

**Forum:** United Nations Security Council (UNSC)

**Issue #15-02:** The crisis in Venezuela.

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## Introduction

The Venezuelan “regime” has existed since 1998 when Hugo Chavez took power; when President Chavez died in 2013, his successor was Nicolas Maduro. When Maduro took over, the country's economy drastically declined along with Venezuelans' quality of life. The water, food, and energy shortage has affected millions of Venezuelans so drastically that the United Nations estimated that about 4 million Venezuelans have fled the country to look for a better future. Recently, a movement led by Juan Guaido, the President of the National Assembly since the beginning of 2019, staged a coup d'etat. Guaido is currently holding public events all around Venezuela to increase resistance to the Maduro regime. Guaido is currently recognized by several countries as acting president; his claim to power comes from a clause in the Venezuelan constitution states that if the elections are illegitimate, then the current president of the National Assembly should take over. Because there are claims that the President Maduro's second term was indeed illegitimate, Guaido felt that it was within his rights to take over. However, there are other countries that still recognize Maduro as acting president, which has generated controversy in the international community. This crisis is of extreme importance to solve because millions of people have fled their homes for the safety and stability offered by different countries; women, children, and men are dying because of the lack of food, water, energy, and medical supplies.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Illegitimate

As defined by the Google dictionary, illegitimate means “not authorized by the law;

not in accordance with accepted standards or rules." For this issue, this term is important for two different reasons: whether or not Maduro's elections were illegitimate, due to corruption claims, and therefore whether Guaido's presidential claim is justified.

### **Regime**

A regime is "a government, especially an authoritarian one" (Google dictionary). This term has been applied to describe the current situation in Venezuela, due to the socialist party's political dominance over the past two decades. Those who claim the elections were illegitimate and riddled with corruption use this word to justify Guaido's claim to the presidency.

### **Economic Crisis**

This is described by the Business Dictionary as a "situation in which the economy of a country experiences a sudden downturn brought on by a financial crisis." Due to the skyrocketing inflation rates, diminished oil exports, increased unemployment, and economic sanctions, Venezuela's economy has plummeted. This has made it difficult for the majority of the Venezuelan population to buy food and water, and though welfare/food stations have been set up, access to food, medicine, and electricity is still restricted, especially in the rural areas of the country.

### **Referendum**

A referendum is "a general vote by the electorate on a single political question which has been referred to them for a direct decision" (Google dictionary). Most elections are considered referendums on who will be President. In Venezuela, many have argued that the electoral referendums held are corrupt and biased by Maduro's party. In addition, the international community has called on Juan Guaido to hold electoral referendums in order to justify his claim to the presidency. Funding for free and fair elections is crucial to the preservation of democracy in Venezuela, and is something the committee must address.

### **Humanitarian crisis**

According to the Humanitarian Coalition, a humanitarian crisis is "a singular event or a series of events that are threatening in terms of health, safety or well being of a community or large group of people." Due to the lack of food security, medical

supplies, and electricity, many in Venezuela have been denied basic human rights. Those who have fled are not safe either: refugee camps on the Brazilian border have been attacked with molotov cocktails and Venezuelans are frequently denied asylum in countries like Ecuador due to missing paperwork. All of this, in addition to the political instability and corruption charges, have led human rights advocacy groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch to criticize the current Venezuelan government and demand action from the international community.

## General Overview

Venezuela has been governed by the socialist PSUV party (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) since Hugo Chavez's election in 1998. He governed from 1998 until his death in 2013. Then, Nicolas Maduro took over. Since his takeover, the PSUV has gained the majority in many governmental organs, including the judiciary, the electoral council, and the supreme court. However, the opposition party has the majority of representatives in the National Assembly. In response, President Maduro created a rival body to the National Assembly, the Constituent Assembly, made up of only government supporters. This body overrules the decisions of the National Assembly.

## Juan Guaido

Juan Guaido is a Venezuelan politician who has been recognized by 54 different countries as acting president of Venezuela. He is also the president of the National Assembly. Guaido is part of the Popular Will Party; he became the head of the National Assembly at the beginning of 2019. His position as the president of the National Assembly is extremely important because the Venezuelan constitution states that in case of a "vacuum of power" within the country, the president of the National Assembly takes over. There are claims that Maduros' second term was illegitimate, meaning it was a vacuum; if these claims are true, then the actual legitimate president is the president of the National Assembly. Guaido called mass protests on January 23 in order to gain public support for his plan to take over the presidency. "We will stay in the streets until we have freedom for Venezuela," Guaido told supporters and television cameras at the protest, "We will fight back until we have democracy" (Zerpa, Daniel Cancel and Fabiola).

## Current Regime

During Maduro's time in office, the Venezuelan economy crumbled, causing a shortage of food and medicine. Potable water systems collapsed and electricity is problematic and irregular throughout the country. There have been reports of children dying because of lack of medical equipment and medicine. People are getting infected by amoebiasis because of contaminated food and water sources. Amoebiasis is a disease caused by the parasite *Entamoeba histolytica*. Only about 10% to 20% of people who are infected with *E. histolytica* become sick from the infection. Although several countries have given aid to Venezuela, most of it has not reached the Venezuela population.

## Aid for Venezuela

More than 50 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, have given aid to Venezuela, but most of this aid hasn't reached the population because it is blocked by the Venezuelan military. Reports have documented the Venezuelan army intentionally burning aid coming over the Colombian border; but, other sources suggest that an individual from the opposition mistakenly threw a molotov cocktail, also known as a gasoline bomb, to the truck carrying the aid.

## Human Rights Violations

Maduro's government has apprehended opposition political leaders, justifying that because of criminal records, they are unfit to run for the presidency. The Venezuelan government and its intelligence have apprehended 230 reported political prisoners. One example of this is Leopoldo López, who was serving a 13-year sentence under house arrest on charges of inciting violence during a demonstration in Caracas in February 2014 despite a lack of credible evidence against him. Several others arrested in connection with the 2014 protests or subsequent political activism remain under house arrest or in detention, awaiting trial. Others have been forced into exile. What happened to Leopoldo Lopez and his followers is a violation of Article 6, Article 7, Article 8 and Article 9 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Chávez-Maduro regime have regulated media; the government can also suspend or revoke concessions to private media if "convenient for the interests of the nation." This includes erasing or blocking web pages and blocking social media. This is a clear abuse of power from the government, and a violation of Article 19 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Venezuelan government has also violated other articles such as Article 3, Article 5 and Article 12.

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### United States

On January 23, US Vice President Mike Pence released a video supporting Juan Guaidó after he was sworn in that same day. In response to these actions, Maduro's regime ordered the expulsion of all US diplomats from Venezuela in 72 hours. The US stated that they would not close their embassy because of their relationship with President Juan Guaidó; if the safety of US diplomats was to be threatened, the US would hold Maduro accountable. Hours before Maduro's deadline ended, Maduro released a statement, giving the US 30 days more. On January 28, 2019, the US imposed sanctions on PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A). The US accounted for 41% of purchases from the company, which is the biggest input to Venezuela's economy. On February 22, 2019, Maduro gave another 30 days for the diplomats to leave the country. On March 12, 2019, the US announced that it was withdrawing its diplomats from Caracas.

### Russia

Russia has been a great supporter of Maduro; it has been aiding Venezuela with military and economic support since Hugo Chavez took over. Russia has made its support clear to the regime through shows of force, such as flying two Tu-160 nuclear bombers to Venezuela. Russia also protects and defends Maduro in the UN, and Russia has been the principal arms dealer to Venezuela. The Russian National Oil Company, Rosneft, has made heavy investments in various joint ventures with Venezuela's state-run oil company. On June 5, following talks with China's President Xi Jinping, President Vladimir Putin wished the situation in Venezuela to stabilize.

### European Union

More than half of the European Union (EU) member states, including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain, give their support to Guaidó; earlier, the EU declared that it "fully supports the National Assembly as the democratically elected institution whose powers need to be restored and respected". On February 4, 2019,

countries of the European Union made a joint declaration supporting and recognizing Juan Guaidó as acting president of Venezuela, asking that he “summons free, just and democratic presidential elections”. Italy's stance prevented this from becoming an official EU position. The EU condemned the Constituent Assembly stripping of Guaidó's parliamentary immunity, calling the action a “serious violation of the Venezuelan constitution, as well as of the rule of law and separation of power”.

## China

The Chinese government was at first supportive of Maduro, because they stand by “efforts made by the Venezuelan government to protect the country's sovereignty, independence, and stability” as described by spokeswoman Hua Chunying. In early February, China adopted a more neutral position towards the Venezuelan crisis. Some reasons may be that Venezuela hasn't paid the \$67 billion debt it owes to China, and that China's support to the Maduro regime might damage relations with some South American countries that support Guaido.

## Timeline of Events

**1998** - Hugo Chavez is elected president, launches 'Bolivarian Revolution' that brings in new constitution, socialist and populist economic, and social policies funded by high oil prices, alongside increasingly anti-US foreign policy.

**2001** - President Chavez uses enabling act to pass laws aimed at redistributing land and wealth. Concern grows in business and some labour circles that he is trying to concentrate economic and political power.

**April 2002** - Armed forces rebel over a violent stand-off between government and state oil monopoly after appointment of new board of directors. President Chavez is taken into military custody, but interim government leader Pedro Carmona collapses and Hugo Chavez returns to office.

**January 2005** - President Chavez signs decree on land reform to eliminate Venezuela's large estates and benefit the rural poor. Ranchers say the move is an

attack on private property.

**March 2005** - New media regulations provide stiff fines and prison terms for slandering public figures.

**December 2005** - Parties loyal to President Chavez dominate parliament after opposition parties boycott election.

**July 2006** - President Chavez signs a \$3bn arms deal with Russia, including an agreement to buy fighter jets and helicopters, marking a reorientation away from US arms supplies.

**December 2006** - Hugo Chavez wins a third term in presidential elections with 63% of the vote, the largest margin since the 1947 election.

**January 2007** - President Chavez announces key energy and telecommunications companies will be nationalised under 18-month enabling act approved by parliament.

**June 2007** - Two leading US oil companies, ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, refuse to hand over majority control of their operations in the Orinoco Belt to the Venezuelan government, which then expropriates them.

**December 2007** - President Chavez suffers his first defeat at the ballot box, when a referendum narrowly rejects proposals to increase government control over the Central Bank and the power to expropriate property.

**September 2008** - Venezuela and Russia sign oil and gas cooperation accord. Russian warplanes visit Venezuela, with Russian warships heading there for November joint exercises - first return of Russian navy to Americas since Cold War.

**October 2008** - First Venezuelan telecommunications satellite launched from China.

**February 2009** - Voters in a referendum approve plans to abolish limits on the number of terms in office for elected officials. This allows President Chavez to stand again when his term expires in 2012.

**January 2010** - President Chavez devalues the Bolivar currency to boost revenue

from oil exports after economy shrank 5.8% in the last quarter of 2009.

**September 2010** - Parliamentary elections. Opposition makes significant gains.

**April 2012** - Government extends price controls on more basic goods in the battle against inflation. President Chavez threatens to expropriate companies that do not comply with the price controls.

**July 2012** - After a six-year wait, Venezuela becomes a full member of regional trading bloc Mercosur, and is given four years to comply with the bloc's trading regulations.

**October 2012** - President Chavez wins a fourth term in office.

**April 2013** - President Hugo Chavez dies at age 58 in March after a battle with cancer. Nicolas Maduro, his chosen successor, is elected president by a narrow margin. The opposition contests the result.

**February-March 2014** - At least 28 people die in suppression of anti-government protests.

**November 2014** - Government announces cuts in public spending as oil prices reach a four-year low.

**December 2015** - Opposition Democratic Unity coalition wins two-thirds majority in parliamentary elections, ending 16 years of Socialist Party control.

**September 2016** - Hundreds of thousands of people take part in a protest in Caracas calling for the removal of President Maduro, accusing him of responsibility for the economic crisis.

**July 2017** - Controversial constituent assembly elected in the face of an opposition boycott and international condemnation.

**May 2018** - Opposition contests the official victory of President Maduro at presidential elections.

**August 2018** - UN says two million Venezuelans have fled abroad to neighbouring



countries since 2014.

**January-February 2019** - Opposition leader Juan Guaidó declares himself interim president, appeals to military to oust President Maduro on the grounds that the 2018 election was rigged. European Union, United States, and most Latin American countries recognise Mr Guaidó.

### **UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

- A special meeting of the Security Council was held on 26 January to discuss Venezuela; unfortunately no consensus was reached.
- Secretary General António Guterres called for dialogue to both representatives from Maduro's government and the opposition, to ease tensions
- On February 14, 2019, a group of UN delegates, including delegates of China, Russia and Venezuela, declared they would fight what they called the "illicit, American-led effort" to change the government of Venezuela. They accused the US of "using sanctions and emergency aid as political weapons against Venezuelans".
- On February 28, the Security Council voted on two draft resolutions: one from the US calling for new elections in Venezuela, the entry of humanitarian aid, and the recognition of Guaidó as interim president; the other from Russia calling for dialogue between the Maduro government and the opposition in line with the Montevideo initiative of Mexico and Uruguay. Neither proposal was adopted. The US draft received majority support (9 votes in favor vs. 3 against), but was vetoed by Russia and China. The Russian draft received four votes in favor and seven votes against.

### **Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

As seen through UN involvement, the Security Council has tried to write resolutions; unfortunately, these have been unsuccessful due to the lack of cooperation

between nations. If an agreement is to be reached, which is incredibly vital, nations must start cooperating with each other and reach an agreement.

## Possible Solutions

According to the first paragraph of article 71 of the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela: "Matters of special national interest may be subjected to a consultant referendum by the initiative of the president of the republic and his ministers; by agreement of the majority in the national assembly; or by a petition of 10% or more of citizens registered with the voters national registry." This means that if the majority of the Venezuelan population call for a referendum, two questions can be asked to the citizen:

1. Do they agree to hold new presidential and National Assembly elections, in 90 days, on terms to be agreed within two weeks by representatives of Nicolás Maduro's government and the opposition, with the oversight of the United Nations?
2. Do they agree to the formation of an independent expert commission, of limited duration, with representatives from both government and opposition, and the international community, with the purpose of defining a strategy to alleviate the economic crisis in the country?

Also, asking the United Nations to issue a resolution forbidding acts of foreign aggression against Venezuela, calling for the return of the illegally retained funds of the country, and offering support to implement the results of the referendum.

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