

Venezuela Coverage Takes Us Back to Golden Age of Lying About Latin America

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I was sitting in my apartment in Caracas, Venezuela, reading the online edition of Time magazine ([5/19/16](#)), which carried a report that there was not even something as basic as aspirin to be found anywhere in Venezuela: “Basic medicines like aspirin are nowhere to be found.”

I walked out of the apartment to the nearest pharmacy, four blocks away, where I found plenty of aspirin, as well as acetaminophen (generic Tylenol) and ibuprofen (generic Advil), in a well-stocked pharmacy with a knowledgeable professional staff that would be the envy of any US drugstore.

A few days after the Time story, CNBC ([6/22/16](#)) carried a claim that there was no acetaminophen to be found anywhere, either: “Basic things like Tylenol aren’t even available.” That must have taken the Pfizer Corporation by surprise, since it was their Venezuelan subsidiary, Pfizer Venezuela SA, which produced the acetaminophen I purchased. (Neither Time writer Ian Bremer nor CNBC commentator Richard Washington was in Venezuela, and there was no evidence offered that either of them had ever been there.)

I purchased all three products, plus cough syrup and other over-the-counter medications, because I doubted that anyone in the United States would believe me if I couldn’t produce the medications in their packages.

Unrelenting drumbeat of lies

In fact, I myself wouldn’t have believed anyone who made such claims without being able to produce the proof, so intense and unrelenting has been the drumbeat of lies. When the Youth Orchestra of Venezuela gave a concert in New York in early 2016, before I moved to Caracas, I went there thinking, “Gee, I hope that the members of the orchestra are all well-dressed and well-fed.” Yes, of course they were all well-dressed and well-fed!

When I mentioned this in a talk at the University of Vermont, a student told me that he’d had the same feeling when he was following the Pan American soccer championship. He wondered if the Venezuelan players would be able to play, because they’d be so weakened from lack of food. In fact, he said, the Venezuelan team played superbly, and went much further in the competition than expected, since Venezuela has historically been a baseball country, unlike its soccer-obsessed neighbors Brazil and Colombia.

Hard as it may be for followers of the US media to believe, Venezuela is a country where people play sports, go to work, go to classes, go to the beach, go to restaurants and attend

concerts. They publish and read newspapers of all political stripes, from right to center-right, to center, to center-left, to left. They produce and watch programs on television, on TV channels that are also of all political stripes.

CNN was ridiculed recently (Redacted Tonight, [2/1/19](#)) when it carried a report on Venezuela, “in the socialist utopia that now leaves virtually every stomach empty,” followed immediately with a cut to a demonstration by the right-wing opposition, where everybody appeared to be quite well-fed.

But surely that’s because most of the anti-government demonstrators were upper-middle class, a viewer might think. The proletarians at pro-government demonstrations must be suffering severe hunger.

Not if one consults [photos](#) of the massive pro-government demonstration on February 2, where people seemed to be doing pretty well. This is in spite of the Trump administration’s [extreme economic squeeze](#) on the country, reminiscent of the “[make the economy scream](#)” strategy used by the Nixon administration and the CIA against the democratic government of President Salvador Allende in Chile, as well as many other democratically elected governments.

Rival demonstrations

That demonstration showed considerable support for the government of President Nicolás Maduro and widespread rejection of Donald Trump’s choice for president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. Guaidó, who proclaimed himself to be president of the country and was [recognized minutes later](#) by Trump, even though a [public opinion poll](#) showed that 81 percent of Venezuelans had never heard of him, comes from the ultra-right faction in Venezuelan politics.

The pro-Maduro demonstration suggested, not surprisingly, that Guaidó had failed to win much popular support outside the wealthy and upper-middle class. But Guaidó couldn’t even win support from many of them. The day before rival rallies February 2, Henrique Capriles, the leader of a less extreme right-wing faction, gave an interview to the AFP that appeared in Últimas Noticias ([2/1/19](#)), the most widely read newspaper in Venezuela. In it, Capriles said that most of the opposition had not supported Guaidó’s self-proclamation as president. That may explain the surprisingly weak turnout at Guaidó’s demonstration, held in the wealthiest district of Caracas, and obviously outshone by the pro-government demonstration on the city’s main boulevard.

The New York Times did not show pictures of that pro-government demonstration, limiting itself to a claim by unnamed “experts” ([2/2/19](#)) that the pro-government demonstration was smaller than the anti-government one.

Readers can look at the photos of the rival demonstrations and judge for themselves. Both groups did their best to pull out their faithful, knowing how much is riding on a show of popular support. The stridently right-wing opposition paper El Nacional ([2/3/19](#)) carried a photo of the right-wing opposition demonstration:

FUE CONVOCADA OTRA MANIFESTACIÓN PARA EL 12 DE FEBRERO, DÍA DE LA JUVENTUD

Guaidó: Una coalición mundial está lista para entregar ayuda humanitaria

El jefe de la AN exhibió su capacidad de convocatoria y atrajo a miles de personas que se congregaron en Las Mercedes, en la primera gran concentración desde que anunció la Presidencia de la nación. Instó a la comunidad de recibir apoyo desde el exterior y precisó que habrá paz de aceptación de sanciones y medidas en Colombia, Brasil y en la isla del Caribe. Hizo un llamado a la OEA: "Solidaridad de la patria, amor madre en sus brazos la decisión de que lagunas y así al regresaré esa ayuda". Asimismo, invitó a la comunidad internacional a apoyar a la AN: "Pasea Tibiana, pasea Tibiana", aseguró que para convocar esas elecciones libres se acordará "sin días algunos" en un nuevo CNE. También anunció que pronto se entregará la ayuda de los Estados Unidos y la ayuda de los países de la región.

El general de división de la Aviación Frenco Álvarez se convirtió a Maduro y se convirtió en el militar activo de más alto rango en reconocer a Guaidó. La Aviación Militar publicó en Twitter una foto de Álvarez con la palabra "Traidor". El presidente de Colombia, Iván Duque, prevé "un efecto dominó en el resto de las Fuerzas Armadas".

En varias ciudades del mundo hubo manifestaciones en apoyo a la oposición. En Colombia, los soldados mostraron pancartas en las que se podía leer: "¡Frente volveremos a abastarnos!".



Maduro insiste en plan para reemplazar a la AN
 Durante la concentración realizada ayer en la avenida Bolívar para recordar los 20 años de la primera toma de posesión de Hugo Chávez, el gobierno ha ratificado su apoyo a la idea de la asamblea nacional como ruta y de adelantarse las elecciones legislativas. Añadió que está dispuesto al diálogo para definir una agenda nacional con "la economía como prioridad". El presidente de Bolivia, Evo Morales, en una visita a Caracas, indicó a su paso por la ciudad que se comprometió a respaldarlo.

CRISIS DE SALUD

Aumento de mortalidad infantil hace retroceder al país 20 años

El desplome de los programas de vacunación, la crisis hospitalaria y la desnutrición son algunos de los factores detrás del incremento de la tasa de muertes en menores de un año de edad.

Investigadores venezolanos concluyen que el país se aleja cada vez más de la meta trazada por el Objetivo de Desarrollo del Milenio. Desde 2010 se redujo la mortalidad infantil, pero la tasa de mortalidad infantil, lo que ocurre de forma subintenta, a partir de 2017, señala Jessy Guerra, del Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Venezuela, que se redujo desde Francia.

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muerde de niños que no ha cumplido un año de vida por cada 1.000 nacidos vivos se registraron en Venezuela en 2016, reveló un estudio.

CENTROAMÉRICA

Salvadoreños escogerán hoy en las urnas al sucesor de Sánchez Cerón

Las elecciones presidenciales de este domingo se celebran en un contexto de guerra civil desde el final de la guerra civil de 2009. El candidato del Frente Republicano Nacionalista, Rodrigo Chaves Fournier, se enfrenta al candidato del Frente Democrático de Liberación Nacional, Carlos Calleja.

EN EL MUNDO

Papel Literario
 Graziano Casparini y Julian Barnes: deténgase con los ojos.

Viajes Turismo
 Recuerdos del genio: Entre Italia y Francia se reparten los lugares más importantes que se debe visitar para conocer la vida de Da Vinci.

Gastronomía
 Embutidos artesanales con sabor italiano.

Messi volvió a salvar la patria

El delantero marcó un punto en el Camp Nou (2-2) y puso fin a una racha de 8 victorias consecutivas en la Liga del Barcelona, que se quedó a las puertas de alcanzar los 32 puntos por 0-2. El equipo azulgrana, gracias a dos tantos de Lionel Messi, consiguió una mala victoria que le permitió mantener su posición en la tabla de posiciones con los gallos de Getafe y Sevilla. El partido acabó con el equipo azulgrana empatado de resultado en el minuto dieciséis, cuando quedó a dos puntos que se disputó la Copa del Rey contra el Real Madrid.



CRÓNICA

Miguel Henríquez Otero
 Los métodos de los ejércitos de ocupación en Venezuela



If that was the best photo it could find, it was remarkably unimpressive compared to the photos in the left-wing papers CCS (2/2/19)....

Maduro encabeza concentración revolucionaria en la avenida Bolívar

El jefe de Estado exhortó a un gran diálogo para buscar soluciones a la crisis

2 febrero, 2019

f Facebook

🐦 Twitter

G Google

✉ Email



...and Correo del Orinoco ([2/3/19](#)), which were only too happy to publish pictures of the pro-government event:

Reitera su apoyo al diálogo propuesto por Uruguay, México y el Caricom

Maduro pide elecciones parlamentarias y llama a la oposición a medirse en ellas

En la tarima colocada en la avenida Bolívar desbordada de punta a punta y destacó las intensas movilizaciones de los últimos días en Carabobo, de lado a lado por patriotas de toda Caracas, el Jefe del Estado venezolano | Miranda, Vargas, Monagas, Lara y otra entidades. [Foto: Prensa del Presidente | págs. 5, 8 y 9](#)



	Gobierno y transportistas fijan pasaje urbano en Bs 70 pág. 2	Cabello invitó al pueblo a defender la patria con pasión pág. 3
	Evo Morales insta a presidentes latinoamericanos a apoyar el diálogo pág. 5	Venezuela denuncia en la ONU política colonizadora de EEUU pág. 4

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Unlikely humanitarian

A huge anti-government demonstration was supposed to make possible a coup d'état, a maneuver the CIA has used repeatedly—in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964 and many more, straight through to Honduras in 2009 and Ukraine in 2015. The turnout at the Trump administration's demonstration was disappointing, and the coup d'état never occurred. The result is that Trump has expressed a sudden interest in getting food and medicine to Venezuelans (FAIR.org, [2/9/19](https://www.fair.org/2019/02/09/)).

Trump, who [let thousands die](#) in Puerto Rico and [put small children in cages](#) on the Mexican border, seems to be an unlikely champion of humanitarian aid to Latin Americans, but the corporate media have straight-facedly pretended to believe it.

Most have suppressed reports that the Red Cross and the UN are providing aid to Venezuela in cooperation with the Venezuelan government, and have [protested](#) against US “aid” that is obviously a political and military ploy.

The corporate media have continued to peddle the Trump-as-humanitarian-champion line, even after it was [revealed](#) that a US plane was caught smuggling weapons into Venezuela, and even after Trump named Iran/Contra criminal [Elliott Abrams](#) to [head up Venezuelan operations](#). Abrams was in charge of the State Department Human Rights Office during the 1980s, when weapons to US-backed terrorists in Nicaragua were shipped in US planes [disguised as “humanitarian” relief](#).

Canada’s CBC ([2/15/19](#)) at least had the honesty to acknowledge that it had been had in swallowing a lie from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that the Venezuelan government had blockaded a bridge between Colombia and Venezuela to prevent aid shipments. The newly built bridge has not yet been opened: it has never been open, apparently because of hostile relations between the two countries, but the non-opening long predates the US government’s alleged food and medicine shipments.

The absurdity of \$20 million of US food and medicine aid to a country of 30 million, when US authorities have stolen [\\$30 billion](#) from Venezuela in oil revenue, and take \$30 million every day, needs no comment.

‘Failed state’

The campaign of disinformation and outright lies about Venezuela was kicked off in 2016 by the Financial Times. Ironically, it chose the 14th anniversary of the 2002 failed coup d’etat against President Hugo Chávez—April 11, 2016—to [claim](#) that Venezuela was in “chaos” and “civil war,” and that Venezuela was a “failed state.” As with the Time and CNBC reports, the Financial Times reporter was not in Venezuela, and there was no evidence in the report that he had ever been there.

I asked right-wing friends in Venezuela whether they agreed with the Financial Times claims. “Well, no, of course not,” said one, stating the obvious, “there is no chaos and no civil war. But Venezuela is a failed state, since it has not been able to provide for all the medical needs of the population.” By that standard, every country in Latin America is a failed state, and obviously the [United States too](#).

The New York Times has run stories ([5/15/16](#), [10/1/16](#)) claiming that conditions in Venezuelan hospitals are horrendous. The reports enraged Colombians in New York, who have noted that a patient can die on the doorstep of a Colombian *public* hospital if the patient has no insurance. In Venezuela, in contrast, patients are treated for free.

One Colombian resident in New York said that his mother had recently returned to Bogotá after several years in the United States, and had not had time to obtain medical insurance. She fell ill, and went to a public hospital. The hospital left her in the waiting room for four hours, then sent her to a second hospital. The second hospital did the same, leaving her for four hours and then sending her to a third hospital. The third hospital was preparing to send her to a fourth when she protested that she was bleeding internally and was feeling weak.

“I’m sorry, Señora, if you don’t have medical insurance, no public hospital in this country will look at you,” said the woman at the desk. “Your only hope is to go to a private hospital, but

be prepared to pay a great deal of money up front.” Luckily, she had a wealthy friend, who took her to a private hospital, and paid a great deal of money up front.

Such conditions in Colombia and other neoliberal states go unmentioned in the US corporate media, which have treated the Colombian government, long a right-wing [murder-squad regime](#), as a US ally (Extra!, [2/09](#)).

Well, OK, but are the reports of conditions in Venezuelan hospitals true or grossly exaggerated? “They are much better than they were ten years ago,” said a friend who works in a Caracas hospital. In fact, he said, ten years before, the hospital where he worked did not exist, and new hospitals are now being opened. One was dedicated recently in the town of El Furrial, and another was opened in El Vigia, as reported by the centrist newspaper *Últimas Noticias* ([3/3/17](#), [4/27/18](#)). The government has also greatly expanded others, like a [burn center in Caracas](#) and [three new operating rooms](#) at the hospital in Villa Cura.

Meanwhile, the government is inaugurating a new high-speed train line, *The Dream of Hugo Chávez*, in March (Correo del Orinoco, [2/6/19](#)). Since the US media have never allowed reporting on any accomplishments in the years since Chávez took office in 1999, but only any alleged, exaggerated or, as noted, completely invented shortcomings, readers have to consult an alternative history. Here is one offered by a Venezuelan on YouTube ([3/31/11](#)): “Por Culpa de Chávez” (“It’s Chávez’s Fault”). Depicting new hospitals, transit lines, housing, factories and so on built under Chavismo, it might help many understand why the Maduro government continues to enjoy such strong backing from so many people.

Economic warfare

This is not to minimize Venezuela’s problems. The country was hit, like other oil-producing countries, and as it was in the 1980s and ’90s, by the collapse of oil prices. That failed to bring down the government, so now the Trump administration has created an artificial crisis by using [extreme economic warfare](#) to deprive the country of foreign exchange needed to import basic necessities. The Trump measures seem designed to [prevent any economic recovery](#).

Like any country at war (and the Trump administration has placed Venezuela under wartime conditions, and is threatening immediate invasion), there have been shortages, and products that can mostly be found on the black market. This should surprise no one: During World War II in the US, a cornucopia of a country not seriously threatened with invasion, there was strict rationing of products like sugar, coffee and rubber.

The Venezuelan government has made food, medicine and pharmaceuticals available at extremely low prices, but much of the merchandise has made its way to the black market, or over the border to Colombia, depriving Venezuelans of supplies and ruining Colombian producers. The government recently abandoned some of the heavy price subsidies, which resulted initially in higher prices. Over the past few weeks, prices have been coming down as supplies stayed in Venezuela, especially as the government gained greater control over the Colombian border to prevent smuggling.

There has never been a serious discussion of any of this in the US corporate media, much less any discussion of the campaign of lies or the Trump administration warfare. There has been no comparison with conditions in the 1980s and ’90s, when Venezuela’s neoliberal government imposed IMF economic recipes, resulting in a popular rebellion, the bloody 1989

[Caracazo](#), when wholesale government repression took the lives of hundreds (according to the government at the time) or thousands (according to government critics), and martial law took the lives of many more.

Efforts by the right-wing opposition to provoke a similar uprising, and another *Caracazo* that could justify a foreign “humanitarian intervention,” have failed repeatedly. So the US administration and corporate media simply resort to the most extreme lying about Latin America that has been seen since the Reagan administration wars of the 1980s.

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