

DECOLONIAL INTERNATIONAL NETWORK

Is the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela dead?

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Introduction

I am a strong supporter of the Bolivarian Revolution. I was fortunate to visit Venezuela a couple of times and experience at first hand the evolution of the revolution. For anti-imperialist revolutionaries the developments in Venezuela since the attack on January 3 on Caracas have been bewildering.

On January 3, a brutal American attack led to the killing of hundred of Venezuelans and Cubans and the kidnapping of Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores.

On January 5, the Venezuelan Supreme Tribunal ordered Vice President Delcy Rodríguez to assume presidential authority as interim president.

From January 8 onwards, Venezuela began releasing political prisoners.

On January 21, Rodríguez confirmed agreements with the U.S. for the marketing of Venezuelan oil worth \$500 million, of which Venezuela receives \$300 million.

On January 29, Venezuela's parliament approved a reform to the Hydrocarbons Law to attract foreign investment.

On January 30, Delcy Rodríguez, proposed a general amnesty law to "repair the wounds" left by the political confrontation in the period from 1999 when Hugo Chávez came to power.

On January 31, US ambassador Laura Dogu arrived in Caracas and reopened the U.S. diplomatic mission in Venezuela, which had been closed for seven years.

On February 21, Cuban security advisers and doctors were leaving Venezuela.

Venezuelan oil deliveries to Cuba are effectively cut off. For years Venezuela supplied Cuba with heavily subsidized petroleum. At its height under Chávez, Venezuela was shipping roughly 100,000 barrels per day to Cuba.

On March 4, in a phone call with UAE president Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Delcy Rodríguez, condemned Iran's attacks targeting the UAE and other countries in the region and affirmed Venezuela's solidarity with the UAE in all measures to safeguard its security, stability, and the safety of its people. On February 28, the United States and Israel launched coordinated large-scale attacks on Iran from bases in the Gulf countries. Iran retaliated.

On March 6, Trump issued a license permitting US companies to buy gold from Venezuela's state-owned gold company Minerven.

On June 24, back-to-back powerful earthquakes hit Venezuela, causing widespread damage.

On July 1, Venezuela officially announced the arrival of an Israeli technical mission from the Zionist army to assist with structural assessments and earthquake recovery.

On July 10, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu publicly described the humanitarian mission as not only rebuilding Venezuela but also "rebuilding relations."

On August 4, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators called for Venezuelan elections, release of political prisoners and protection of candidates.

On August 6, the government and the opposition started a process of national dialogue. Jorge Rodríguez, president of the National Assembly, leads the government delegation; Dinorah Figuera, a supporter of Juan Guaidó, represents the opposition.

On August 11, Venezuela and Israel jointly announced a mechanism for providing consular services and agree to continue bilateral technical cooperation.

On August 12, the Rodríguez government and an opposition delegation agreed jointly to seek recovery of the Venezuelan gold in the Bank of England (31 tons valued at around \$4 billion), principally to finance reconstruction following the June earthquakes. Under proposals being discussed, the proceeds could be placed under mechanisms involving U.S. Treasury oversight and international auditing.

On August 25, Rodríguez announced that Venezuelan oil production has reached approximately 1.23 million barrels per day, which is the highest level since February 2019.

On August 28, Venezuela and the US reached a new oil agreement giving a U.S.-linked partnership huge influence over the development involving more than 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan proven reserves.

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Watching these developments as described above I cannot escape the feeling of anger and frustration about betrayal of the support for the anti-imperialist revolutions that Chavez and Madura have propagated for decades. Yet, I want to move beyond these emotions and try to understand what really might be going on in the country of Simon Bolivar and give an assessment whether there is betrayal or something else.

What should we make of all these developments in Venezuela? Has the country effectively been recolonized by the US? Is the Bolivarian Revolution finished?

My short answer and proposition is: the Bolivarian Revolution is not dead, but has been hit seriously by the brutal attack on January 3 and the subsequent pressure from the Trump administration. It suffered a tactical defeat, but it still has the possibility to recover and turns this in a strategic victory, but the road is long and difficult.

Here are my arguments for my proposition.

1. The US strikes are a tactical defeat, not a strategic defeat, yet

The general pattern of American military intervention of CIA supported coups is as follows. The intervention or coup is the first step in destroying a revolution. The next step is destroying the state infrastructure of the progressive government. The last step is to bring in people from the old order to run the state.

In Indonesia the Sukarno government supported by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was brought down. The PKI was one of the largest communist parties in the world. The party was physically destroyed by the systematic murder of 500,000 to 1,000,000 million members and sympathizers. General Suharto finally became president and established a ruthless new order that lasted until 1998.

The military coup in Chile led to the killing of thousands of members of the left parties and the fascist take over of the state by the army.

The American military attack on January 3 was not followed by the destruction of the state infrastructure of the Bolivarian government. There is a whole network of opposition leaders in and outside of Venezuela. The most prominent leader is María Corina Machado, who was awarded the 2025 Nobel Peace Prize. She presented the medal to U.S. president Donald Trump after the 2026 U.S. strikes in Venezuela and kidnapping of Maduro and Flores. But none of these people were brought in to take over the state. The army, police and intelligent services that are under control of the Chavistas have not been dismantled.

Just by looking at these facts one can not hold that the US attack was a strategic victory. It did not achieve the most important steps: destroying the infrastructure of the Bolivarian state. It was a tactical defeat, not a strategic defeat of the Bolivarian revolution.

This means that the struggle is far from over. It is only over with a strategic defeat and that will look more like the scenario of Chile than the current one in Venezuela.

The tactical defeat comes with sacrifices. The policies outlined above that are in contradiction with the values of the Bolivarian Revolution. They are the sacrifices that are made to maintain state power. Now the question is: are these sacrifices destroying the

base of the Revolution or are they needed in order to create better conditions to move forward with the struggle of Chavismo? Time will tell, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

2. A rare opportunity in history: turning a tactical defeat in a strategic victory

I know that it sounds strange, but I do believe that the American attack that failed to deliver a strategic victory for the US can open the door for a strategic victory of the Bolivarian Revolution. Let me explain.

One of the biggest challenges for the Bolivarian Revolution was in the economic field. The systematic economic boycott and sabotage were making it difficult for the masses of Venezuelans to survive economically. It might have led to the demise of the revolution, because the electoral victories of the Chavistas were not massive, usually a margin between 5-10%. The biggest card in the hand of the opposition was the threat of American intervention with the aim of bringing down the whole system. The American attack has taken place with 100 people killed and the kidnapping of the president and his wife. And yet the system survived and two important cards in the hand of the opposition are flying in the air: possible economic welfare and legitimate elections.

In the American propaganda the US has control over the economic resources of Venezuela. In her explanation of the deal with the US president Rodriguez emphasized that Venezuela will retain ownership and sovereignty over its natural resources. So the deal is not about transfer of control, but shared responsibility in developing the economic base of Venezuela: the oil industry. The revenues for Venezuela will be staggering. The country is expected to receive \$209 billion under the energy agreement based on an average crude oil price of \$65 per barrel. The current GDP is \$ 111 billion. The current price is around \$ 88. For Venezuela, the challenge will be to convert oil income into long-term economic benefits, that could include rebuilding public infrastructure, strengthening non-oil industries and creating mechanisms to ensure that revenues reaches the wider population.

The American still control the boycott regime and can decide anytime to impose or lift sanctions. The agreement by which the US sells Venezuelan oil and decides which portion goes to Venezuela is effectively a limitation on the sovereignty of Venezuela.

With the economic boycott turning into economic cooperation in the future and the prospect of a big boost in the welfare of the people there is a historic opportunity for a growing massive support for the Bolivarian Revolution in the future. That would turn a tactical defeat in a strategic victory. It all depends on the question whether the deal can lead to the projected massive revenues and the government can use these revenues to drastically improve the economic situation of the population.

The second big challenge for Chavismo is to keep control of the state through elections. Venezuela has elections for six governing bodies: the presidency (six year term), the national assembly (five years), the state governments (four years), the state legislative councils (four years), the municipal government (four years) and the municipal councils (four years). The last election for the president was held on July 28, 2024; for the National Assembly, state governments and state legislative councils it was on May 25, 2025; for the municipal government and municipal councils it was on July 27, 2025.

In four years time the new cycle of elections will take place. If the Chavistas are able to keep state power, then they will be in a position to recover in a significant way from the tactical defeat in January 3. But in this situation, the U.S. will have a hard time contesting the legitimacy of the elections.

Rebuilding the Bolivarian Revolution and preparing for a new phase

Venezuela is in a peculiar phase in its history. The Americans had planned a two stage attack on January 3. The first phase was the kidnapping of Maduro and Flores killing 100 people. The second phase would be a massive bombardment of Caracas and other major cities of Venezuela. After the first phase the Americans called Delcy Rodriguez and told her she had fifteen minutes to decide: either start negotiations or face the consequences

of the second strike. She got a list of the cities that would be bombarded with an estimated 70.000 people that might be killed.

Why did the American gangster bother to call Rodriguez and ask for negotiations. Why did they not move to the second phase? The answer is simple: the second phase would not guarantee that the state would collapse nor would it lead to an alternative government. It might usher a period of violence and instability that could radicalize the revolution more than ever.

The Bolivarian leadership was not prepared for such a blackmail nor was it prepared for a war that could be devastating for the country.

The compromise that it engaged in was giving up part of their sovereignty, especially in the era of foreign policy, but still keep hold of state power and adjust to the new situation.

The biggest question for the Chavistas is: do they accept a strategic defeat and give up the struggle to restore total sovereignty or can they find a way to rebuild the movement after a tactical defeat and prepare for the next round of confrontation with the Americans. The Americans have no control over the armed forces and intelligence agencies, two crucial components of the security structure of the state apparatus. They will not leave the status quo as it is. Down the road in the coming years there will be new confrontations with the U.S. that will be brutal and bloody. How will it look like? What is the plan of the Chavistas, if there is any? If there is none, what is the thinking process about developing such a plan?

After the Iraq-Iran War, Ali Khamenei, who was then a military commander, developed a long term vision for the struggle against imperialism in Western Asia. He argued that in the coming decades after the war the US and Zionist will never give up their ambition to totally destroy the Islamic Revolution. Sooner or later there will be a final countdown in the form of a total war, a military confrontation that either ends in a brutal crush of the Islamic Revolution or the expulsion of the American power in Western Asia. And after that expulsion the collapse of the apartheid state of Israel will follow. To prepare for that war that is now actually going on, Iran had to start building underground cities for the production of advanced weapons and the construction of a replaceable command structure. In political terms there the need to unite the population for the final countdown. This is of paramount importance. Iran is now winning the war with this vision.

I see four big tasks on the road to recover sovereignty and rebuild the Bolivarian Revolution.

The first is rebuilding the popular support base for the Revolution. In every election this will be a big test for the Chavista party. Are they able to convince a large section of the population that they are the best party to look after the interests of the Venezuelan people? At the end of the day it will be about safeguarding the social and economic interests of the population. Now that the prospects for economic growth are promising, can the party show that under these conditions they can best manage economy in society in the interest of the masses?

The second is uniting a divided party. International supporters of the Bolivarian Revolution are shocked by the concession made to the US in the field of international politics (Palestine, Cuba, Iran). I imagine within the party the emotions might run even higher. These concessions will lead to great dissatisfaction with the Chavista movement. Is this dissatisfaction solved by discussion in the party, or will a group mobilize to split the party and take the struggle against the Bolivarian leadership to the street? The experiences in Grenada and Bolivia have shown that splitting the movement will only lead to the total destruction of the revolution. "United we stand, divided we fall" is more than even a slogan that should remind us of the alternative for unity.

The third is the vision for the future. This requires a clear theoretical analysis of how to look at national and socialist revolutions in the 21st century and especially during the decline of the Western empire. I am working on a book on theorizing the experience of the economic transformation of China. I deal with several questions:

1. What is the theoretical basis of the transformation and how is this compatible with Marxism? How relevant is Marxism in understanding the transformation?

2. Are there other, better, theoretical frameworks to analyze the transformation?
3. What are the social, (geo)political and cultural implications of the transformation from a theoretical point of view?
4. What are the theoretical lesson that we can draw from the Chinese experience?

As I am rethinking many theories I come to consider that contrary to the Marxist theory of class struggle it is possible under certain circumstances to build a revolution that put economic prosperity at the center of its mission and thus can open the door for foreign investments to develop the economy, as China has shown. The book will come out in the beginning of next year and will be freely available.

I believe that the rebuilding of the Bolivarian Revolution is more than devising pragmatic policies in a period of constant US pressures. It is also about providing a strong theoretical foundation for these policies. For these reasons I do think that the Bolivarian revolution is still alive with the prospect of better future.

The last task is preparing for a final countdown. How will the coming decades look like for Venezuela? How will a final countdown look like? A new military invasion aimed at uprooting the military, political, social, cultural and ideological infrastructure of the Bolivarian Revolution? This will be a brutal and very bloody affair.

Are there other options? Will the "true" Chavista split and launch a new political party? What will their vision be for a final countdown?

The role of the international solidarity movement with Venezuela

The Bolivarian Revolution is going through hard time. The international solidarity movement with Venezuela is also going through hard times, especially in trying to understand what is going on in Venezuela. The reputation of Venezuela as an anti-imperialist country got a severe blow. Iran's president Masoud Pezeshkian said that Iran is no Venezuela implying somehow that Venezuela acted cowardly by not fighting back. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, also said that Iran was not Venezuela when fight against the United States. These comments are hurtful for Venezuela, but it reflects the decline of the reputation of the Chavistas in the eyes of the anti-imperialist movement.

One country that has every reason to be disappointed in Venezuela is Cuba. At the time when Cuba is facing the hardest period in its whole history and when 30 of its people died defending Maduro and Flores it must be shocking to see how Venezuela abandoned Cuba and move closer to cooperation with America.

I totally understand these emotions, but I think that this is the time when Venezuela needs international solidarity more than ever. We, who are living outside of Venezuela and don't have a gun constantly pointing to our head, are not in a position to teach Venezuela about what needs to be done. We can voice our disappointment with some decision taken by the Bolivarian leadership, but we should ask ourselves: what is the alternative that we offer?

In my view that alternative will be articulated within the Bolivarian Movement. There are many intelligent people in the movement who undoubtedly are thinking about the next phase of confrontation with the US and how to prepare for it. The first thing obviously is to accept that there was a tactical defeat, lick the wounds and stand up again. It is not easy.

Our task as activists who are engaged in building a solidarity movement with Venezuela is to stay on the road of building solidarity, try to understand what is going on, and help think about what a new future might look like for the anti-imperialist movement in Venezuela.