on Venezuela. Only 4 of them refer to the Bolivarian government's social programs and achievements and then only to dismiss them.^[58] However, the achievements have been recognized by many other countries, by the UN and several of its agencies, and other international organizations.

What will happen next?

Disturbing echoes of History

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) the Phalange, the fascist forces of Francisco Franco, waged war against the elected, liberal, Republican Spanish government. What ensued was a savage, vicious civil struggle in which an estimated one million lives were lost.

Fascism was the preferred ideology of the Spanish upper classes. The Axis powers, Germany and Italy specifically, backed Franco with resources and soldiers. The Nazis introduced a new diabolical war tactic: mass bombing of unarmed civilian populations with a new technology, their stukka dive bombers. Who can look at Pablo Picasso's masterpiece GUERNICA and not tremble with horror at the depiction of a brutal assault on innocent unsuspecting civilians fleeing fire falling on them from the skies?

Russia backed the Republic and thousands of principled foreign individuals volunteered to defend it by joining the XV International Brigade, which included the Canadian volunteers of the Mckenzie-Papineau Battalion. The Spanish Civil War became an international struggle of fascism against democracy, liberalism, and communism. But the governments of North America and Europe all turned their backs on the Republic and failed to substantially defend democracy. By doing so they unwittingly gave the Nazis encouragement to pursue their war plans to dominate Europe and more. Seeing how the leading powers Britain and France did not defend Spain, the Nazis surmised that they also would not defend Czechoslovakia if they invaded which they did in early 1939, a precursor to WWII. In the end, fascism won, the Republic was lost, Franco governed Spain for decades afterwards, the Nazis were powerfully emboldened and strengthened to follow their demonic ambitions of domination and implement the horrors of the Holocaust.

The parallels with the war that is being waged against Venezuela are frightening. As in Spain, the targets are innocent people, an entire population, not soldiers. Through hybrid warfare, new technologies are in use such as sanctions, cyberattacks, terrorism. Already tens of thousands of Venezuelans have died due to the illegal sanctions. And Canada and Europe are turning their backs on a democracy that is victim to these atrocities. Worse still, they are aiding and abetting the USA in its efforts to crush the Venezuelan economy, whatever the cost to the population, and to overthrow the Venezuelan government. Who's next?

Will the USA Invade?

Trump has not ruled out an invasion and neither have his key advisors, Pompeo, Bolton and Abrams, who continue to threaten it. Bolton's policy paper on Venezuela shamelessly contains 6 scenarios of attack: coup d'état, military invasion by border states, economic collapse, civil war, paramilitary attacks and direct invasion and bombing by the USA.^[59] Peaceful negotiation and diplomacy are not included. The paper attests to an integration of USA foreign policies such that its diplomatic, economic and financial policies are no longer distinct from its military objectives. The private and public spheres have been combined with militarization in US international relations.^[60]

However, as Nino Pagliccia insightfully observed: "*A realistic successful military intervention can only take place if the Venezuelan high-ranking officers of the armed forces deserted in mass. This is not likely to happen.*"^[61] The Venezuelan military, well-schooled by Chávez, is a firm defender of the nation's Constitution and has vowed never to turn their arms against their people. They are supported by a civilian militia of more than 2 million Venezuelans who are trained and on standby to defend their homeland. Any misguided military invasion of Venezuela is certainly to trigger a protracted regional conflict of dire proportions.

Will President Maduro's government survive?

The question most asked is, how can the government of President Maduro survive all these ongoing economic, financial, media, cultural, diplomatic, cybernetic and violent attacks? Why does it still receive obvious and enthusiastic backing of a majority of the population that has been deprived of so much by foreign sanctions, sabotage, violence and international defamation? The answer lies in the following:

- (a) The solid achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution especially its reduction of poverty
- (b) The military-civil union with military forces that fiercely defend the Constitution
- (c) The international solidarity that Venezuela has garnered from Cuba, Russia, China, the Caribbean countries and all the Non-Aligned UN members.

The Bolivarian Revolution turned Venezuela from a country with more than a third of the population in poverty into one of the most prosperous and egalitarian nations in the Latin American region. It did this by investing oil revenues in numerous programs to address the social needs of the population and a plethora of participatory democracy initiatives that affected the actual way that the State was administered. These measure are now under severe threat from the sanctions and the backward looking opposition. Venezuelans know this. Meanwhile President Maduro continues to resist the pressures and to seek a peaceful accommodation with the opposition providing they accept the legitimacy of the elected government. Thousands of communal councils, communes and collectives of all sorts are organizing, planting, feeding, building, helping Venezuelans endure the aggression to which they are subjected. They direct and implement many of the government social programs, most of them led by women.

Another reason for Venezuelan's resiliency is the international solidarity it has received while striving to bring about regional integration and mutual support for all the global south. More than one hundred and forty UN members, including all the Non-Aligned Members, recognize Nicolas Maduro as the only legitimate president of Venezuela.^[62] The continuing support of Russia and China is a major reason the USA has not invaded. Russia and China have been a lifeline to beleaguered Venezuela sending medicine, food and other goods, and bringing industrial investments that transfer know-how to Venezuelans in a demonstration of real international solidarity. Cuba has provided unique and fundamental help from the start especially in providing health and education programs. The solidarity of many if not most of the small Caribbean islands has been nothing short of heroic. They have proudly withstood USA threats and blackmail and have not betrayed the friendship that Venezuela offered them through many programs, but especially through PETROCARIBE, providing them with oil at preferential prices.

For 60 years USA aggression towards Cuba has failed to overthrow the revolutionary Cuban government despite enormous economic losses and truly incalculable human suffering. So, while economic war can devastate an economy, it is obviously not enough to change minds and overthrow a truly popular government. As President Maduro said to the UN: *"Venezuela is stronger than ever, we know how to resist, we are standing and determined to go forward constructing our own social model, that of the revolution of socialism of the XXI century...we are confident in the noble people of Venezuela who will not surrender."* [63].

If President Nicolás Maduro does tragically fall to an assassin's bullet, it is clear that there are many able members of the government ready to take his place. As the death of Chávez showed, the Bolivarian process has not been a one-man show, but a profound social transformation of the society.

There are wider regional and global implications to this war against Venezuela

The ramifications of this assault on Venezuela's Bolivarian socialism erodes the very assumptions on which states have hitherto based their security. The Westphalian principle of state sovereignty, which has stood since 1648 and which created the modern nation state, is in real danger from the push of powerful corporations. They see national sovereignty and popular democracy as a true threat to their accumulation of capital through exploitation of land, water and peoples. A participatory democracy such as Venezuela is a particular threat. Corporations are accustomed to working with economic, cultural, and especially political elites, through "representatives" in a representative democracy. The unpredictable and often uncontrollable exercise of popular power in communes, in communal councils, in collectives, in congress, and at the ballot box, becomes a force that corporations counter with implacable determination. In Venezuela, the class struggle has broken through some formidable boundaries with its participatory democracy. It has set a regional example that the USA considers counter to its hegemony, and so it should. As Cellina Della Croce has observed, *"[Venezuela] lies at the crux of a geopolitical war waged by global capital, with the USA at its head, to destroy the threat of a people-centred agenda once and for all"*. [64].

Make no mistake about this: the struggle of the Venezuelan people today, as it was in the 1800s, will define the destiny of the region.

This is no exaggeration. If the USA and its allies destroy Bolivarian Venezuela, it will immediately go after Cuba, Nicaragua and Bolivia, as they have openly stated. [65] In fact, it will impede any other regional government from exercising any real self-determination if it does not suit the interests of the USA and corporate capitalism. The fate of Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution will determine also in great measure, the triumph or failure of any sort of socialism as a viable alternative to savage capitalism

Conclusion

In conclusion, the economic war against Venezuela has global political implications in that:

- 1) Fundamental international laws and treaties that for years have kept the peace between sovereign states and regulated the conduct of war are being openly violated.
- 2) Regulations and principles of ownership and banking are being ignored; that banks appropriate other countries' assets erodes the banking system; that duly established corporations can be taken over by another country for political reasons erodes the legal security of publicly owned corporations.
- 3) Diplomatic conventions guaranteeing the safety of foreign embassies has been shattered by the assault and take over of the Venezuelan embassy in Washington DC.
- 4) Powerful nations have refused to acknowledge legitimately elected government representatives and have attempted to set up and support a bogus shadow government.
- 5) Human rights and humanitarian issues are callously misused as political weapons, endangering large numbers of innocent people.
- 6) Illegal and immoral economic sanctions have become an instrument in an undeclared war, punishing collectively an entire population causing tens of thousands of deaths, and contravening the Geneva Convention.

However, Venezuela, representing socialism in the 21st century, is not responding as they wish. Along with, Cuba it is withstanding the pressures. Venezuelans have demonstrated even under harsh attacks, that they are determined to be

free to chose their own government and use their plentiful resources for the common good. As Della Croce has pointed out, like Viet Nam, Venezuela is the domino that will not fall.^[66]

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