

Venezuela: The Unavoidable Challenge for the West

The Iranian flag waves defiantly in the middle of downtown Caracas, a taunt that the democratic leadership of the western hemisphere cannot ignore. We must act now.

Venezuela's devastation runs deep and the explosiveness of the situation is nakedly patent: massive and systematic human rights violations occur every day, a pandemic strikes the country in the middle of its worst humanitarian crisis, the complete collapse of the economy and all public services, an unsolvable energy crisis has brought the country to a standstill - a country that was once a model for the world's oil industry.

Venezuela is –without a doubt– a failed state. The tragedy is laid out before everyone's eyes, and there is no room for naiveté or indifference. The rule of law ceased to exist long ago, the State has increasingly – and inexorably– lost control over the territory, and cannot safeguard nor guarantee a modicum of security under any conceivable metric.

Venezuela is also a country under occupation. Widespread anarchy increases with the presence of multiple criminal and terrorist groups in the country, including Colombian guerrillas, drug cartels and Hezbollah cells, who fight bloody turf wars over control of vast areas of our territory and its resources.

Right from the outset, the chavista regime progressively eroded our national sovereignty. The regime's endless and opaque dealings with Cuba allowed for the systematic plundering of the country's riches and ensured the control by Cuban officers of the armed forces and of the tyranny's intelligence and repression apparatus.

The convergence of agents of authoritarian regimes, transnational terrorist, and criminal groups in Venezuela are holding our nation ransom in an evil alliance with an international syndicate of so-called "businessmen" and rapacious financiers that live lavishly and hide their capital in the big cities of the world's most developed countries. Simultaneously, these groups hide their true intentions behind a façade of social justice and create political storefronts such as the São Paulo Forum or the Puebla Group to conspire against the democratic institutions of democratic governments that do not bow to them.

The financial and criminal goal of occupying Venezuela reaches a geopolitical dimension when one grasps the magnitude of participation of the Russian, Chinese and Iranian regimes in the political and economic realms of Venezuela, and their evident goal of expanding their influence within the hemisphere to destabilize western democracies. The now explicit Iranian presence in Venezuela evidences the radicalization of the alliances of the cartel oppressing the country and its steadfast determination to entrench themselves in power.

On a hemispheric level, the Venezuelan situation impacts the most fundamental interests of American democracies. The west cannot allow a failed and criminal state –controlled by autocratic powers and terrorist groups from outside the region– to operate in the heart of the continent.

On a global level, this represents an act of aggression against the core of the civilizing notion of liberal and representative democracy and the values of western civilization. We must only look at the progress of the attacks against democratic institutions in Spain.

During the last 21 years, Venezuelans have explored every avenue to defeat the regime. The results force us to discard those methods that have only served to entrench them in power. We have tried:

1. **Elections:** We have had 29 electoral processes and 15 referenda in 22 years. The regime's control over the results have grown to the point that they now employ illegal means with impunity to disregard the results of the few elections they "lose." Without national sovereignty, there cannot be popular sovereignty. As long as this regime is in power, there will not be free elections, only shams.

2. **Dialogues:** we have been through over a dozen of dialogue processes promoted by obscure figures with the alleged goal of brokering a "negotiated solution" with the tyranny. Attempt after attempt, with the presence of a few representatives of the opposition, the regime has outsmarted the Vatican, the European Union, and several Latin American foreign ministers. They never intended to comply with the agreements, but were merely trying to buy time and got a great bargain. The real purpose of these talks was to get the sanctions imposed by the international community lifted because they limit the movement of the members of the several mafias that compose the government and their web of front-men, and restrict the flow of funds for the illegitimate government.

3. **Military Uprisings:** The Venezuelan armed forces are an army in tatters, with wretched operational capacity. Both the relentless infiltration of Cuban and Russian agents within their ranks and the deliberate atomization of its chain of command have neutralized those officers who still stand for democratic values and principles. Their only asset is their capacity for intelligence, repression and propaganda. This network of vigilance and control also operates within its ranks. Therefore, the multiple intents to revolt carried out by law-abiding officers have been infiltrated since their inception, resulting in prison, torture, and even death for those involved.

4. **Popular Uprisings:** We have been exercising civil disobedience since the beginning and during the 21 years of chavista rule. We Venezuelans have bravely confronted this transnational criminal syndicate. In this fight, we have deployed every mode of civil struggle despite unremittent repression, and state-sponsored violence against unarmed citizens, with a tragic outcome of many wounded and killed as a result. Venezuelans remain as steadfast as ever in their conviction to fight for their freedom, but we are well aware that to do so without the backing of the democratic powers of the west in a joint action would be suicidal.

Because all of this, the only option to evict this criminal syndicate from power for good, and end their wholly asymmetrical assault against Venezuelans, is **the creation of an international coalition to deploy a Peace and Stabilization Operation in Venezuela (Operación de Paz y Estabilización – OPE).**

Venezuela has been invaded and occupied; the nation has been abducted, brutalized, and ransacked. With every passing day, the suffering of the Venezuelan people increases, causing irreparable losses as the regime advances in its goal of destabilizing the continent. Although there is no "right to intervene," there is a legitimate obligation to intervene and a Right to Protect [R2P]. Those who oppose the entry into Venezuela of an international peace force to recover our institutions and pacify the country, are condemning the nation to succumb to the total dominion of mafias.

A Peace and Stabilization Operation faces the challenge of controlling the territory and neutralizing a well-organized network of criminal groups and guerrillas, as the country recovers stability, while its production capacity and the rule of law are restored. Thus, a **multifaceted peace operation should include, at least the following:**

- a) Control of the territory, security, and disarmament.**
- b) Humanitarian aid.**
- c) Rebuilding healthcare and public services infrastructure.**
- d) Restoration of law and order.**
- e) Restoration of the rule of law.**
- f) Rebuilding democratic institutions from the ground up.**

The success of each one of these objectives is a primary requirement for the success of the subsequent ones. Thus, this multifaceted peace operation should not be under the aegis of a single actor. Instead, it should consist of a coalition of allies with regional readiness and legitimacy under the framework of the **Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance [Rio Treaty - Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca - TIAR]**, which should include different organizations and countries with multiple and complementary tasks. In the areas of security and disarmament, we should rely on the TIAR (Rio Treaty) platform (which sets the obligation of mutual aid and defense of American countries). Health and nutrition matters should be handled by the respective United Nations agencies. For infrastructure rebuilding efforts we should rely on regional cooperation mechanisms and the OAS, the EU, and the UN for human rights monitoring and building a new electoral system.

There are many historical examples of successful international coalitions, but there are also many regrettable cases when help arrived too late. The longer we wait to act, the action becomes more time-consuming, complex and costly, precisely what is happening with Venezuela.

The hemisphere was on the right track when it decided to punish the regime leaders and state-owned companies used to finance their criminal operations with sanctions. The recent indictments by the US Department of Justice against regime ringleaders under charges of drug trafficking and terrorism, as well as the recently deployed antinarcotics operation in the Caribbean Sea, are firm steps toward the creation of a credible threat against the tyranny.

However, **it is necessary to accelerate the pace and proceed with new actions:**

- **Blocking the finance and assets flows from Venezuela to Cuba.** Also, disrupting the telecom network between the two regimes, which enables the control of Cuban agents over vital sectors of the Venezuelan state such as; intelligence services, ports, repression apparatus, armed forces, registries and notaries, the national identification system and as a result, the electoral system.
- **Expanding the scope and capabilities of the multinational anti-narcotics operation currently deployed in the Caribbean,** to include maritime and air blockade of all looting and collaboration activities with foreign non-democratic powers.
- **Dismantling the regime's censorship and propaganda system,** with state-of-the-art technology.
- **Leading a coalition to create a multifaceted peace operation** for the recovery and transition to democracy in Venezuela.

The emerging pandemic has resulted in enormous internal demands to our allies. Undoubtedly, a peace and stabilization operation in Venezuela represents the most pressing challenge for the west, with great risks and costs implied. Nevertheless, immediate action is urgent and justified, given the devastating consequences to hemispheric security inherent in tolerating the existence of a criminal regime that advances inexorably in undermining democracy and freedom in the region.

We Venezuelans will keep fighting until we achieve the full liberty and sovereignty of our country. We will transform Venezuela from the criminal world's hub it has become into a strong nation where democracy, justice, property, trade and the wellbeing of its citizens prevail.

Liberating Venezuela is of the utmost importance to halt the operations of the world crime syndicates against the west. It is not only about solidarity with the Venezuelan people. This is about the west choosing between accepting its historical responsibility or surrendering to the plans of an evil alliance. It is our duty to stop this, this is why we must act together, and why we must do so immediately.

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