

From Late Victorian Holocausts to 21st Century Imperialism: “Crocodile Tears” for Venezuela

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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On 26 February, Stephen Hickey, UK political coordinator at the United Nations, delivered a statement at the Security Council briefing on Venezuela that put the blame for the situation in that country on its government. He said that years of misrule and corruption have wrecked the Venezuelan economy and that the actions of the “Maduro regime” have led to economic collapse.

He continued by talking about the recent attempts to bring ‘aid’ into the country:

“... use of deadly violence against his (Maduro) own people and other concerning acts of aggression to block the supply of desperately needed humanitarian aid are simply repugnant... the Maduro regime’s oppressive policies affect... innocent civilians, including women and children, who lack access to essential medical and other basic supplies...”

He then went on to talk about journalist Jorge Ramos being reportedly detained, later to be released and deported:

“As with the lack of freedom given to journalists, other essential freedoms – such as democratic ones – are simply not present in Venezuela... We stand with... Juan Guaidó in pursuit of our shared goal to bring peace and stability to Venezuela.”

We can but wonder what Hickey thinks about the [illegal and arbitrary detention and needless suffering](#) of Julian Assange in the Ecuadorian embassy in London for the best part of a decade courtesy of his own government.

Hickey argued that the only way to achieve peace and stability is by democratic transition through free and fair presidential elections, as demanded by ‘interim President Guaidó’ and the National Assembly, in line with the Venezuelan Constitution.

He stated:

“Until this is achieved, the current humanitarian crisis caused by the Maduro regime’s corrupt policies will continue... nothing short of free and fair presidential elections will do.”

In the meantime, Hickey called for additional sanctions against individual members of the Venezuelan government who he said had benefited from corrupt policies.

He concluded that:

“The Venezuelan people deserve a better future. They have suffered enough at the hands of the Maduro regime.”

Something for Hickey to consider

Here are a few facts for Stephen Hickey. In 2018, Maduro was re-elected president. A [section of the opposition](#) boycotted the election but the boycott failed: 9,389,056 people voted; 16 parties participated and six candidates stood for the presidency. Maduro won 6,248,864 votes, or 68 per cent. Renowned journalist [John Pilger says](#) that on election day he spoke to one of the 150 foreign election observers who told him the process had been entirely fair. There was no fraud and none of the lurid media claims stood up.

So what of the unelected Juan Guaidó whom Hickey calls the “interim president”?

Pilger notes that the Trump administration has presented Guaidó, a [pop-up creation](#) of the CIA-front National Endowment for Democracy, as the legitimate President of Venezuela. Guaidó was previously unheard of by 81 percent of the Venezuelan people and has been elected by no one.

And what of the people who are behind him (not ordinary Venezuelan people, but his backers in Washington)? Pilger says:

“As his “special envoy to Venezuela” (coup master), Trump has appointed a convicted felon, Elliot Abrams, whose intrigues in the service of Presidents Reagan and George W. Bush helped produce the Iran-Contra scandal in the 1980s and plunge central America into years of blood-soaked misery.”

Talking about the Western media biased reporting on Venezuela, Pilger adds that the country’s democratic record, human rights legislation, food programmes, healthcare initiatives and poverty reduction did not happen:

“The greatest literacy program in human history did not happen, just as the millions who march in support of Maduro and in memory of Chavez, do not exist.”

None of this happened in the warped world of Stephen Hickey either. He paints a wholly distorted picture of the situation in Venezuela, one which lays the blame for economic woes and their consequences at the door of Maduro and his ‘corrupt regime’. But this is a tried and tested strategy: bring a country to its knees and apportion blame on the political leaders of that country.

Countries like Venezuela have to a large extent been [trapped by their colonial legacy](#) and have very often become single commodity producers – in this case oil – and find it difficult to expand other sectors. In effect, they have found themselves extremely vulnerable. The US can squeeze the price of the commodity upon which such countries rely, while applying sanctions and cutting off financial lifelines. It then becomes that much easier to lay the blame for the consequences on a ‘corrupt regime’.

[Prof Michael Hudson has outlined](#) how debt and the US-controlled international monetary system has backed Maduro into a corner. He argues that Venezuela has become an oil monoculture, with revenue having been spent largely on importing food and other necessities, which it could have produced itself. In the case of food at least, many countries in the Global South have been adversely affected by the 'globalisation of agriculture' and have had their [indigenous sectors undermined](#) as a result of WTO policies and directives, debt and US-supported geopolitical lending strategies.

However, this is all an inconvenient truth for the likes of Hickey and the Western media. Talking about the BBC, John Pilger notes that it is "too difficult" for that media outlet to include any of this in its reporting:

"It is too difficult to report the collapse of oil prices since 2014 as largely the result of criminal machinations by Wall Street. It is too difficult to report the blocking of Venezuela's access to the US-dominated international financial system as sabotage. It is too difficult to report Washington's "sanctions" against Venezuela, which have caused the loss of at least \$6 billion in Venezuela's revenue since 2017, including \$2 billion worth of imported medicines, as illegal, or the Bank of England's refusal to return Venezuela's gold reserves as an act of piracy."

None of this is up for debate by the BBC or Hickey. He sits in the UN talking about, freedom, democracy and the rights and suffering of ordinary people, while failing to acknowledge the US or the UK's own role in the denial of freedom and the perpetuation of suffering across the world.

From Syria to Iraq, the 'squeezing out of life'

According to former French foreign minister [Roland Dumas](#), Britain had planned covert action in Syria as early as 2009. And writing in The Guardian in 2013, Nafeez Ahmed discussed leaked emails from the [private intelligence firm Stratfor](#), including notes from [a meeting with Pentagon officials](#), that confirmed US-UK training of Syrian opposition forces since 2011 aimed at eliciting the "collapse" of Assad's regime "from within."

But this is where Britain and the West's concerns really lie: facilitating the geopolitical machinations of financial institutions, oil companies, arms manufacturers and profiteers. And it is [no different this time](#) around with Venezuela. Ordinary people are mere 'collateral damage' left dying in or fleeing war zones that the West and its allies created. The West's brutal oil and gas wars are twisted as 'humanitarian' interventions for public consumption.

In 2014, former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray told a meeting at St Andrews University in Scotland that Libya is now a disaster and 15,000 people were killed when NATO (British and French jets) bombed Sirte. The made-for-public narrative about that 'intervention' began with some tale about Gadhafi killing his own people, which turned out to be false. Now we are hearing similar about Maduro.

As far as Iraq is concerned, Murray said that he knew for certain that key British officials were fully aware that there weren't any weapons of mass destruction. He said that invading Iraq wasn't a mistake, it was a lie.

Over a million people have been killed via the US-led or US-backed attacks on Iraq,

Afghanistan and Syria. But this is the plan: to turn countries into vassal states of the US, or for those that resist to reconstruct (destroy) them into fractured territories.

Any eulogies to morality and humanitarianism must be seen for what they are: part of the ongoing psychological operations being waged on the public to encourage people to regard what is happening in the world as a disconnected array of events in need of Western intervention. These events are not for one minute to be regarded by the public as the planned brutality of empire and militarism.

[Tim Anderson](#) (author of 'The Dirty War on Syria') argues that where Syria was concerned Western culture in general favoured its worst traditions:

“the ‘imperial prerogative’ for intervention... reinforced by a ferocious campaign of war propaganda.”

We are now seeing it again, this time with Venezuela.

We might well ask who is Donald Trump, John Bolton or for that matter Stephen Hickey to dictate and engineer what the future of Venezuela should be? But this is what the US with the UK in support has been doing across the globe for decades. Control of oil is key to current events in Venezuela. But there is also the subtext of destroying any tendencies towards socialism across Latin America (and elsewhere) as well as the need of Western capital to expand into or create new markets: Washington's hand-picked puppet Juan Guaido will [facilitate the process](#) and usher in a programme of [‘mass privatisation’ and ‘hyper-capitalism’](#).

In many respects, the US has learned its imperialist playbook from its former colonial master, the UK. In the book [‘Late Victorian Holocausts’](#), the author Mike Davis writes that millions in India were dying of starvation when Lord Lytton (head of the British government in India) said, “There is to be no interference of any kind on the part of government with the object of reducing the price of food”. He dismissed any idea of feeding the starving as “humanitarian hysterics”. There was plenty of food, but it was held back to preserve prices and serve the market.

Indian writer and politician Shashi Tharoor, [notes](#) a speech to the British House of Commons in 1935 by Winston Churchill who said that the slightest fall from the present standard of life in India means slow starvation and the actual squeezing out of life, not only of millions but of scores of millions of people. And that after almost 200 years of British rule. According to Tharoor, this “squeezing out of life” was realized at the hands of Churchill in the six to seven million Indian deaths in the WW2 Bengali Holocaust.

Despite Hickey's crocodile tears, hundreds of thousands in various countries are still dying today due to the same imperialist mindset. Humanitarian hysterics are for public consumption as the “squeezing out of life” continues regardless.

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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