

Crisis & Critique: A Trumpist Hangover Prevails in Venezuela

VA columnist Ociel Lopez evaluates the lasting impact of Trump's legacy for the Venezuelan opposition.

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Elliot Abrams has gone missing in the last few days. He seems to have lost some of his proactivity.

Maybe the now former White House special envoy for Venezuela tired himself out in his last weeks on the job, drafting sinister decrees willy-nilly, such as [blocking Venezuela's diesel purchases](#) and [sanctioning opposition politicians](#) and businessmen. As he wrote them, horned men attacked Washington's sacrosanct Capitol, just a few blocks away from his office, which failed to draw comment from the diplomatic expert.

Abrams isn't the only one who has gone AWOL. Former Vice President Mike Pence was forced to deal with other “dictators” closer to him in the final days of his term and stopped [touring the globe](#) to discuss the “serious humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.” [Florida Senator] Marco Rubio has also seemed to forget about the Latin American “tyrants,” while US Southern Command no longer has sudden “concerns” about [drug trafficking](#) in the Caribbean.

The Magazolans, as Venezuelan Trump supporters are called, especially in Florida, no longer dare to call the new president a “communist” or accuse him of “selling out to the Russians and Chinese” as they did weeks ago. The election campaign is over and they now have a new president. Many, though, are waiting for Trump to call on them to start another adventure.

Undoubtedly something is going to happen in Washington. What it is will have repercussions in Latin America, especially in Venezuela, because the US government has been telematically overseeing what has been happening in the Caribbean country for the past four years, especially among the opposition.

First, the US designed a system of economic sanctions not seen in decades, [going after](#) any company that did oil-based or other trading with Venezuela. Equally, in the military area, Abrams notoriously orchestrated the violent [military coup attempt of April 30, 2019](#). During the attempted coup, opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, now [exiled](#) in Spain, broke his house

arrest and dozens of military personnel tried to take the La Carlota airbase before marching through some Caracas avenues. As the coup attempt failed, Abrams himself admitted that the officials contacted to lead the coup had “turned off their phones.”

This was the most notorious failure of the Republican government’s Venezuela policy, but it wasn’t the only one. Others included implementing a [parallel presidency](#) and attempting a military landing called [Operation Gedeon](#), which was orchestrated by a US military company, in which two U.S. citizens were [imprisoned](#).

It all happened during the Trump years, in which he “green lighted” any adventure in Venezuela because “all options [were] on the table.”

Things are hardly rosy with new President Joe Biden, but the point is that Trumpism is in decline. This decline has been solidified due to the way that Trump challenged and ridiculed the transition period in a style akin to that of the Venezuelan right: throwing the toys out of the pram and failing to concede.

This shift allows a respite for the Venezuelan opposition which hasn’t fled the country and was desecrated, persecuted and even sanctioned by the US Treasury Department for betting on the electoral strategy. In fact, many of the Office of Foreign Asset Control’s recent sanctions were against opposition politicians and entrepreneurs. The opposition that remains in Venezuela can breathe a bit easier without Trump.

A sanctioned opposition

Without Trump, Guaido has found it increasingly difficult to legitimise his “interim administration” amongst the parties of the former National Assembly. As such, he has been forced to concede to their demand to eliminate the “government center coordinator” position, which he created to house his political mentor Leopoldo Lopez.

The monster created through the interim administration has gone on to devour its maker. The hangover after Trump’s intoxication reached the heart of the imaginary government that Washington itself built.

A chain of micro-events has equally been set off in sectors of the Venezuelan opposition which has disobeyed this radical, foreign-bred strategy that had its main support in Republican officials.

Within a few days of the US transition, opposition leader and former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles left the Republican script by [calling](#) for a change of strategy and talks with Chavismo.

The following day, Democratic Action Henry Ramos Allup, his natural contender, reported that his party is “cold-headedly” discussing its participation in the regional and local elections to be conducted this year. Democratic Action leaders, as well as Ramos Allup’s relatives, have previously been sanctioned by the US.

Both are the most important opposition leaders remaining in Venezuela and belong to the opposition’s most voted parties.

Post-Trumpism has resulted in a kind of thawing of positions that were forced to freeze

when US government officials decided on an aggressive strategy against Venezuela in 2016. What is normal in any country — for opposition leaders to prepare to go to elections — is in Venezuela a real sacrilege against Washington’s current interests.

Meanwhile, the unravelling of Guaido’s international recognition continues at full speed.

Allied support for Washington starts to break down

The first international player to change its position was the European Union.

As of its 6 January communiqué, the EU [no longer grants](#) Guaido any protagonism but rather the same status as any other political actor. It includes him, but without any recognition of office.

France24 interpreted this as such:

“The words ‘interim president’ no longer describe Juan Guaido in the EU’s latest statement on Venezuela’s political situation. While recognising him as a leading opposition voice, the twenty-seven countries removed this title from Guaido after control of the National Assembly returned to President Nicolas Maduro’s government.”

The German government was also explicit. Since January 17, it ceased to recognise Guaido as “interim president” following the “recommendations of the EU State Council,” according to Christofer Burger, a spokesman for the ministry of foreign affairs.

In Latin America, winds of change are also beginning to be felt: Dominican Republic backtracked on Guaido’s recognition at the end of January, stating that if they didn’t, they would be setting a “terrible precedent.”

No policy changes have yet been seen from Biden’s government. At the moment, lowering the tone on Venezuela already seems like a major change because it gives national and international actors room to finally emerge from the Trump period that dominated the region over the past four years.

Amidst all this, it is not known whether Abrams (or any new Abrams) will be making calls to the region’s governments, as he once recognised vociferously that he did, or whether he is calling them as we speak but they are behaving as the Venezuelan officers who did not answer their phones during the 2019 coup attempt.

We’ll know soon enough, and we’ll be analysing it all in Crisis & Critique.

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Featured image: Trump’s lingering legacy prevails in Venezuela, especially in the opposition’s ranks. (Venezuelanalysis)

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