

VENEZUELA: THE COUP THAT FAILED (!?!)

It is very clear that what happens in Venezuela will determine whether in all of Latin America there is a shift to neoliberal authoritarianism or an opposite process of resuming a course of popular emancipation. Latin America remains the key, it defines everything. That's why resistance is so important and overcoming the climate of defeatism that exists among many leftists. It is possible to resist.

I think that what's interesting about the current situation is that the coup-plotters' failures are coming one after the other. The **first collapsed coup** happened when, upon **Guaidó's self-nomination as president**, he said he would call elections in 30 days. Time has passed and this guy has carried out no presidential function at all. The Venezuelan right wing is experienced at mounting abortive coups; we can't forget that it tried and failed **five times since 2013**, and this one isn't succeeding either.

What happened on Feb. 23 confrontation at the bridge between Columbia and Venezuela is the **second collapsed coup**. It was supposed to be "D" day. All the opposition was betting the trucks would get in. None did, and the farce of humanitarian aid was exposed, because to deliver humanitarian aid you need political neutrality. I believe that this operation has been very well defined as a Trojan horse. It was a military action in disguise, because the humanitarian aid arrived on planes dispatched from U.S. bases in the Caribbean and was coordinated by Pentagon contractors.

Saturday F23 was an incredible farce. The famous bridge that Venezuela was alleged to have blocked to prevent aid had never been inaugurated and opened. Maduro was directly accused of burning the trucks, but they were burned from the Colombian side. Another US False Flag attempt.

In the end it was one more *guarimba*, with a group of rightwing provocateurs conducting a meaningless exercise while waiting for a major military desertion, a kind of Berlin Wall that was supposed to fall with the great desertion of Venezuelan armed forces crossing over to the Colombian side. It didn't happen. There was pressure on the barracks and still nothing happened. Vice President Mike Pence is complaining to Guaidó that he fooled him, because there was no military desertion, the social base of Chavismo is holding up, the regime is not collapsing.

It seems to me, and I'm being a little more speculative, that we are beginning to witness a **third failure**, because the Brazilian vice president has already said that he opposes a military invasion. Military leaders, who are in effect ruling Brazil, are saying, **"I don't like the transfer of the Brazilian embassy to Jerusalem"**; **"I don't like the Alcántara base"**; **"I don't want to get into a military adventure against Venezuela."** What happened with Brazil is important because if Brazil puts on the brakes, Colombia will also begin to falter. Colombia alone is not going to be willing to launch a military operation. Colombian opposition leader Gustavo Petro is already campaigning against it.

There are many declarations. There are many boorish speeches. But it is very difficult to launch a seizure of territory and set up a parallel government in Venezuela following the Middle East model. **I believe that what the U.S. is going to try are border operations, terrorism, limited actions, like the U.S. did supporting and arming the Nicaraguan Contras of the 1980s and 1990s.**

There are many Chavista economists who are critical of government policies, proposing that now is the time to make a turn, because Venezuela needs to respond to the new aggression of embargoes and expropriation of the Venezuela Citgo oil company, and **the starting point would be a moratorium on debt**. Venezuela has paid some **\$70 billion in interest** on the debt, but now it is left with nothing. Many economists propose the importance of an immediate moratorium differentiating clearly the different bonds according to each creditor.

Amnesty International Peddling Regime-Change Propaganda?

Amnesty International has ignored grave human rights abuses in plain sight in Venezuela while demonizing supporters of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

Shortly after meeting with Juan Guaido Amnesty put out a report that reads like a barely disguised attempt to reinforce, from a 'human rights' angle, the military threats against Venezuela from Trump and his henchmen. Team Trump as Venezuela's **"Only hope"**?

Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty's Americas director, said:

"International justice is the only hope for victims of human rights violations in Venezuela. It is time to activate all available mechanisms to prevent further atrocities."

And the report stated that:

"Countries genuinely concerned about the human rights situation in Venezuela should explore the application of universal jurisdiction."

As Amnesty released this report, the threat of a US military attack on Venezuela disguised as **"humanitarian aid delivery"** could not be more obvious. Never mind that Venezuela is, in fact, receiving foreign aid with authorization from the Maduro government.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton and Senator

Rubio have repeatedly made *Mafioso*-like threats against Venezuela's military and Maduro. Trump himself has been repeatedly threatening a military *"option"* since 2017 (the year he reportedly asked **"Why are we not at war with Venezuela?"**).

Amnesty ignores Trump's attack on the right to health and food, at the same time, Amnesty has refused to denounce Trump's financial sanctions which have been in place since August 2017 and whose impact on the entire economy has been crippling. By now, the sanctions have cost Venezuela's government well over \$6bn in revenues in an economy that imported \$11.7bn in goods in 2018. Before the deep and sustained collapse in oil prices (and oil production, which nose-dived as the sanctions began), Venezuela's economy had been importing about \$2bn a year in medicines. The Trump administration has choked the cash-starved government as it struggles to feed its people.

It is important to remember that, in Venezuela's case, Amnesty has been very explicit in pointing to economic problems as human rights abuses. Last year, when they wrote to me refusing to denounce Trump's sanctions, Amnesty said:

Amnesty International does not take a position on the current application of these sanctions but rather emphasizes the urgent need to address the serious crisis of the right to health and food which Venezuela is facing. In terms of human rights, it is the Venezuelan state's responsibility to resolve this.

Amnesty has now updated its position on Trump's sanctions, asking Trump to please be careful and "monitor" the impact of new sanctions that he imposed in January. The new sanctions directly cut off revenues that the Venezuelan government obtained from sales to the US.

Support for human rights demands an immediate end to all the economic sanctions Trump has imposed.

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Venezuela needs to maintain a network of international economic alliances, which is indispensable. And it needs an economic policy **based in the communes**, in the dynamic of **the popular economy** but with a totally different economic orientation. And I believe that a turn of this kind is possible because there is a will to struggle. What was demonstrated this past month is that **there is a people** and **there is a government**. Maduro has called six mobilizations in a matter of days, and he fights for the streets on equal terms with the right.

There is a very strong patriotic feeling in the Army that blocks the campaign for defections. 300 defections out of 300,000 troops! **There is a 20-year-old construction of consciousness of sovereignty in the Army; there is socialist education in the Armed Forces.** In addition, the government is acting intelligently, maintaining serenity in the face of provocations. I believe that they learned from the 2017 *guarimbas*, when they launch tear gas not bullets against the fascist gangs, preventing the escalation into an armed conflict and, above all, maintaining the flag of peace.

So the Venezuelan government carries out measured actions, closes the border, breaks relations with Colombia because the aggression is organized there. It has an intelligent international strategy; there are more countries that recognize its government than those that recognize Guaidó. [And] a military alliance with Russia, the actions preventing the U.N. from repeating the Saddam Hussein story, that is, stopping the U.N. from issuing a declaration that legitimizes an invasion. It is a struggle of David against Goliath. We must not lose sight of this, but the great battles were always like this.

What Venezuela has going for it is that this war of public opinion is being commanded by a person of supreme ineptness like Trump and all his fascists in Miami. In addition, the conflict is being internationalized. Banners in favor of Venezuela appeared among the Yellow Vests of France. It's come down to being in favor of the coup or defending Venezuela. There is less and less space for that neutral world inhabited by some intellectuals who think that we have to be in the middle, that Maduro is as guilty as Guaidó, that a right-wing dictatorship is equal to government by Chavismo.

I believe that fortunately this type of position is losing strength. The function of a left-wing movement or party is not to be intermediaries, not to be the organizers of a mediation; that is what Uruguay, Mexico, the Vatican are for. A left-wing organization has to say what it is doing, what sector it's working with. It is important to maintain distance from the counterrevolution, above all because this position goes hand in hand with very mistaken ideas, such that Maduro's government is a dictatorship or a totalitarian government. Totally absurd.

I don't agree with many things about Maduro's government. I could write a pamphlet about the things I dislike. But it is not a repressive government. In reality, it's a government that is more permissive than anything else. Very few governments would tolerate what Maduro endures. It is a government that does not persecute popular sectors. It puts in prison those who have to be put in prison, who are the fascists who carry out coups d'état, like the leader of Guaidó's party, in prison for kidnapping the Minister of Finance in the failed coup of 2002. It is also completely ridiculous to say that it's a dictatorship when every day there is both a massive right-wing protest and a huge demonstration in support of the government.

It is very auspicious what is happening among the left here because I remember that when the 2017 *guarimbas* occurred, there was a very big debate on the left. There was a sector that was thinking Maduro was the culprit, not the right. There were many hesitations. It seems to me now the whole left has turned around and is taking the position that not only denounces the coup without hesitation, but they march and they mobilize. **And so we must continue in the struggle, be in the mobilizations and be in the front row defending the Venezuelan people against imperialism.**

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Translated by Michael Otto.

