

Venezuela: A Problem of Continental Security

Summary of Vladimiro Mujica Presentation
The Venezuelan Tragedy – A Panel Discussion
October 3, 2020

I would like to start by thanking the organizers, the Vicksburg Cultural Arts Center, and especially my friend and scientific colleague Claudio Mendoza, for the opportunity to be here to convey to the Venezuelan diaspora and the American public part of my vision on the Venezuelan tragedy, as this event has so very aptly been titled.

About my background, I want to clarify that I am a professor at Arizona State University, a scientist working in physical chemistry at the School of Molecular Sciences. Prior to that, I was a Research Professor at Northwestern University, and before I was a professor at the Venezuelan Central University in Caracas, where I met Claudio. In addition to my scientific background, I have been an active participant in civil society organizations both in Venezuela and the USA and a democratic activist against the Venezuelan regime, first under Chavez's ruling and now under Maduro's.

The specific aspect of the intricate Venezuelan situation on which I will concentrate has to do with the regional and continental implications of the imposition of a political model by the ruling regime. It has not only confiscated freedom and democracy from Venezuelans, but it has also openly stimulated the intervention of foreign countries and organizations in crucial areas of government. The list of foreign powers entrenched in Venezuela include Russia, China, Iran and Cuba, which in practice constitute an anti-USA alliance. Other organizations include a branch of the Colombia guerrilla and Hezbollah.

As part of my social activism, I write regularly for several Venezuelan online media, and one of my recent articles, translated to English by Claudio with the title "*Cubazuela: Internal War Debriefing*", has to do with the extreme nature of the Cuban intervention in Venezuela. In fact, the term "Cubazuela" refers to a sarcastic combination of the names of the two countries to emphasize the absorbing and parasitic character of the Cuban grip on Venezuela. This article has been made available by the organizers of this event, and I will regard it as a background reference to this introduction.

For all practical purposes, the Cuban presence in Venezuela has the dimensions and relevance of an occupation army. Partly in the shadows and partly overtly, it operates in the repressive actions of the regime and the control of the population through fear and neighbor vigilance, in a scheme disguised as social and organized popular activism. Significant portions of the national identification and public notaries of the country are also in the hands of the Cubans, as well as a large part of the public health initiatives of the regime, especially through the program *Barrio Adentro*, and of the basic educational system through a program of indoctrination of teachers and instructors. One of the most sinister roles of the Cuban occupation army in Venezuela is the repression of political dissidents, especially in the military.

The magnitude and depth of the Cuban presence in Venezuela has been extensively denounced in a report of the General Secretary of the Organization of American States, the State Department and various Venezuelan institutions such as the National Assembly and organizations of the civil society. A separate chapter in this sort of colonizing process has to do with the supply of essentially free oil that Venezuela has been shipping to Cuba for more than a decade. In fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of its support to Cuba, it would not be an exaggeration to say that, from the economic point of view, the island is entirely dependent on its predatory special relationship with its continental possession.

I have often compared the Venezuelan regime with the Vichy collaborationist regimen imposed by the Nazis during the Second War invasion of France. This comparison is not entirely accurate because, in the Venezuelan case, Cuban colonization has been voluntarily accepted by Chavez first and then by Maduro. It is of course no coincidence that the Castro brothers entirely supported Nicolas Maduro as Chavez's successor after his death. Maduro was trained as a young man in the island, and his ties with the Castro dynasty are very deep.

A final reflection. Understanding the regional and international nature of the Venezuelan crisis is essential to consider realistic political alternatives to this tragedy. Venezuelans cannot defeat the regime by themselves because it is a very unequal confrontation against several powers at the same time, which will not hesitate to use violence as has been extensively demonstrated. We Venezuelans must certainly fight to recover our freedom and democracy, but the USA and the rest of the international democratic community must understand the nature and inherent risks of the Venezuelan crisis to the entire region. This includes the realization that, for better or worse, there is not solution that does not include the Cubans as the real power behind the throne.