

US Intervention in Venezuela Portrayed as a “Humanitarian Mission”. “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P)

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Human rights and democracy?

Great powers invariably disguise foreign interference or military intervention as a humanitarian mission. The refrain may vary but in fact always comes down to the same thing: out of concern for the local population we have no other choice than to intervene. In Iraq democracy had to be restored, in Libya it was a massacre the population had to be saved from and in Syria the refrain was that of human rights and democracy that had to be defended. After the foreign interference, the three countries were completely destroyed or left behind in chaos.

Today again noble motives are put forward when it comes to Venezuela:

“President Trump stands with the people of Venezuela as they demand democracy, human rights, and prosperity denied to them by Maduro,” according to [the White House](#).

Let’s check. Had Trump been so concerned about democracy, why did he congratulate **Juan Orlando Hernández** on his election victory in [Honduras](#) in December 2017? To friend and foe it was clear that those presidential elections were one big farce.

And what about human rights? If Trump really considers them so important, why does he not immediately impose economic sanctions on Colombia, Venezuela’s neighbour? Since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016, [more than 300](#) community leaders, trade unionists and human rights activists have been murdered there. That is much more than in Venezuela during the same period. In Venezuela, by the way, the deadly victims feel as a result of the unrest triggered by the opposition.

It is illuminating to note that Trump has so far consistently championed freedom and democracy in only [three countries](#) altogether: Cuba, Iran and Venezuela.

It’s the oil stupid!

[Alfred de Zayas](#), former head of the UN Human Rights Council, exposes the humanitarian rhetoric.

“What’s at stake is the enormous, enormous natural resources of Venezuela. And I sense that if Venezuela had no natural resources no one would give a

damn about Chavez or Maduro or anybody else there.”

John Bolton, a hawk in Trump’s cabinet, as usual says what it is all about:

“We’re looking at the oil assets. That’s the single most important income stream to the government of Venezuela. We’re looking at what to do to that. It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela.”

Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world. Potentially, depending on the oil price, annual oil revenues amount to at least [50 to 100 billion dollars](#). It is this bonanza that the energy giants of the US have their eye on. John Bolton, is at their beck and call.

“We’re in conversation with major American companies now. I think we’re trying to get to the same end result here.”

Foreign policy at the service of multinationals, you cannot put it more clearly.

The sanctions

In 2015, the US launched [economic sanctions](#) against Venezuela. These sanctions disrupt financial transactions, freeze assets abroad and hamper the import of food, medicines and other basic necessities. It is well possible to question Maduro’s economic policy, but in any case, the sanctions have not missed their effect. Since their launch, the social situation has deteriorated significantly. Child mortality and malnutrition have increased. Venezuela plunged down 16 places in the overall global [Human Development Index](#) rankings of the UNDP. Many people are leaving the country as a result of this decline.

De Zayas, quoted above, was UN rapporteur for Venezuela at the time. He wrote [a report](#) on the consequences of the sanctions. He unquestionably labels them as a [crime against humanity](#).

“I think when the magnitude of the suffering that sanctions cause is as it was in Iraq or as is now becoming apparent in Venezuela, I can say that the sanctions against Venezuela entail a crime against humanity, which could be brought against the International Criminal Court as a violation of Article 7 of the Statute of Rome.”

The three protagonists

In Venezuela’s current approach, three men play a leading role: Trump, Bolton and Abrams.

Elliott Abrams is the special US envoy to Venezuela. Under President Reagan, he was involved in the dirty [counter-revolutionary wars](#) that the US waged in Central America, in which hundreds of thousands were killed. He supported [Rios Montt](#), the dictator of Guatemala, who committed genocide against the Indian population in the 1980s. He was one of the masterminds of the [failed coup](#) against Chávez in 2002. Former presidential candidate [Jesse Jackson](#) sums up the man’s profile:

“Elliott Abrams, ardent advocate of dictators and war criminals, a cheerleader for virtually every catastrophic U.S. intervention from Reagan’s covert war on Nicaragua to the Bushes’ invasions of Iraq, and a convicted perjurer (withholding information about the Iran-Contra scandal).”

John Bolton, the US national security advisor, whom we quoted above, is another hawk. He was one of the architects of the 2003 [invasion of Iraq](#), a war that caused hundreds of thousands of victims and led to the creation of IS. Bolton is an ardent critic of the [United Nations](#) and the [International Court of Justice](#). He once summed up his [vision of the UN](#) in a powerful way:

“There is no United Nations. There is an international community that occasionally can be led by the only real power left in the world, and that’s the United States, when it suits our interests and when we can get others to go along.”

And then we have Trump. He has his own reasons for a regime change in Venezuela. His foreign policy has so far been quite catastrophic. He has lost a lot of influence in the Middle East at the expense of Russia. He has also been unable to present results in the conflicts with Iran and North Korea. Perhaps Venezuela can offer him a long-awaited victory. A large part of the Venezuelan elite has left the country. Many moved to Florida and bought condo units in Trump properties. [Financial Times](#) writes that “it is impossible to draw a line between Mr Trump’s business ties and his support for democracy in Venezuela”. Nor should we forget that Florida is an important swing state. A hard stance towards Maduro can give Trump [the votes](#) of the increasing number of Venezuelans who have settled there and may thus make sure that the state tilts to his advantage.

The fact that the foreign policy of the United States is determined by not very noble motives is not new and should not really come as a surprise. But the fact that Canada and the EU are getting dragged down by these three worrying fellows makes it all the more painful.

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