

Venezuela: Towards a New Geopolitical Approach

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Venezuela is a nuisance for western and Latin American elites. And this is because it dared to propose a route different from neoliberal capitalism at a time when the triumph of this one, single thought was announced. The elites - local and foreign - have done their best to destroy such an initiative.

Contents

- [Politics, economy and geopolit](#)
- [Maduro, the strong man of](#)
- [The Venezuelan oppositions](#)
- [Geopolitics as the Determining](#)
- [The real problem of the \(...\)](#)
- [And in the workplace?](#)
- [Is there a transition?](#)
- [What is to be Done?](#)

Political violence sponsored from abroad has incorporated an element unknown in recent decades into the country's democratic life. The greatest hope that emerges from the negotiations in Mexico is that violence will be averted as a political option, that democratic institutions return to normal, and that the criminal economic sanctions be lifted. These have only served to cause the people to suffer, to put the screws on the government in its worst aspects and to feed the discourse about the failure of the socialist path. Unfortunately, the urgency of improving the wages and conditions of those who work for a living is not included in Mexico's agenda.

After the failure of the Oslo negotiations, now, under the auspices of the governments of Mexico, Norway and Russia, a new round of talks is taking place. However, this is not a just a continuation of the previous talks, but a new chapter. The Venezuelan government meets at the headquarters of the Museum of Anthropology with one of the nine factions of the Venezuelan opposition closely tied to the US government. An agreement can open the gates for the return of a people centered politics and stop politicians from controlling the daily lives of its citizens.

Politics, economy and geopolitics

Most analyses overestimate the national political dimension in this regard, without taking into account the economic and geopolitical dynamics associated with this process. Therefore, they get stuck in a bipolarity of agree/disagree and have a hard time understanding that what is happening is actually a process.

The current Venezuelan political tension is the result of not having been able to resolve on the political level the economic crisis that broke out almost forty years ago (1983), the social crisis

(Caracazo, 1989) and the geopolitical crisis (globalization and internationalization of capital) generated in the 1880's. The pro-system alternative (Caldera, Chiripero), the rebellious alternative (Causa R) and anti-system alternative (MBR 200) were unable to build a method of solving this situation in the 1990s. [\[1\]](#)

Chavez's electoral victory in 1998 resulted from a broad alliance which was built to resolve this crisis. Having few options on the economic level and running into serious difficulties on the geopolitical level, Chavez emphasised the social aspects of the crisis during his first three years in government.

The sector of the importing bourgeoisie that had accompanied Chávez felt threatened by laws passed on land tenure, control of oil rent, and redefinition of the role of State institutions. The 2002 coup, the popular insurgency which returned Chávez to power, and the subsequent break with this bourgeois sector created a new situation: the state-bourgeois chain, so necessary in a country where a very important part of what is consumed is imported, broke down.

Thus, there is a phenomenon that had not occurred since the period of Juan Vicente Gómez (at the beginning of the 20th century), in which the State, threatened by the rupture generated by the coup d'état of April 2002, granted import licenses to sectors close to the government bureaucracy to try to solve problems of product supply. This generated a new network of accumulation of profits and perverse forms of relationship with the State that shaped, in subsequent years, a new bourgeoisie, now associated with the Bolivarian transformation process.

However, some bourgeois groups of the fourth republic - such as the Mendoza Group or Cisneros - continued to receive incentives and support due to the impossibility of the new importing bourgeoisie producing goods within the country or as a result of the exchange of information for access to a sector of oil exploitation. Let us add that this is similar to the contradiction between the socialist course formulated at the end of 2004 and the bourgeois castes (of the fourth and fifth republic), which for reasons of space we cannot develop here.

To the crisis which opened in the 1980's this new element can be added: the contradictions between the bourgeoisie of the fourth and fifth republic (2002-2012), for whom the power dispute is fundamentally economic although it is expressed publicly with ideological overtones. This goes practically unnoticed by most of the popular sectors, who are committed to a socialist deepening of the process and for whom Chávez tries to build an institutional framework and support that increasingly threaten the old and new bourgeoisie.

While Chávez promoted policies that reverse the accumulated social debt, at the same time he promoted a geopolitical insertion of the country that not only is anti-imperialist (fundamentally anti-USA), but also renews the logic of non-alignment through alliances with progressive governments, along with consolidating a strategic alliance with Cuba. This is one factor which breaks with the dependent and privileged relationship that the US and Venezuela had in the 20th century, an aspect that affects the negotiations in Mexico today and that should not go unnoticed.

Chávez does not arbitrate the crisis that opened in the 1980's nor does he assume a mediating role between the bourgeois fractions, but instead opts for a radicalization of the process from below, allowing a new bourgeoisie to emerge as part of an economic strategy of sustainability. His illness and subsequent death occur when the "game" was still open and in full swing; when no bourgeois fraction had prevailed, nor had social reality allowed time for a new intraclass correlation of forces to take hold. Chávez's final calls for a "sharp turn" and "commune or nothing" reiterate that his bet was for a departure from the popular camp.

Maduro's arrival in power, occurs unexpectedly in the midst of a brutal drop in oil prices that puts in check the rentier model of accumulation and formation of bourgeoisies from the appropriation of foreign currency generated by the oil industry. The political factors associated with this enable the old bourgeoisie to understand the implication of this fall in income — a possibility of generating a rupture that allows them to regain control of the government.

Between 2014 and 2017 different insurrectionary activities take place interlaced with demonstrations and mobilizations that, however, do not manage to displace Maduro from power. The governments of Trump, Duque [Colombia] and Piñera [Chile] were behind the greatest danger of invasion to the homeland and the beginning of a civil war; the 2019 Cúcuta incidents were the height of an escalation of violence. [2]

If there is one thing for sure, it is that it is impossible to build a people-centered politics in the midst of a spiral of political polarization and violence. The migration crisis, especially from 2014 to 2021, greatly affected the opposition in political terms, causing it to lose an important part of its capacity to mobilise. Nevertheless, it is incorrect to say that “all those who leave are opponents”: the majority are citizens seeking to survive the economic ravages of the crisis.

Maduro, the strong man of Venezuelan politics

Maduro, unlike Chávez, not only assumes the role of arbitrator and mediator between the bourgeois fractions in order to stabilise the political situation, but also works scenarios and models for the convergence and articulation of national and transnational capital. Those who see Maduro as a merely a supporting character are wrong. Maduro may not be a cultured man, but he is a sagacious politician who has imposed the logic of the union bureaucracy on Venezuelan politics.

Since he came to power, little by little he has become the strong man, relegating anyone else to the shadows. First, weakening and fragmenting the opposition by combining the carrot (agreements with factions of the parties, support for dissidents, judicialization of politics) and the stick (declaring organisations illegal, disqualification and imprisonment of rebellious opponents of negotiation).

Second, moving the party structure and government further away from the leading moral figures of Chavismo. Some of whom made the terrible mistake of meeting with the leader of the opposition who was directing an attempted invasion of the country - emptying thereby any possibility of building a traditional Chavista ethical reference as a real political option. Third, expelling the key financial architect of the Bolivarian bourgeoisie from his environment - and forcing him into European exile—thereby consolidating his leadership of this sector. Fourth, progressively lowering the profile of other leaders of the governing party, who went from incumbent to wild card (the recent internal elections of the PSUV demonstrated this, reducing the real sources of power in the government to four: Maduro, Delcy and Jorge Rodríguez, Diosdado).

Fifth, establishing a new model of military control in the Armed Forces, consolidating the leadership of a non-charismatic but shrewd military leader. Sixth, becoming “the hand that rocks the cradle” of the oppositions: all opposition gravitates today around what Maduro says or does, with practically no real capacity for initiative. Seventh, developing with almost total impunity a model of authoritarianism directed at those who protest against the terrible effects of the economic crisis, especially against the leadership and rank and file sectors of the working class. Eighth, using the criminal US blockade against Venezuela for his own means as a justification for the policies of inter-bourgeois mediation that he seeks to develop.

Ninth, building a narrative that is presented as a continuation of Chavismo, but that, in reality,

expresses an attempt to resolve the bourgeois crisis generated in the 1980's. Tenth, instrumentalizing the despair caused by the effects of excessive inflation, the astronomical devaluation of the currency and the almost total loss of the purchasing power of wages. Eleventh, creating a situation in which the majority of the Latin American left does not offer automatic solidarity; minimising critical thought regarding what is going on. Certainly, Maduro loses support from the radical left; but on the orthodox and progressive left, the debate about what is happening in the workplace in Venezuela is yet to be had. Twelfth: he has developed a structural adjustment program for the Venezuelan economy with profound social and wage impacts which are justified by the sanctions. If the sanctions are lifted, it will be the weakened unions and unions who will have to fight for an important recomposition within the workplace.

The massive migration of Venezuelans, depriving almost all opposition parties of an important part of their foot soldiers (and voting base), has favoured Maduro. It is true that only a small group of those who emigrated can be placed within the periphery of the opposition parties, but they did provide them with a strong mobilising base.

Maduro is the strong man of Venezuelan politics and his delegation goes to the Mexican negotiations with a clear agenda: a) dismantle the North American sanctions on the Venezuelan economy in order to be able to fulfill his role as mediator between the bourgeoisies and becoming a determining factor in social peace; b) to generate a cohabitation agreement with the different bourgeois sectors that removes political and social conflict; c) having learned during these years that the opposition is limping along economically they will try to reach an agreement on new rules for the political game in exchange for turning the State into the economic guarantor of their activities; d) to move away from a possibility of an opposition demand for a recall by making the opposition understand that these elections will be concentrated on mayors and councils and not in governorships; e) build up in social consciousness that there are now multiple oppositions who are so divided amongst themselves that they do not represent any sort of political alternative.

In Mexico, Maduro begins to build another geopolitical approach, closer to social democracy than to the old concept of non-alignment; beyond some statements to reassure internal sectors the idea of socialism has been disappeared. It would not be surprising that in a —until now— hypothetical re-founding process, the PSUV changes its name, erasing the word socialism in order to liquidate the last resistance of the US establishment to the lifting of sanctions. This does not imply a distancing from Cuba; on the contrary, it may be doing it with the island's permission.

The Venezuelan oppositions

The Venezuelan opposition is fragmented and, in many cases, lacks connections between its various currents. All are reactively tied to the government's agenda, without a capacity for self-initiative and increasingly discredited at base by a double discourse which combines verbal radicalism with permanent conciliation at the level of action.

The first of the oppositions is made up of the groups now gathered in Mexico, those close to the original political factions of Primero Justicia [*Justice First*] (Borges-Capriles), Voluntad Popular [*Popular Will*] (Leopoldo López-Guaidó), Nuevo Tiempo [*New Era*] (Manuel Rosales) and Acción Democrática [Democratic Action] (Allup). These are parties that have been intervened in through court action and whose leaderships have been designated ad hoc; in fact, one of the negotiating points is the return of the acronyms, accounts and properties of those parties. This opposition is called "G-4".

For the most part (except for AD), they are renewed political expressions of the interests of the old

Fourth Republic bourgeoisie. Its agenda is deeply linked to the relationship of its class interests with transnational capital; they seek harmonious integration between national capital and transnational capital — a difficult task since the eighties. Faced with the new geopolitical distribution in the world, they seek to control the State (or a fraction of it) to capture the income resulting from the increasingly extractivist role that capital has assigned to the region in the framework of the fourth industrial revolution and the consumption of imported goods. It is a sector without an alternative capitalist productive project to extractivism.

The second is a business opposition that acts as its own representative since it does not trust the political forces that seek to represent it. Lorenzo Mendoza, its most visible face, does not rule out being a presidential candidate.

The third seems to be made up of the so-called Democratic Alliance, which brings together Avanzada Progresista [*Progressive Advance*] (Henry Falcón) and the so-called “scorpions” (those authorities designated through state intervention into the parties) of Acción Democrática (Bernabé), Primero Justicia (Primero Venezuela) [*Venezuela First*], Voluntad Popular COPEI, [*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente/ Independent Political Electoral Organization Committee, the Social Christian Party*] Venezuela Unida [*United Venezuela*], Movimiento ecológico de Venezuela [*Ecological Movement of Venezuela*], Unidad Visión Venezuela [*Unity Vision Venezuela*], Compromiso País [Country Commitment], Bandera Roja [Red Flag], Unidad Política Popular 89 [Popular Political Unity 89] UPP89, Opina [Opinion], Soluciones [Solutions] (Claudio Fermín), Movimiento Republicano [Republican Movement], NVIPA, Prociudadanos [Pro-Citizens], Movimiento al Socialismo MAS [Movement for Socialism], Movimiento de Integridad Nacional-Unidad Min-Unidad [*National Integrity Movement-Unity*], Alianza Centro [*Centre Alliance*]. This opposition group is the one that has carried out most partial agreements and negotiations with the government; therefore, they are considered by the G-4 as in opposition to the government.

The fourth grouping consists of the most radical forces (María Corina Machado, Antonio Ledezma and Andrés Velásquez), who promote the application of the Tratado Interamericano de Asistencia Recíproca TIAR [3] and an invasion by the USA. They have been effectively isolated since the defeat of the Republicans in the White House.

The fifth is the Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria [*Popular Revolutionary Alternative*] (APR), led by the Communist Party, and which includes a long list of former members of parties that were subject to state intervention, such as the PPT (Patria Para Todos) [*Fatherland for All*] and Tupamaros, but also the Partido REDES [*Networks Party*], Izquierda Unida, [*United Left*] Nuevo Caminos Revolucionario [*New Revolutionary Way*] and a host of local and regional organizations that until recently supported the Maduro government.

This represents a left dissidence, that is, it seeks to connect with the workplace. Since its formation, the APR has not been able to show the capacity to mobilise or disperse its debates with the Latin American left, which is why it has not built real strength to be a factor in favor of the workplace in the negotiation.

The sixth opposition consists of academics and intellectuals structured around the Platform in Defense of the Constitution (PDC) and Pensamiento Critical [Critical Thinking] site. It is often referred to as “dissident Chavismo”, although they do not represent all expressions of this group. This group does not have any mobilising capacity that enables them to be taken into account in a negotiation.

The seventh brings together sectors of the left that connect those from the social, ecological, indigenous, feminist, alternative communication and educational movements alongside those in

defense of the imprisoned labor leaders, among others. This sector, although disjointed at present, is the most dynamic and creative. A convergence of their forces can be a determining factor in building a political force with a real presence in the territories. But so far there are no clear signs in that regard.

A separate point is what happened in the recent PSUV elections, where new local and regional leaderships emerged —many of them sustained by the Communes *[formed as a result of a 2006 law which enabled the formation of neighbourhood-based elected councils that initiate and oversee various projects and policies on a local level]*. In some cases their election was respected and in others invalidated. The movement of the Communes could lead to an awakening of the constituent spirit.

The eighth is the very weak radical Trotskyist left. After having produced a significant regrouping at the beginning of the 21st century, they fractured over differing assessments of the Chávez government. Currently Marea Socialista [Socialist Tide] and the Partido Socialismo y Libertad *[Socialism and Freedom Party]* (PSL) have been supporting specific struggles, but as their big weakness is having no intrinsic connection to the mass movements they have not managed to pose themselves as a pole of reference.

The ninth opposition is extremely marginal: a fundamentalist and ultraconservative right headed by Felipe Pérez Martí, the ex-Minister of Planning in Chávez's government, who appears in the medium term to be the genesis of a right-wing in the style of Trump or Le Pen but with the addition of religious messianism.

Geopolitics as the Determining Factor

At the meeting in Mexico, a hidden agenda will be revealed, something that Maduro has been working on in recent years, confirming to the United States, the European Union and its allied countries that Venezuela does not represent a communist danger. The separation of the Communist Party and those with a leftist past from the government coalition and associated posts has been a clear and unequivocal signal in this regard. Now in Mexico, the official delegation will show that not only can a broad and democratic path be built for the mega-elections of November 21, but that Maduro is a determining factor in arbitrating and forming agreements between the different bourgeois fractions.

The dislocation and dispersal of the Venezuelan oppositions confirm the fact that Maduro is the current strongman of Venezuelan politics. His government and his way of relating to and negotiating with the right-wing opposition, subordinating his work, constitute a guarantee for connecting transnational and national capital.

The real problem of the current negotiation

The meeting in Mexico may be the beginning of a new regime of relationship and cohabitation between the Maduro government and the G-4 opposition. This would come with some minor friction with sectors of the so-called Democratic Alliance (opposition). This tension and the way in which it is resolved could facilitate or impede the construction of a new long-term government agreement (which, however, does not include a presidential challenge).

It seems that - contrary to what some people proclaim - this will be expressed modestly in

November's electoral results. In the current circumstances, the opposition could obtain important mayoralties and councils but would only achieve poor results in the governorates.

The progressive, gradual and sustained suspension of US sanctions will be a determining factor in the political stabilization and the strengthening of Maduro's bonapartism in pushing for the coexistence and unity of the different bourgeois fractions.

However, the peace of the main bourgeois party groupings may mean that the growing social instability reaches a boiling point: the people have suffered an unprecedented and dramatic loss of quality of life and purchasing power of wages.

And in the workplace?

The dozens of labor leaders prosecuted and detained show the real signs of this ongoing peace. With monthly salaries that do not exceed two digits, accumulated inflation that exceeds one million percent and the sustained devaluation of the Bolívar (it has just been announced that six zeros will be removed from the currency again) it is foreseeable that the struggles of the working class, public employees and salaried workers in general could blow the imposed restrictions apart.

The tendency could be towards deepening the government's authoritarian path or towards a sustained negotiation with the unions in pursuit of a substantive recovery of the quality of life. The problem for the government is that the new breed of labour leaders that is emerging seem to be as far from the opposition as it is from the government. In neither case do they have the bureaucratic machinery capable of containing ongoing social upheaval.

Is there a transition?

There is no transition from the Maduro government in the short term. On the contrary, their ability to control the political situation has been consolidated. None of the various oppositions look strong enough to create conditions favourable for a transition. What can be reached is the beginning of a political cohabitation, with the consequent distribution of power sharing between the government and the right-wing opposition.

The left alternatives, for their part, are going through a crisis of their own. Neither the platform in defense of the National Constitution nor the radical left have a social implantation strong enough to be able to reverse the current situation in the short term. The Alternativa Popular Revolucionaria [Popular Revolutionary Alternative] created bigger expectations than it could possibly deliver on, trapped as it has been in the logic of the revolutionary party and mass fronts.

No option to the left of "Madurism" has been able to constitute itself as a relevant mobilising factor. Neither have they been able to clarify to the regional left what is really going on in Venezuela. The authoritarian drift of the government can be argued as a determining factor, but even in situations of dictatorship the left had not previously lost its capacity to mobilize the masses.

In this context, democratic social struggles play a fundamental role in the democratic recomposition of the political, economic and social panorama. For this reason, the radical left, rather than worrying about consolidating partisan micro-parties, needs to open up to new and chaotic forms of organization that allow them to relate to the subterranean forms of resistance that are woven into society.

What is to be Done?

It is time to rebuild the left from the ground up. We must urgently leave behind bizarre debates about political theories and rebuild from the struggles, putting to one side the epistemology of a vanguard party and recovering the humility of accompanying and learning from concrete social struggles. The left has always recovered hope from the darkness. It is time to do it again.

Recovering hope and mobilizing democratic capacity today is localised much more in community, social and alternative activities than in left or right political parties. It is there that national life seems to be reinventing itself.

Migration may be the factor that tips the balance in the coming years. Millions of Venezuelans have had to leave the country in order to survive. In that process they have known the barbarism of neoliberalism, but they have also known the friendly hand of ordinary people in other countries. To the extent that sanctions are lifted, and political violence is averted, many will return and, potentially, may become a determining factor in another possible Venezuela, a Venezuela of social justice, equity, solidarity and democracy.

Could it be that we can regain the ability to do street politics? That policy, and no other, is the one that dreams, pulsates and opens the way to radical change.

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P.S.

- Fourth International. Tuesday 9 November 2021:
<https://fourth.international/en/latin-america/387>
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Footnotes

[1] Rafael Antonio Caldera Rodríguez 24 January 1916 – 24 December 2009 twice elected the president of Venezuela, served for two five-year terms (1969–1974 and 1994–1999), becoming the longest serving democratically elected leader to govern the country in the twentieth century. His first term marked the first peaceful transfer of power to an opposition in Venezuela's history. Chiripero was the name that was given to the coalition which supported his candidacy for President in the 1993 elections. Causa Radical (Causa R/Radical Cause) founded in 1971 by ex-communist party militants split in 1997, with the majority forming Patria Para Todos (PPT) and supporting Hugo Chávez's 1998 candidacy for the presidency. The continuing Causa R opposed

Chávez.

[2] Cucuta is a city in Colombia close to the border with Venezuela which has been the scene of provocations against Venezuela

[3] Interamerican Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance -known as the Rio Treaty of 1947 in which “an attack on one is an attack on all”