

# Irresponsible Protections: Venezuela and Foreign Intervention

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#), [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

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*A stalemate of sorts has developed in Venezuela. The pretender, Juan Guaidó, as head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, continues as faux interim president, noisier than ever, but no more effectual than the time he declared his intentions to overthrow the incumbent. President Nicolás Maduro, despite winning in 2018, is still cited as the illegitimate one, holding the reins of a ruined country. Guaidó, despite being in permanent campaign mode, has yet to convince the military to take his side. The Constituent Assembly, directed by the Supreme Court, have also stripped the pretender of parliamentary immunity, leaving the way open for arrest.*

To date, the political support Guaidó can count on, leaving aside his well wishers in the country, has been externally sourced; Washington and a range of European capitals have decided to turn their noses up at the UN Charter, though all are offering differing measures of encouragement.

The strategy on the part of the opposition has been one of triggering a broader popular insurrection. While the protestors number many, to date, they have not been sufficient to oust Maduro. This has led to calls for rallies and marches of such scale that they cannot be ignored.

“We,” Guaidó [hopes](#), “call on all the people to join in the largest march in the history of Venezuela to demand the end to the usurpation so this tragedy can end.”

Maduro, for his part, is making a fist of it, attempting to [stem](#) the bite of US sanctions, notably those targeting the state oil company PDVSA. This is being done by getting cash via Venezuelan oil sales through Russian state energy giant Rosneft, which is one of PDVSA’s largest creditors. Once obtained at a discount rate, Rosneft on-sells the oil at full price.

Interest has now shifted to a provision in the country’s constitution that offers the opposition a snifter of hope. It is a fitting, discomfiting echo to past instances where cabals and groups of officials would beg a foreign power to do the job of retrieving their positions or undermining those of others. To that end, interest in Article 187(11), governing the powers of the National Assembly to authorise foreign interventions in the country, has spiked.

To hook to hang the argument upon has been that world weary Trojan Horse to state independence, humanitarian intervention. How far does such generosity for a downtrodden populace extend? Maduro’s opposition felt they could make much of the February 23

announcement to bring such aid into the state with the assistance of sympathetic foreign powers. If they could do it, then surely, their virtue demanded reward? Predictably, Maduro loyalists blocked the effort, [leading](#) to a parliamentary faction by the name of Bloque 16 de Julio urging the deployment of the article.

Vente Venezuela chief Maria Corina Machado is a key proponent, seeking to use the article to open the door for the international community to meddle and salvage. The bricks and mortar behind the intervention would be that most troubling of doctrines, the Responsibility to Protect, a point expressly endorsed by former Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma.

“Maduro,” he [exclaimed](#), “dances over the ashes of a destroyed country.”

For his part, Guaidó is [more cautious](#), demonstrating the imaginary limits about how such a doctrine can be deployed. First, authorising such an intervention was not a decision to be “taken lightly” (read, potentially catastrophic); second, operational logistics, boundaries and protocols of engagement had to be specified. As the blood spattered record of R2P shows, these limits are often the stuff of boardroom nonsense rather than military reality. Once the bombs fall, the law falls silent.

The dress of humanitarian intervention is already looking very worn, and its tattered coverings will come off in any traditional invasion or toppling common in the Americas. But things are bound to get more interesting with Russian counters, suggesting that President Vladimir Putin is ready for his next gambit. Russia’s *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* has already made the point that Moscow is considering the deployment of strategic bombers on an ongoing basis in Venezuela to add to recent deployments of personnel in Caracas on March 23. It is also said that an [agreement](#) has been reached between Moscow and Caracas to permit the deployment of Russian aircraft at La Orchila, where Russian advisors already find themselves.

An Ilyushin Il-62 plane [carrying](#) some hundred personnel and an accompaniment of 35 tons of material aboard an Antonov An-124 military cargo plane were already troubling additions to the picture for Washington. It seemed to have, in its template, a Syrian-style propping up, and is nothing less than an act of niggling molestation for the US security establishment. The [official line](#), predictably enough, is that the deployments are there to shield non-military Russian personnel and provide assistance in maintenance of Venezuela’s Russian designed air-system.

On Moscow’s part, Washington’s intentions are clear enough.

“Now when the Americans keep saying that all options remain on the table,” [suggested](#) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Glavnoye with Olga Belova, “I have no doubt that they are calculating the consequences of a military adventure.”

The spoiling measure on President Putin’s part, with all the grit that comes with such calculation, is a simple admission that any overthrow of Maduro will be, at best, a messy affair and distinctly non-humanitarian in nature. Washington, for its part, will simply do what it does worst: attempt, if it can, to deploy force clothed in translucent principles under the guise of realpolitik.

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*Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research and Asia-Pacific Research. Email: [bkampmark@gmail.com](mailto:bkampmark@gmail.com)*

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Kampmark](#)

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