

Venezuela: A Threat to US National Security? An Absurd Political Pronouncement

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The most absurd political pronouncement of 2015 was made on March 9.

The US President issued an Executive Order that declared “a national emergency with respect to the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States posed by the situation in Venezuela ...” A White House spokesman explained that Venezuela was a threat because of “Venezuelan officials past and present who violate the human rights of Venezuelan citizens and engage in acts of public corruption...” He further asserted that these officials will not be welcome in the US, “and we now have the tools to block their assets and their use of US financial systems.” Seven individuals have been targeted by the White House. There have been other sanctions against Venezuelan officials and citizens in the past.

So far the US has not provided any tangible evidence of how Venezuelan officials have violated human rights or indulged in public corruption. Its reckless allegations have been effectively refuted by the Caracas government. Even leaders from other Latin American countries have condemned the statements emanating from Washington DC.

They have also criticized Washington for demanding that Caracas release all “political prisoners” allegedly detained by the government including “dozens of students.” The Venezuelan government insists that those detained are facing trial for criminal offences linked to violent attempts to destabilize the situation and oust the democratically elected government of the day. The government has been able to offer incontrovertible proof of this to the public.

Former Caracas mayor, Antonio Ledezma, for instance, was arrested in February for his role in the February 12 coup which also implicated Air Force personnel and terrorists such as Lorent Saleh. Another opposition leader facing trial is Leopoldo Lopez who was at the head of a series of violent opposition protests in 2014 that sought to overthrow the Nicolas Maduro government. The protests that Lopez led caused the death of 43 people, the majority of whom were from the security forces or followers of the charismatic late President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez.

In fact, Ledezma and Lopez, together with a third right-wing leader, Maria Corina Machado, were actively involved in the infamous April 11 2002 coup against Chavez. The coup failed, it is worth reiterating, mainly because tens of thousands of ordinary Venezuelans came out in full force to demand that Chavez be restored to power. As I stated in an article on the 1st of June 2009, “Never before in history have ordinary unarmed people played such a decisive role in defeating a coup.” The US, through the CIA, was, needless to say, responsible for engineering the coup.

This time all three coup manipulators from 2002, had allegedly signed a document which openly espoused the overthrow of the Maduro government. President Maduro has shared with his people recordings of phone conversations that some of these individuals had in recent months with other Venezuelan politicians living in New York and Miami which suggest a complex coup plot. The execution of the plot envisaged the privatization of most public services and the intervention of the IMF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in the Venezuelan economy for the benefit of the pro-US elite in the country and their masters in Washington and other Western capitals. Maduro has promised to reveal more details of the planned coup at the Summit of the Americas scheduled for April in Panama.

Since this is what is happening — a concerted drive by the US elite to oust a democratically elected government which has been going on for at least 13 years — how can Obama talk of a Venezuelan threat to the US? If anything, it is the US that is a present and continuous threat to the people of Venezuela. It is the US elite that is undermining Venezuelan democracy.

Why is the US doing this to Venezuela? The reason is simple. Since Hugo Chavez Frias became President through the ballot-box in 1998, he and his successor, Nicolas Maduro, have been determined to preserve and enhance the independence, sovereignty and integrity of their nation. The Venezuelan people as a whole are not prepared to yield to US dominance and control over their land which was the reality for long decades before 1998.

It is not just because of the resistance of the Venezuelan people to US hegemony that they are being threatened and punished in this way. The US elite knows that their resistance is part of an ever-widening, ever-expanding resistance that encompasses a large number of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Their collective desire to protect and enhance their sovereignty and independence has now found expression through regional initiatives such as ALBA and CELAC. The Venezuelan leadership itself continues to play a significant role in these initiatives.

As more and more nations in a region that was once contemptuously referred to as “the US’s backyard” assert their dignity and self-respect, it is obvious that US power and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is waning rapidly. The very fact that that the overwhelming majority of states in the region have rallied around Venezuela as it faces threats from its northern neighbor is proof that the tide has changed. A while ago, Latin American states also stood by Argentina when it was subjected to enormous pressures from Wall Street speculators and financiers. If the US realizes that it cannot throw its weight around anymore it is also because of the increasingly close ties that are developing between nations in the region and China, and to a lesser extent, Russia. In other words, the new scenarios that are unfolding are not to the US’s liking.

Perhaps, it is in that sense that Venezuela — one of the movers of change in Latin America and the Caribbean — is a “threat” to a declining hegemon.

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