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Venezuela, How to Aid Venezuela's Political Corruption with Maduro in Power?

May 20th, 2018 remains a scarred, torturous, and heart-wrenching date for many individuals in Venezuela. Ever since this date, the events that seemed so horrendous in their worst nightmares became a reality for too many victims. The date will always prove to be an example of democracy not always favoring the people, for this date will haunt the lives of generations to generations to come.

What happened on May 17th, 2018?

Nicolás Maduro was sworn in for his second term, serving as Venezuela's leader and dictator for the next six years (Herrero, Specia 2019). While this may not seem as disastrous as implied, one must think again on what accounts for disastrous events in the eyes of the Venezuelan people. There's no doubt that there's a crisis in Venezuela. The Conversation points out food and medicine shortages, more than 3 million emigrants, and out-of-control hyperinflation as only a few examples of the deteriorating state of the country (Gutiérrez 2019). In response, the United States, European Union, Canada, Mexico, Panama, and more countries have imposed sanctions on Venezuela since the Obama administration with the intention to force the abusive Maduro regime out of the country (Morello 2019). However, the sanctions have not only proven ineffective in their goal but have harmed hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan citizens. Thus, in order to fully throw out Maduro from this suffering region, there must be international, national and local cooperation alike. However, the first step to helping the nation would be to lift the current economic sanctions against Venezuela.

In 2017, the Trump Administration placed embargoes that prevented the purchase of oil from Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA, and confiscated Venezuela's \$8 billion US subsidiary CITGO (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The Center for Strategic and International Studies notes just how catastrophic these measures proved; roughly 98% of the Venezuelan government's income comes from oil exports, and that is the prime source of income that is used for social spending on citizens for subsidized food and housing (Center for Strategic Studies, 2019). The interruption in this revenue stream by the US means that less money is available for spending on citizens, and the impact of this can already be seen. According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, US sanctions have increased the cost of, and decreased the availability of medicine to the point where roughly 300,000 Venezuelans are at risk of illness and death (Welle 2019). This includes 16,000 citizens who need dialysis, 16,000 who require cancer treatment and 80,000 who require HIV medication. The problem does not stop there. Maria Flores, vice president of operations at Hidrocapital, the state water agency for the country's capital, says that the United States is blockading access to

essential foreign parts to supply clean water to citizens. The United States “blocks the money in the bank or sanction the company that is working with us, just for selling us this equipment and without seeing that they are affecting people's lives” (Welle 2019). By implementing ineffective sanctions the US is directing the brunt of the damage towards innocent Venezuelan citizens rather than the intended targets of the Maduro Regime.

These sanctions are responsible for the loss of human lives, human rights violations and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis by allowing sanctions to continue. The Independent corroborates this in 2019 when it documents at least 40,000 people dying in Venezuela as a result of US sanctions that made it harder for ordinary citizens to access food, medicine and medical equipment (Buncombe 2019). The fact of the matter is regions are putting pressure on an authoritarian regime that is killing people and the outcomes of this so-called strategy is? Killing more people.

Although the Maduro Regime has alienated itself on the international stage from the backing of many nations, two notable superpowers remain in support: China and Russia. China and Russia have both provided massive loans to the Venezuelan government in the past, to bail out their state oil company PDVSA and to support their stagnant economy (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). As these two nations remain intertwined with Venezuela, buying their gold, oil, and commodities, and the United States draws itself away, the US is only making room for Russia and China to compete more effectively economically, and establish a larger geopolitical presence in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, Russia is looking to take their presence a step further. Craig Fuller, the head of US Southern Command reports that Russian troops have embedded themselves in garrisons around Venezuela by the hundreds (Berg 2019). Moreover, Russia has been making efforts to upgrade the missile system they previously sold to Venezuela, as well as implement an AK-47 Plant. The military presence of Russia is fueled by US sanctions as Venezuela turns to Russia as an ally and further embeds themselves in a coalition when the US can no longer provide sufficient economic support in times of dire need. However, the greatest threat to the US comes not from Russia or China, but rather from Iran. Hezbollah is a militant political party formed during the Iranian Revolution that used to obtain many of its funds, supplies, ammunition, explosives, and more from Iran. Iran depends on Hezbollah to spread its influence globally. After the US sanctions on Iran, though, Hezbollah came to rely more on Venezuela as a network to gain its funding, and the two nations have now formed strong ties in the face of shared hostility towards the US (Counter Extremism Project, 2019). After the US attack on Iranian Commander Qassim Suleimani, tensions with Iran are at an all time high; interfering with their interests even further, can in the status quo, prove dangerous for the US and its citizens. So, overall, by continuing economic sanctions we are paving the way for the alienation of the US from Venezuela, and geopolitical and militant presence of other aggressive superpowers, which will harm US and Venezuelan citizens interest (Tobin, Jonathan, et al. 2019).

The people in Venezuela don't need foreign countries meddling in their country and have even recognized the ineffectiveness of sanctions themselves. 56 percent of Venezuelans

oppose U.S. financial sanctions according to Foreign Policy; only 32 percent support them (Rodriguez 2018). When it comes to foreign military intervention in Venezuela, why should unprompted countries help people in a country if they don't want the supposed "help" in the first place? More importantly, if the people of Venezuela have recognized its effectiveness, how come the leaders of the regions haven't recognized this as well?

If sanctions continue, economists project massive destructive impacts to the region. Economist Francisco Rodriguez from the Financial Times estimates that there will be an imminent famine, UN High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that more than 5million people will have fled the country by the end of this year, and create instability in the economy permanently (Stott 2018). These are massive permanent damage all for a temporary regime control, and international strategy isn't even working!

Lifting sanctions would have a real and tangible effect on Venezuela. That's not just a projection, we can quantify this. In Geneva for the World Health Organization (WHO) assembly, Health Minister Carlos Alvarado said Western sanctions had led to the freezing of 5 billion euros (\$5.6 billion) in assets, including gold in the Bank of England and funds in major institutions like Citibank (Nebehay 2019). He estimated that would cover Venezuela's medical needs for six years. Thus, lifting sanctions has a 5 fold impact. It would fix the quality of life of numerous Venezuelans. It would, consequently, save human lives. Third, it will enable the people in Venezuela to focus on tailored ways to throw Maduro out of power. It would restabilize world economies. Finally, it allows for the foreign countries meddling in Venezuela's economic system to rethink their foreign policy.

A common misconception is that U.S. sanctions on Venezuela are all targeted sanctions on government officials; this is untrue. For example, our sanctions regarding human trafficking create a variety of restrictions on the aid, including humanitarian aid, that we can send to Venezuela. Even supposedly "targeted" sanctions have broader impacts on the populace, and these costs are coming at no gain at all. The Congressional Research Service's report from February 1 details that many of the targeted sanctions have been in place for more than a decade, and the most impactful sanctions have been in place for approximately five or more years now (Congressional Research Service, 2020). In the last few years with all of these sanctions in place, we have not seen increased cooperation from the Venezuelan government, and the humanitarian crisis, including human rights abuses, is only worsening. Targeted sanctions do not work.

In a statement from late January, a United Nations rapporteur and former secretary of the U.N. Human Rights Council condemned current U.S. policy against Venezuela, calling sanctions "illegal" measures that amount to "crimes against humanity" because they knowingly hurt the poorest people in society, cause preventable death through food and medicine shortages, lead to increased violations of human rights, and attempt to coerce another country (United Nations, 2019). He specifies that the current "economic warfare" waged by the U.S. is a significant factor in the humanitarian crisis and that U.S. sanctions should never have been put in place without endorsement from the UN Security Council, violating Article 7 of the Rome

Statute of the International Criminal Court (United Nations, 2019). Keeping this ineffective policy in place puts the U.S. directly against international norms.

The solution for Maduro's corrupt regime remains simple in the first step that is evident and long overdue: there needs to be a termination in economic sanction against the Maduro administration. Indeed while sanctions stress economic pressure on the administration itself, it is imperative to note that it literally strips the quality of life of millions of Venezuelans as well due to the hyperinflation and lack of basic goods that are needed for the everyday consumer in this developing country.

Additionally, imposing the implementation of a system of checks and balances in democratic nations like Venezuela would ensure that no single actor is stepping out of their boundaries. There needs to be an increase in transparency and access to information in these developing countries. Countries successful at curbing corruption have a long tradition of government openness, freedom of the press, transparency and access to information. Access to information increases the responsiveness of government bodies, while simultaneously having a positive effect on the levels of public participation in a country.

The UN should take a more active role to make a judgement on an international viewpoint by designating the Human Rights Council of the UN to be responsible for addressing the civil unrest in the nation, addressing the dire urgency for a resolution by encouraging the most dominantly successful countries to play a more vital role in conflict resolution, and emphasizing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and a series of international human rights treaties to maintain world order and peace. There is an urgent need for global cooperation in pressuring governments to comply with international law and United Nations governance; regions who initially sanctioned Venezuela need to find more direct and strategic tools that will directly affect the Maduro administration rather than the poor people living in the nation.

Under the "United Nations Convention against Corruption", Article 5, must be emphasized and highlighted for combating political corruption in developing nations. It is established under Article 5 "Preventive anti-corruption policies and practices," that "states parties shall, as appropriate and in accordance with the fundamental principles of their legal system, collaborate with each other and with relevant international and regional organizations in promoting and developing the measures referred to in this article" ("United Nations Convention Against Corruption", United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime). Through Article 21, clause 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures" (United Nations) Essentially, corruption can not and should not usurp the will of the citizens. Maduro must be accountable for his actions and there needs to be United Nation leaders that detail each and every violation that Maduro is conducting in his own country diplomatically before resorting to violence or more chaos in the region.

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