

# OPINION

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# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

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PRO-CON

## Is the US push to unseat Venezuelan leader Maduro the right course?



Marcelo Garcia/Miraflores Presidential Press Office

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro raises his fist from an amphibious tank at the naval base in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela.

### PRO: Maduro must go — Venezuelans deserve a functioning democracy

**W**ASHINGTON — Last weekend, the Bank of England blocked Nicolas Maduro from withdrawing \$1.2 billion worth of gold from a Venezuelan state account.

That action followed the United Kingdom's decision to recognize Juan Guaido as the interim president of Venezuela. Maduro will experience similar banking troubles elsewhere, as 52 countries — including the majority of nations in South America, North America and Europe — now recognize Guaido as Venezuela's lawful leader.

That recognition matters. In the U.S. and all those other nations, Guaido now has the ability to name diplomats and handle the country's financial affairs.

While things go south for Maduro abroad, his stock is also tanking back home. His socialist regime has pillaged and bled the country dry. He retained his presidency last year only by rigging the elections.

Now, anti-government protests are rocking dozens of cities in Venezuela, as millions of his countrymen demand his departure. The size, scale and magnitude of these demonstrations far exceed anything seen in Venezuela's 20 years of socialist misrule.

Not every country is onboard with a democratic transition in Venezuela. Cuba, Russia, China and Syria — as well as the Palestinian Authority and the terrorist organization Hezbollah — have strongly condemned calls for Maduro's resignation.

Still, the pressure is getting to Maduro's government. Over the weekend, his chief diplomats in Washington, Houston and Miami abandoned the sinking ship and pledged their loyalty to Guaido.

Despite broad bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress for resolving Venezuela's crisis, certain members continue supporting the Maduro regime.

Leftist claims of Guaido being a self-appointed puppet of the U.S. are inaccurate. His interim presidency is constitutional, a reflection of the people's will. Maduro's presidency has been neither for years.

Nor is it accurate to claim that U.S. policy aims to destroy the Venezuelan economy. U.S. sanctions are targeted specifically against regime officials for corruption, human rights abuses and narco trafficking.

The U.S. also forbids purchasing Venezuelan gold, a lucrative industry for corrupt officials.

The recently announced oil sanctions take things a step further. The U.S. is now

blocking Maduro from receiving all cash flow derived from Venezuela's state-owned oil company — Petroleos de Venezuela or PVDA.

That income will be handed over to the government once the interim president assumes office.

Following U.S. recognition of Guaido, Venezuelan government bank accounts in the U.S. were placed under Guaido's control as well. He has established a government in exile and appointed a U.S. representative and ambassador to the Organization of American States.

As interim president, he is responsible for leading Venezuela through a transition and preparing for its first free and fair election in nearly two decades.

For the U.S., it is imperative that Maduro step down. He and his cronies have turned Venezuela into an international drug trafficking hub. The U.S. Treasury has designated high-ranking officials like Maduro's former vice president, his attorney general and his secretary of homeland security as drug-trafficking kingpins.

Accordingly, the U.S. has seized \$500 million in narcotics-related assets from the vice president. And Maduro's own nephews are serving prison sentences in the U.S. for attempting to sell drugs to an undercover DEA agent.

While Venezuelans starve, Maduro's regime has enriched itself by trafficking drugs throughout Latin America and into the U.S., often colluding with violent cartels that have left a high body count in their trail.

The regime also openly supports regional and international terrorist movements, like Colombia's deadly Revolutionary Armed Forces, National Liberation Army and Iran's equally murderous Hezbollah.

All three are designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S.

Latin American security and stability is good for Latin America and good for the U.S. For 20 years, Venezuela's socialist leaders have wreaked havoc in the hemisphere. The Trump administration is justified for mounting a pressure campaign against them. Venezuela and its people deserve an opportunity at freedom.

Ana Quintana is an analyst in The Heritage Foundation's Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, specializing in Latin American issues.



Ana Quintana

### CON: Trump's efforts to oust Maduro are illegal, will kill more Venezuelans

**W**ASHINGTON — If Russia, China and North Korea decided to recognize Nancy Pelosi as the president of the United States, would Americans go along with that?

I mean, the ones who don't like Trump, think he is a real threat to the country, and even not a legitimately elected president? I don't think so. But Trump, his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and National Security Adviser John Bolton all think that the United States should be able to choose a new president for Venezuela.

So does "ouster in chief" — as the New York Times recently described him — Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.). And this bunch has just recruited Elliot Abrams, who many believe should have been convicted as a war criminal in the 1980s, to help make their dream come true.

How could this go wrong? Well we do have some 21st-century experience with U.S.-sponsored "regime change" and it has ranged from murderous to horrific.

Iraq, Syria, Libya, Honduras — all have led to a lot of killing and suffering, mostly of civilians including children.

Many of the migrants fleeing Honduras in the caravans that Trump has recently demonized and manipulated politically were escaping from misery caused by the 2009 U.S.-backed military coup in that country.

Not to mention the much larger wave of migrants upending European politics, most of them escaping from the mess that the U.S. government created with its regime change wars in the Middle East.

We can put aside the fanciful notion that the Trump regime change operation in Venezuela has something to do with promoting democracy.

Trump is still good buddies with MBS in Saudi Arabia — that's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman or Mister Bone Saw, as he was called after his underlings killed and chopped up a Washington Post journalist and U.S. resident.

And the murderous Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, who has killed thousands in his own country; or Juan Orlando Hernandez of Honduras, who stole his re-election last year in broad daylight. And so on.

But President Nicolas Maduro has to go, they say. So Juan Guaido, a lit-

tle-known Venezuelan congressman, anointed himself after a phone call from Mike Pence the night before.

What do the Trump administration and its allies want in Venezuela, besides the world's largest oil reserves for American oil companies?

Mostly they want power in the region, where just a few years ago left governments who were quite friendly with Venezuela presided over the majority of the region.

The U.S. "national security state" lost a lot of influence in Latin America during the first decade or so of the 21st century, and now they are taking it back.

To be sure, a large majority of Venezuelans want a new government, and there are good reasons that they would.

The economy has shrunk by a record 50 percent in the last five years, and inflation is over a million percent annually. It's a record-breaking depression combined with hyperinflation, and it's mostly the fault of the current government.

But the U.S. has imposed harsh sanctions to make that depression worse and make it nearly impossible to fix the hyperinflation. These sanctions, which are illegal under international and probably U.S. law, have killed many Venezuelans by worsening the scarcities of life-saving medicines.

New sanctions announced this week will take more billions of dollars of revenue and assets from the government, severely deepening the depression. More Venezuelans will die and others will flee the country, exacerbating the Venezuelan refugee crisis.

A worse scenario may unfold if the regime change operation pushes Venezuela, which is still a politically polarized country, into civil war.

Isn't it time we stopped trying to choose other people's governments and focused on trying to clean up our own mess at home?

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