

TARGETING VENEZUELA FOR THE SINS OF EMPIRE

By Julio Noboa Polanco

The Trump administration would have us believe that the crises in Venezuela is simply one of tyranny versus democracy, but the reality is much more complex than that. Often ignored by the American media is the long history of American relations with Latin America, their traditional “backyard.”

For over a century, the United States has engaged in numerous interventions in Latin America, many of them through outright violence, destroying democratically elected leaders and replacing them with repressive military dictators. Most notable among them were two violently deposed presidents, Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954 and Salvador Allende of Chile in 1973. Clearly the U.S. intent was not to protect or defend democracy but instead to establish, maintain or increase corporate profit by exploiting the country’s land, people and resources.

The American Empire has not only supported repressive regimes in the past, in Brazil, Chile, and Guatemala but also in the present, notably the murderous monarchies of the Middle East, namely Saudi Arabia. The Empire has also engaged in bloodless political coups to remove enlightened and democratically-elected presidents such as Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti in 2004, or more recently José Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009, because its corporate interests were threatened by their social and economic reforms.

Given the capitalist nature of the American Empire, reformist and especially socialist regimes were always targeted for political, economic, and/or military intervention regardless of whether they were established through the ballot or the bullet. These interventions were facilitated by the fact that in every Latin American nation there exists a perennial class struggle tearing at the social fabric of each with the wealthy, powerful elite being the major economic beneficiaries of a regime under the control of or in partnership with the Empire.

It is with the above understanding that the crises in Venezuela can best be understood. I’m no admirer of the late Hugo Chavez, nor of his militarist mentality, nor of his cult of personality. Nevertheless, his Bolivarian Revolution did finally bring a large portion of his nation’s enormous petroleum-based wealth to help the poor and destitute of Venezuela with education, housing, health and other benefits long denied them. For centuries this wealth had gone only to the elite, who in Venezuela were roundly defeated in the polls when Chavez won a democratic election. Nevertheless, the Bush administration supported a failed military coup in 2002 that further served to divide the Venezuelan people and harden their resolve.

Under internal and external attacks, media misinformation and harsh economic sanctions and sabotage, the Bolivarian regime has become more paranoid and repressive. Due in part also to their own mismanagement, they confront a host of economic hardships that further exacerbate the crises with severe shortages of food and medicine and plummeting of oil prices.

This is the climate into which Nicolás Maduro took the reins of power. Whether or not you believe he won a completely free and fair election, it is important to note the Trump administration’s current support of undemocratic regimes the world over.

More to the point, the Trump administration and its allies have no



Tallahassee SDS protests US intervention in Venezuela. (Fight Back! News)

right to declare who the president of Venezuela is, much less to name their designated choice, National Assembly President Juan Guaidó, who did not even run for president or receive a single vote for that office. The Trump regime is entering into very volatile territory openly supporting a coup in Venezuela which will inevitably lead to more repression, violence and bloodshed.

There are more peaceful means for resolving this crisis as suggested by Uruguay, Mexico and the Vatican. Certainly, this coup attempt by the U.S. will not only make it even more difficult to resolve the crisis through dialogue and negotiation, but it will also divide all of Latin America as well as the world, into two dangerously opposing camps.

Let’s not be fooled by Trumpist rhetoric about democracy and liberating the Venezuelan people; the U.S. has its eyes on all those incredible petroleum reserves that are under Venezuelan soil. The Trump regime cares little for the lives of poor and destitute Central Americans seeking asylum, nor the starving Yemenis being bombarded every day, nor the Saudi women leaders being jailed and tortured. Are we to believe they really care about the plight of Venezuelans?

The best way out of this conundrum is through dialogue, yet the Trump administration has refused to enter into negotiations with Maduro despite their repeated invitations to do so. The Trumpists are focused on regime change to achieve their objectives and have no intent on pursuing peaceful solutions. We can only hope that the efforts at dialogue are realized and that another struggling Latin American nation can avoid

the devastation of civil war brought about by the greed of their own elite and of the American Empire.

Bio: Julio Noboa Polanco a writer, columnist, and social justice activist served as Chair of the Esperanza Board in the 90s. He was also an opinion columnist at the *San Antonio Express-News* for near a decade. His writings continue to appear in Texas (*Houston Chronicle*) and Costa Rican (*Semanario Universidad*) newspapers. Recently retired as Assistant Professor of Social Studies from UTEP, Julio now lives in Costa Rica with his wife, Elsa. His focus is on Latino History, Mexican American Studies, critical pedagogy and multicultural education.

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A man holds a sign that reads “They attack for oil” during a march in support of the state-run oil company PDVSA, in Caracas, Venezuela, Jan. 31, 2019. (AP Photo/Ariana Cubillos)