

# Venezuela and the United States - Contrasting Worldviews at the UN General Assembly

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*The 73<sup>rd</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that kicked off last September 25 brought together the presidents, heads of governments and high-ranking representatives of the 193 UN member states. The General Assembly is the main deliberative and policymaking organ of the UN. It is the only UN body with equal representation, where each country has one vote.*

However, it is the general debate that takes place during the first five days that draws most of the attention. That is when heads of state take turns to speak about their countries achievements and challenges, and make statements of commitments and political position. It is an occasion to tell the world where they stand on many issues. It is a great opportunity for all those who want to see and hear the speeches of the world leaders direct on the UN live stream videos.

There is usually a lot of anticipation.

One country out of the 193, with a few exceptions, elicits the expectations of all the others for its geopolitical implications and impact. It is the United States of America. The reactions range from diplomatic rebuttals or concurrence, to expressions of defiance.

In our region of the Americas, I would like to focus on the speeches of the president of the United States, **Donald Trump**, and the president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, **Nicolas Maduro Moros**. Understanding the position of the two countries today is key to understanding the future of Latin America.

We have seen a great deal of confrontation between the two countries over the years. Venezuela is trying to consolidate its socialist Bolivarian Revolution initiated by Hugo Chavez in 1999, and the U.S. is overtly attempting to stop it by provoking a regime change and establish a pro-neoliberal government that Venezuela openly and vehemently rejects.

Can we foresee any compromise in their position from their speeches at the UN?

How far or how close are the ideologies and relationships between the two countries as far as we can tell from what was said or not said at the UN? The speeches can be downloaded from the UN website. [1] [2]

## **Donald Trump's speech**

Donald Trump started out with what seems to be his trademark, praising himself for the best administration in the history of the United States. That caused laughs from the audience. Trump was caught off guard by the unexpected reaction and off-script said, "but it is OK". I

mention this only to highlight the contrast in the reactions from the audience to the two presidents. President Maduro received several rounds of applause and a standing ovation at the end.



Having put that comment out of the way for the benefit of those who have not had the chance to watch the speakers on video, what did Trump really say?

Overall, in term of U.S. foreign policy, Trump dedicated almost a quarter of his speech to issues related to the Middle East. While praising the “advances” that the U.S. has made against terrorism, surprisingly he did not make a single reference to Russia’s important balancing contribution to de-escalating conflicts in the region.

On the other hand, only four short paragraphs were dedicated to Venezuela. I quote them in full:

“Currently, we are witnessing a human tragedy, as an example, in Venezuela. More than 2 million people have fled the anguish inflicted by the socialist Maduro regime and its Cuban sponsors.

Not long ago, Venezuela was one of the richest countries on Earth. Today, socialism has bankrupted the oil-rich nation and driven its people into abject poverty.

Virtually everywhere socialism or communism has been tried, it has produced suffering, corruption, and decay. Socialism’s thirst for power leads to expansion, incursion, and oppression. All nations of the world should resist socialism and the misery that it brings to everyone.

In that spirit, we ask the nations gathered here to join us in calling for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela. Today, we are announcing additional sanctions against the repressive regime, targeting Maduro’s inner circle and close advisors.”

That short reference to Venezuela understates the U.S. determination, the drive and the actions to delegitimize and destabilize the democratically elected and therefore legitimate Venezuelan government. It does so by using old Cold War language like “socialism”, “communism”, “misery” they bring “, and “repressive regime”. We will never know how Trump reconciles his contradiction apparent in another statement in his speech, “We believe that when nations respect the rights of their neighbors, and defend the interests of their people, they can better work together to secure the blessings of safety, prosperity, and peace.”

But that old language addressed at Venezuela may well be aimed at China as well with his call to “resist socialism” and its “thirst for power”. In fact, when Trump’s language is put together with other keywords in his speech like militarism (“Our military will soon be more powerful than it has ever been before”), sovereignty (“We will never surrender America’s sovereignty to an unelected, unaccountable, global bureaucracy”), protectionism (“The United States has just announced tariffs on another \$200 billion in Chinese-made goods for a total, so far, of \$250 billion.”), and patriotism (“We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.”), we notice an affirmation of what political analyst Andrew Korybko called the “Trump World Order” and Trump’s “alternative model to what is now the Chinese-led Liberal-Globalist order.” [3]

Those same words, though, together with a practice of intolerance for diversity, could also suggest a desperate transition and indicate that the “alternative model” is one of ultra-nationalism. We know from the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that ultra-nationalism was a disastrous social experiment for the world.

The U.S. new strategy includes a retreat from many of the international commitments such as the Commission on Human Rights and the International Criminal Court among others in the name of “patriotism” and for the sake of “sovereignty”. However, U.S. interventionism in the affairs of other sovereign states is to continue making more evident the U.S. doctrine of exceptionalism.

### **Nicolas Maduro’s speech**

Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro stated the intention of his presence at the UNGA in order “to bring the truth of a people that struggles”. And as such he spoke frankly, directly and forcefully. His words were explicit and compelling about Venezuela’s principles and the issues affecting Venezuela vis-à-vis the United States. His speech had a lot to say about the U.S. referring to Donald Trump five times by name, and no less than eleven times as the “President of the United States”.

Here are some of his quotes categorized by relevant topics. No further comments are necessary.

### **On U.S. withdrawing from international commitments showing exceptionalism**

“The President of the United States yesterday, from this podium, threatened the governments of the world to submit to his designs, to his orders and to collaborate with his policies in the United Nations system, or they [the U.S.] would act accordingly.”

### **On U.S. sanctions**

“Yesterday the president of the United States, from this very podium, announced new sanctions, pretentious economic and financial sanctions against our country, precisely in the sanctuary of the law, in the sanctuary of international legality. Does the United Nations System know that unilateral sanctions, using domination, the favorable currency, and financial persecution, are considered illegal from the point of view of international law?”

## **On U.S. interventions**

“Venezuela is the victim of permanent aggression in economic, political, diplomatic and media aspects by those who govern the United States of North America.”

“Economically, Venezuela has been subjected to a series of illegal, unilateral measures of economic persecution in the past two years.”

“Yesterday in this same place the President of the United States of America attacked, once again, the noble people of Venezuela, [with] its interventionist role, its pretentious role as judge, party and police of the world.” This was a reference to Trump’s announcement of new sanctions against Venezuela.

## **On U.S. - Venezuela discrepancies**

“It is a historical conflict, we have said it many times to the world, our people know it very well, it is the conflict between the interventionist imperial doctrine, Monroe’s neo-colonialism, versus historical doctrine of rebellion for independence, dignity, justice, freedom, and republican [democratic] equality.”

“Do we have differences, President Donald Trump? Of course we do. But it is people who have differences who must dialogue; it is those who have differences in this world that have to put on the table their goodwill and their ability to speak.”

## **On Venezuela’s worldview**

“Venezuela is a country that advocates and commits itself to the construction of a multipolar, pluripolar and multicentric world. There isn’t just one economic model. We cannot allow a unique economic model, a single ideology to be imposed.”

“We believe in a different world, our generation saw the so-called bipolar, two-bloc world go by, what was then called Cold War, which some seem to want to bring back in their attacks to China, to Russia and to humble countries like Venezuela. To initiate a struggle and a fight against countries like Russia and China is a contradiction against what must be a human international policy that recognizes the emergence of new poles of power and the need to build a multipolar world.”

## **On Venezuela today**

“Today, Venezuela is stronger than ever, we have learned how to resist, we are standing and ready to continue advancing in the construction of a social model of our own, that of the socialist revolution of the 21st century, we say it to the world.”

## **On dialogue**

“I am willing to speak with an open agenda on all the issues that the

government of the United States wants to speak, with humility, with frankness, with sincerity.”

“Despite the immense historical differences, despite the immense ideological differences, despite the immense social differences, ... I would be willing to shake the hand of the President of the United States and to sit down to talk about bilateral and regional issues.”

## Conclusion

Despite the awareness that back channel conversations can take place between conflicting countries, this possibility is quite remote first and foremost because this is a one-way “conflict”. It is the U.S. that is interfering with Venezuela and not the other way around. U.S. sanctions and military threats are unilateral and the Venezuelan government has responded only in the form of official statements of rejection and denunciation without threats nor retaliation.

Having said that, after a long-standing confrontation, imposed sanctions and threats against the DPRK, we never imagined Trump thanking **Chairman Kim Jong Un**, “for his courage and for the steps he has taken” - around withholding development of nuclear weapons - as he did at the UNGA. We can only hope.

Trump did not refer extensively to Venezuela in his speech but his message was precise and unequivocal. I paraphrase: we will continue imposing sanctions and socialism is very-very bad, all nations should oppose it. He did not utter any military threats at the UNGA. Even then, several heads of State rejected the notion of interventions, military or otherwise.

What Trump did not say about Venezuela, he did say about Syria and “the corrupt dictatorship in Iran” and the “chaos, death, and destruction” its leaders have caused together with “mayhem across the Middle East and far beyond.” Strong words.

Perhaps Trump’s real message was his geopolitical view of the world and the U.S. position in it. He put it very concisely and explicitly in one sentence, “We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism.” It was a reference to pulling out from obligations of international responsibilities and commitments, at the same time that it does not rule out U.S. offshore intrusion in order to disrupt any perceived threat to its power and interests. China and Russia are seen as such a threat.

Aside from the political ideology, it is possibly in the geopolitical view of the world where lies the greatest divide between the U.S. and Venezuela.

The U.S. is increasingly defending itself from a developing multi polar world with China, Russia, Iran, and other nations - including Venezuela. The Trump administration seems to have adopted a daring, and possibly dangerous, redesign of U.S. geopolitical strategy in order to avoid being pulled in by the sheer force of attraction, and consequently lose the unipolar exclusive power that has been its historically persistent strategic drive.

Beyond the obvious defense of independence and rejection of the economic war on Venezuela, Maduro has clearly stated his belief in a multipolar world that recognizes and includes China and Russia. Venezuela is wholeheartedly accepting the inevitable reality and is embracing the opportunities that it brings.

Those worldviews are too far apart to even conceive a point of contact. But Venezuela, with the international law on its side, continues to call for a dialogue with the opposition, the U.S. and the international community.

I think it was unfortunate that Trump did not take the occasion of the UNGA to meet face-to-face with Maduro. Without a dialogue there cannot be any possibility of compromise in their positions. And without compromise, continued divisions in Latin America, potentially escalating to more serious confrontations, can devastate the whole region.

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## Notes

[1] <https://gadebate.un.org/en/73/united-states-america>

[2] <https://gadebate.un.org/en/73/venezuela-bolivarian-republic>

[3]

<https://eurasiafuture.com/2018/09/26/the-kraken-killed-the-liberal-globalist-new-world-order-at-the-un/>

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