

Almost Everything Americans Hear About Venezuela Is A Lie

By Andrew Dobbs, American Herald Tribune, 17 February 2019

Tune into virtually any mainstream news source in the US, Canada, or Europe and you will see a striking unanimity among the “free and independent” press when it comes to Venezuela. Corporate-aligned media all claim that Venezuela’s government is corrupt and autocratic, led by a “strongman” who could only win illegitimate elections and whose socialist policies have plunged the country into chaos, a mess which the United States now has some sort of obligation to clean up.

In this narrow context, they have a very limited debate: should the US launch a military invasion or intervention into the country in order to install the constitutionally “legitimate” government of Juan Guaido, or should we use diplomacy to negotiate for new elections that can bring them into office? The idea that the United States should mind its own business butts in occasionally, mostly from isolationists on the right, but not only are these voices marginal, they still assume the rest of the context everyone else does--Venezuela has been ruined by a corrupt socialist dictatorship.

But none of that is true at all. Venezuela’s government is not a dictatorship, but a democracy--certainly more democratic than the United States government. Their recent elections were free and fair, and the only elements that undermined their legitimacy were the very opposition now demanding regime change. Socialism didn’t cause Venezuela’s problems, capitalism did, and the United States can’t solve their problems, they are guaranteed to make them worse.

As the United States begins to consider war of one sort or another in Venezuela knowing these facts is crucial to push back on the imperialist propaganda lying us into yet another disaster.

Democracy in Venezuela

Not only has Venezuela had more elections than most countries--with regular national elections for president, their National Assembly, municipal offices, and multiple constitutional elections over the last 20 years--the Carter Center said they had one of the best systems in the world. Observers during the most recent election in 2018 said the system was “fraud proof,” and another team of church leaders, trade union activists, and NGOs from Canada found it to be free and fair. Note that there were not more observers because the US-backed opposition actually asked observers NOT to come.

In light of US voting officials closing polling places, kicking people off the voter rolls, and overseeing their own close and controversial elections it seems absurd to be criticizing Venezuela.

And for a “dictatorship” Venezuela’s ruling party--the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, or PSUV--sure does have a funny habit of losing elections sometimes. That’s how the National Assembly came to be in the hands of the opposition so they could put up Guaido in the first place--they won a sweeping victory in 2015. In 2004 the opposition even secured enough popular support to force a recall election of Chavez, which ended up being a relatively close vote (58%) nonetheless reaffirming Chavez’s popular support.

In an actual autocracy--like Saudi Arabia, a country the United States has curiously never singled out for “regime change”--even suggesting a recall would result in swift and serious consequences. The fact of the matter is that Venezuela’s ruling class doesn’t like the outcomes of elections there because the poor have strong political organization and leadership. The rich and powerful get their colleagues in the imperialist countries to attack the results, and with no real dissent allowed in US media this is all we hear.

They especially hate when Venezuela takes up profoundly democratic processes like the Constituent Assembly called last year. This process engages every community in the country in deliberations over how to design a constitution that will empower the decentralized network of communes giving working people a chance at direct government. This was universally reported as a “power grab” by Maduro, despite the fact that any party could participate and the constitutional process was open-ended.

This was not the only democratic process in which the opposition has refused to participate either. They alienated much of Venezuelan society by leading violent protests in 2014 and 2017, lynching poor Venezuelans, murdering police officers, and terrorizing whole cities. The US press presented these as “peaceful demonstrations” viciously attacked by the evil socialist government. Venezuelans know the truth, however, and facing embarrassing losses the opposition decided to boycott elections altogether.

Their allies in the imperialist US media then slandered the elections as “rigged” because the opposition wasn’t in them... of their own accord. The press here has said the opposition was “barred” from the presidential election, when in reality they were simply expected to re-register their parties, having failed to garner any votes in the previous national elections for municipal leadership because they boycotted that process as well. A number of opposition parties did manage to register--fairly easily--but they were threatened with sanctions by the US government for daring to participate in the elections. This begs the question: who was trying to keep parties out of the democratic process, Maduro or Trump?

Maduro won re-election by a substantial margin, and while turnout was historically low, it was higher than what midterm elections typically get in the United States. Oh, and unlike the US presidential election, the candidate with the most votes actually won--and yet we lecture them on democracy!

The Corporate War on Venezuela’s Economy

Turnout was especially low because there is a great deal of discontent in Venezuela, particularly over the extraordinary economic hardship the country has faced in recent years. These hardships have been terrible, but still exaggerated by the US press to include “starvation,” which has not been a threat. Shortages have curiously only affected products produced or imported by oligopolies, not fruits and vegetables and other products with decentralized production domestic to Venezuela. The shortages have also been predominantly among certain staple items and never for luxuries enjoyed by Venezuela’s wealthy.

All of this is indicative of a concerted effort to manufacture shortages, and police discoveries of large hoards of “unavailable” products as well as illegal smuggling into neighbouring Colombia prove that the shortages are manufactured by the ruling class. Even when independent measures show imports and production going up the shortages persist, getting

worse around election time. Of course, now that Venezuela is subject to strict sanctions explicitly designed to starve its people a humanitarian crisis really is developing. But again, this is not Maduro's doing, but that of the United States.

These sanctions are just the latest form of international financial warfare on Venezuela. Prior to this the world's largest banks had already begun boycotting Venezuelan transactions, shutting down the accounts their government used for bond payments and for obtaining US dollars for international account settling. This forced Venezuela to undertake complicated transactions through Russia and China in particular, but once the formal sanctions came down these were impossible too. Venezuela cannot trade its currency for dollars which means it can't pay its dollar denominated debts, which means they default and their credit, their money is worthless.

They could get dollars from their oil sales, but Saudi-led price manipulation struck a major blow to their revenues, and now the US has seized the money generated by their sales in the US--by far their largest customer. Put all of this together and you get hyperinflation and a deep financial crisis. When the government has tried to reset its currency right-wing forces associated with an attempted coup in 2002 have set up alternative currency exchange rates published most notably on a conspiracy-mongering news site. The same oligopolies driving the shortage crisis then only trade at these rates, wrecking any pegging scheme set up by the government or central bank.

Note that if it really was mismanagement that prompted US intervention, why did they not do the same to Turkish strongman Recep Erdogan or right wing Argentinian leader Mauricio Macri when their currencies went through crises last year? And if it were true that Maduro was hopelessly corrupt, diverting all the country's wealth for himself, a former bus driver--and it isn't true--then why did the US consider Zaire's dictator Mobutu Sese Seko such a close ally despite stealing as much as \$15 billion from the world's poorest country?

The fact is that these lies aren't the reason for US intervention, the independence of the Venezuelan people is.

Guaido's Corrupt Plans

And as for Juan Guaido, he's a total unknown to the Venezuelan people. He's never run for president and was only recently made the leader of his party and of the National Assembly. When he appointed himself president about 81% of Venezuelans had never even heard of him. Since then he's clearly spent more time wooing the Western media than he has his own people. His agenda is explicitly driven towards liquidating the benefits working people have received under the Bolivarian regime and turning Venezuela's natural resources over to the imperialist powers again.

His appointment is entirely outside of the legal process, based on the idea that Maduro "abandoned" the presidency. Maduro obviously did not, and was sworn in under atypical, but still constitutional circumstances forced by the Assembly's contempt of the nation's courts. Even if he had there's a Vice President in the country too, but the US-backed opposition ignored the constitutional process altogether to put Guaido into power.

There is a word for leaders like Gaudio who come to power through illegal means: tyrants. And knowing what his right-wing “reform” agenda will do to the poor of Venezuela--millions of whom saw their lives improved under Chavez and Maduro--he fits that term perfectly. Unfortunately for the US and its imperialist and right-wing allies the Venezuelan people have a rich history of resistance to tyranny, stretching back to the great Liberator of South America, Simon Bolivar, and even before to Native resistance to Spanish colonizers. Chavez and Maduro have armed hundreds of thousands of working people in Venezuela, and any attempt to invade or occupy will likely be a long, bloody defeat for those who try and do it.

This should be the absolute bottom line for everyone in the United States. Even if you can't bother yourself to care about the sovereignty of another country, about the wickedness of billionaires lying to our faces so they can starve another nation into submission, even if you turn a blind eye to abject tyranny, we must remember the costs of such ignorance and arrogance. We were told the Vietnamese needed to be saved, we were told the Iraqis would greet us as liberators, we were told we were freeing the Afghan people from terror.

Maybe this time we should stop listening to the liars in the imperialist media and worry about resisting our own corrupt and oppressive regime before we spill blood for years on end somewhere else. That would be a newsworthy change for sure.