

Picking Up Where Bush, Obama, and Trump Left Off, Biden Extends U.S. Campaign to Crush Venezuela

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On October 13th, Venezuela’s representative to the UN **Samuel Moncada** [denounced plotting by the United States and Colombia](#) against Venezuela’s democratically elected government at the UN Security Council.

In an eight-page [letter](#) to Security Council **President Martin Kimani**, Moncada [detailed “bellicose” statements by Colombian President Iván Duque and by U.S. Navy Admiral Craig S. Faller, who praised the U.S.’s “maximum pressure” campaign against Venezuela.](#)

These latter comments suggested that U.S. policy has not changed from the Trump era, despite the arrival of a Democrat to the White House.

The Threat of a Good Example

Joe Emersberger and Justin Podur’s new book, *Extraordinary Threat: The U.S. Empire, the Media, and Twenty Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela* (New York: Monthly Review, 2021) details over twenty years of U.S. subversion efforts directed against Venezuela.

According to the authors, U.S. hostility to Venezuela’s government stems from the threat of a good example.

While Venezuela possesses massive oil reserves, the Venezuelan government never denied the U.S. access to its country’s oil and, as late as 2017, Venezuela remained the U.S. economy’s third-largest foreign supplier of energy.

The true fear of U.S. officials is that a country with significant resources and poor communities (a.k.a. Ranchos) has tremendous potential to develop an independent path and succeed in raising the standard of living for all its citizens, not to mention help out other countries in the region.

A secret cable published by WikiLeaks revealed that, in 2007, U.S. officials were

demanding more (and more flexible) resources and tools to counter [Venezuelan President Hugo] Chávez's [1999-2013] effort to assume greater dominion over Latin America at the expense of U.S. leadership and interests.^[1]

Bolivarian Revolution: Brief History and Successes

Throughout much of the 20th century, Venezuela was ruled by an oligarchy which monopolized the country's oil wealth.

In February 1989, in what became known as the Caracazo, Venezuelan security forces killed hundreds and possibly thousands of poor people who had risen up in revolt against an International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed structural adjustment program that had resulted in a rise in fuel prices and bus fares.

The program was imposed by President Carlos Andrés Pérez (1974-1979; 1989-1993), who had campaigned saying that IMF programs were like a "neutron bomb that killed people but left buildings standing."

During the 1980s, Hugo Chávez had been secretly building a leftist movement within the Venezuelan military, which gained recruits and intensity after the Caracazo.

When Chávez was elected president in 1998, after a failed coup attempt six years earlier, he had the support of poor people in Venezuela's cities who organized into self-help organizations and popular militias.^[2]

The goal of the revolution was to restore Venezuela's economic sovereignty, empower the poor and Indigenous people, and revitalize the legacy of Latin America's great liberator, Simón Bolívar.



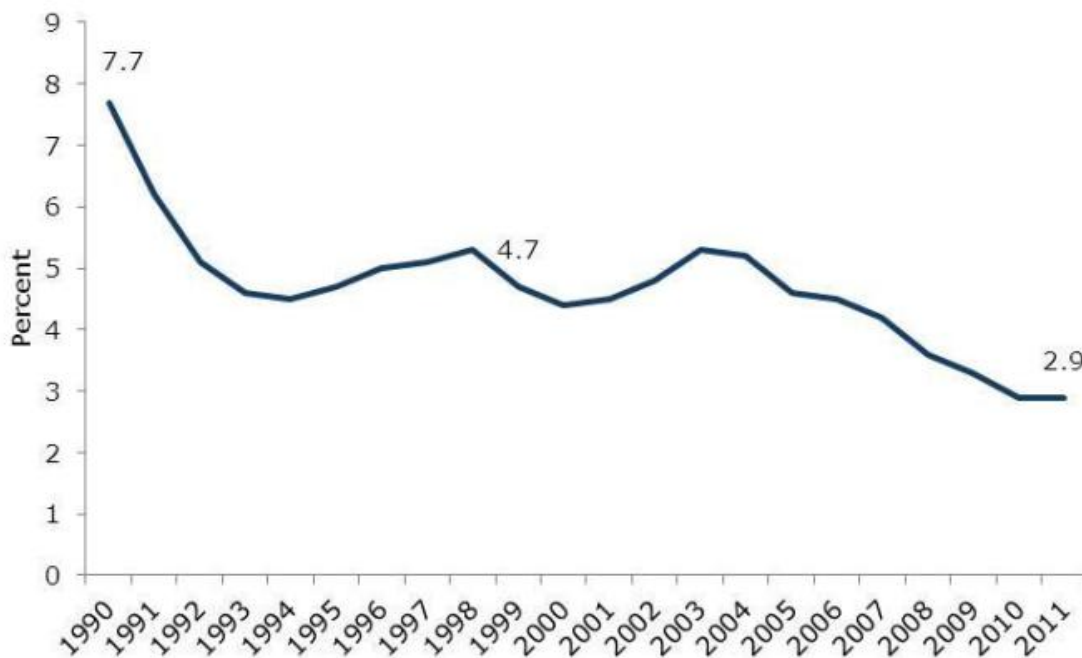
Venezuela's late President Hugo Chávez unveils a photograph-like portrait of Venezuela's independence hero Simón Bolívar on the 229th anniversary of Bolívar's birth at Miraflores Presidential Palace in Caracas, Venezuela, on Tuesday, July 24, 2012. [Source: trtworld.com]

Once in power Chávez—unlike Pérez—followed through on his promises to change Venezuela's political-economic system.



Despite efforts to destabilize the country, the Chavez and Maduro administrations have made advances including building affordable housing projects known as Gran Mision Vividendas. [Source: nodal.am]

By 2013, when Chávez died of cancer, poverty and inequality had been reduced substantially, literacy had increased, and Venezuela’s UN Human Development Index, a composite measure of national income (GDP), access to education, and child mortality—rose from seventh in the region to fourth.^[3]



Malnutrition in children under five was one of several social indicators that improved dramatically in Venezuela following the election of Hugo Chávez in 1999. [Source: fair.org]

Chávez’s successor Nicolás Maduro continued many of the same policies that had benefited Venezuela’s poor, though fell victim to a collapse in world oil prices and crushing U.S. sanctions that resulted in a major economic crisis.

Despite mistakes and some internal corruption typical to countries in both North and South America—including the legalized bribery that corrupts U.S. politics through the lobbying system, as the standard bearer of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution, Maduro sustained popular support, winning the 2018 election with 6.2 million votes (67.7%) compared to challenger Henri Falcón’s 1.9 million (21%).^[4]

First Two Coup Attempts and U.S. Support

On April 11, 2002, the George W. Bush administration supported a coup led by Pedro Carmona—the head of Venezuela’s largest business federation. The coup was put down after Venezuelans took to the streets at great personal risk to rally behind Chávez. *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (embedded video below) is well worth watching as it is an excellent documentary on the coup; the Irish film crew that produced the documentary just happened to be in Miraflores, the presidential palace, at the time of the coup.

A decree that Carmona issued dissolved the National Assembly, fired all Supreme Court judges, and disassociated Venezuela from the legacy of Simón Bolívar.

In July 2002, the U.S. State Department’s Office of the Inspector General published a report titled [“A Review of U.S. Policy Toward Venezuela November 2001-April 2002”](#) detailing how the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), Pentagon and other U.S. assistance programs provided training, institution building, and other support to individuals and organizations understood to be actively involved in the coup.

Journalists Jeremy Bigwood and Eva Golinger later uncovered how prominent coup plotters such as Leopoldo López and María Corina Machado had received U.S. funds.^[5]

Scott Wilson reported in *The Washington Post* that the U.S. government hosted people involved in the coup before it happened.

Wilson wrote that “there was involvement of U.S.-sponsored NGOs in training people that were involved in the coup. And in the immediate aftermath of the coup, the United States government said that it was a resignation, not a coup, effectively recognizing the government that took office very briefly until President Chávez returned.”^[6]

Six months after Carmona’s coup was put down, the opposition to Chávez led by Leopoldo López—the mayor of the Chacao Municipality of Caracas—organized a one-day national strike among oil workers with the aim of bringing down the government.

The coup failed but it contributed to a contraction of Venezuela’s GDP. Chávez later pardoned the coup plotters—belying claims of his supposedly authoritarian nature.

Emersberger and Podur write that “any foreign government linked to a political movement that inflicted [huge] economic damage on the United States would suffer horrific retaliation. U.S. politicians and media outlets that supported the sabotage would be declared treasonous and never be heard from again.”^[7] Such was not the case for Venezuela.

More Subversion

In 2010, Wikileaks published a U.S. embassy cable from four years prior in which the

American ambassador William Brownfield outlined a [five-point cloak-and-dagger strategy for “penetrating Chavez’ political base,” “dividing Chavismo,” “protecting vital U.S. businesses,” and “isolating Chavez internationally.”](#)

USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), which provides [fast flexible, short term assistance designed to foster political transition—ie. regime change—was central to these efforts](#), which continued after Chavez’ death.^[8]

When Maduro won a snap election in April 2013, the defeated candidate Henrique Capriles—a participant in the 2002 coup and a mob siege of the Cuban Embassy—cried fraud and called his supporters into the streets, with backing from the Obama administration.

A year earlier, Jimmy Carter had called the technical aspects of Venezuela’s electoral system “the best in the world.”^[9]

Sanctions of Mass Destruction

In March 2015, Obama followed his backing of Capriles’s bogus election fraud charges by imposing economic sanctions on Venezuela, which Obama ridiculously called “an extraordinary threat to the national security of the United States.”^[10]



Source: presenza.com

The goal of the sanctions—which were indefensible under the UN Charter, OAS Charter, and U.S. law—was to starve the Venezuelan government of the hard currency it needed to import food, medicine, and the parts required to maintain basic infrastructure such as Venezuela’s electrical grid.^[11]

The intensification of Obama’s sanctions by the Trump administration in August 2017 resulted in the loss of \$6 billion in oil revenue over the next 12 months.

By 2018, Venezuela could only import \$140 million worth of medicines, down from around \$2 billion in 2013-2014. Food imports in the same period declined from \$11.2 billion in 2013 to \$2.46 billion in 2018.^[12]

In 2019, the Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) published a study by U.S. economists Mark Weisbrot and Jeffrey Sachs estimating that Trump's sanctions may have killed about 40,000 Venezuelans in the 2017-2018 period alone.^[13]



Venezuelan Embassy [Source: masspeaceaction.org]

Trump Presidency and Sixth Coup Attempt

Under Trump, U.S. officials began openly encouraging the Venezuelan military to oust Maduro. National Security Adviser John Bolton [joked about having Maduro sent to Guantánamo Bay](#).^[14]

When opposition leader Juan Guaidó—[who aimed to privatize Venezuela's the oil industry](#)—declared himself interim president in January 2019, President Trump immediately recognized him.

However, Guaidó's case for president was based on the lie that Maduro had been elected illegitimately in May 2018.

Emersberger and Podur present the entire Guaidó era as a sixth very long coup attempt. (See CAM's coverage at the time: "[Yet Another U.S. Coup Attempt to Eradicate the Bolivarian Revolution](#)" and "[Operation GIDEON: New Details Emerge Linking U.S. to Latest Coup Attempt in Venezuela](#).")

Its defining feature has been crippling economic warfare, combined with false allegations against Maduro that were designed to give the Venezuelan military a humanitarian pretext for turning on him.

Useless Democratic Opposition

Democrats in Congress were useless as an opposition to Trump’s hardline policies. In his memoir, John Bolton cited Trump Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin as the most serious in trying to stifle him on Venezuela—not any Democrat.

Bernie Sanders (D-VT) characterized Maduro (and Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega) as a dictator in January 2020 and repeated the lie that Maduro had refused humanitarian aid. Sanders further condemned Maduro for using violence against protesters—though the protesters were the ones sowing much greater violence.^[15]

On March 8, 2020, Ro Khanna (D-CA) told *The Real News* that he opposed sanctions because they were giving “Maduro an excuse to blame the United States, as opposed to taking responsibility for his own *failed economic policies* [my emphasis] and his own cronyism.”^[16]

Khanna subsequently characterized Maduro in *The Washington Post* as an [“authoritarian leader who has presided over unfair elections”](#)^[17]—a claim contradicted by the Carter Center that fits the standard U.S. propaganda narrative.

Manufacturing Consent

Mainstream corporate media helped manufacture consent with U.S. subversion efforts in Venezuela through a relentless demonization campaign, which falsely claimed that Venezuela was a prosperous democracy until Chávez and Maduro came along and ruined everything.

Alan MacLeod found the media far more favorable toward Saudi King Abdullah after his death in 2015 than Chávez after his death in 2013, even though King Abdullah was “an absolute monarch boasting one of the worst human rights records in history.”^[18]

London Guardian correspondent Rory Carroll meanwhile wrote a well-received book about Venezuela which a) provided an almost total whitewash of the U.S. role in efforts to overthrow Chávez; b) omitted discussion of the amnesty that Chávez granted to coup plotters Henrique Capriles and Leopoldo López; and c) never said a word about hundreds of Chavista peasants who were assassinated, most likely by wealthy landowners opposed to land reform.^[19]

Carroll’s bias was in part related to his privileged lifestyle. According to a guest, he was put up by *The Guardian* in a “lavish apartment with the feel of a penthouse” in Altamira, an upper-class neighborhood and opposition stronghold in East Caracas.^[20]

Human Rights Fraud

The U.S. empire’s human rights group, Human Rights Watch (HRW), predictably followed the media in aggressively attacking Chavismo.

Within hours of Chávez’s death, HRW put out a statement entitled [“Chávez’s Authoritarian Legacy,”](#) which said nothing positive about him and grouped him with supposedly rogue dictators in Libya, Iran, Cuba and Syria—all countries targeted for regime change by the U.S.

Conclusion

The United States's unremitting hostility to Venezuela's socialist government reflects the pathologies of the capitalist system, which cannot tolerate any rival competitor.

United States double standards are apparent in its alliance with oppressive governments in [Colombia](#) and [Honduras](#) that have committed egregious human rights violations and have been responsible for flooding the U.S. with cocaine.

And yet somehow Venezuela is the bad guy.

Despite the years of U.S.-backed subversion, Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution has endured, as the majority of the country's people remain committed to its principles of anti-imperialism, economic sovereignty and social justice.

Though the Biden administration may be intent on sustaining a cruel economic war and fomenting regime change, the prospect of success is limited as the principles of the Bolivarian revolution remain strong.

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Notes

1. Joe Emersberger and Justin Podur, *Extraordinary Threat: The U.S. Empire, the Media, and Twenty Years of Coup Attempts in Venezuela* (New York: Monthly Review, 2021), 22.
2. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 65, 66.
3. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 186.
4. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 26.
5. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 87.
6. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 87.
7. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 105.
8. In 2013, [the National Endowment for Democracy \(NED\) provided at least \\$300,000 to opposition candidates](#) and supported efforts on social media to undermine Venezuela's socialist government.
9. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 112.
10. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 10.
11. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 10.
12. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 18.
13. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 18.
14. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 18, 42.
15. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 46, 47.
16. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 18, 42.
17. Khanna had similarly called Syrian President Bashar al-Assad a war criminal while claiming to oppose regime-change designs in Syria, and said that U.S. concerns about Russian interference in U.S. elections was legitimate—when it was not.

18. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 184, 185.
19. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 199, 201.
20. Emersberger and Podur, *Extraordinary Threat*, 191. *The Guardian* was supposedly a left-wing newspaper.

Featured image: Rally in rejection of the U.S. destabilizing plan against Venezuela, 2019. | Photo: Twitter/ @codepink

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