

Attack Venezuela? Trump Can't Be Serious!

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There is something unsettling about how President Trump has surrounded himself with generals. From his defense secretary to his national security advisor to his White House chief of staff, Trump looks to senior military officers to fill key positions that have been customarily filled by civilians. He's surrounded by generals and threatens war at the drop of a hat.

President Trump began last week by threatening "fire and fury" on North Korea. He continued through the week claiming, falsely, that Iran is violating the terms of the nuclear deal. He finally ended the week by threatening a US military attack on Venezuela.

He told reporters on Friday that,

"We have many options for Venezuela including a possible military option if necessary. ...We have troops all over the world in places that are very, very far away. Venezuela is not very far away and the people are suffering, and they are dying."

Venezuela's defense minister called Trump's threat "an act of craziness."

Even more worrisome, when Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro tried to call President Trump for clarification he was refused. The White House stated that discussions with the Venezuelan president could only take place once democracy was restored in the country. Does that mean President Trump is moving toward declaring Maduro no longer the legitimate president of Venezuela? Is Trump taking a page from Obama's failed regime change policy for Syria and declaring that "Maduro must go"?

The current unrest in Venezuela is related to the economic shortcomings of that country's centrally-planned economy. The 20th century has shown us very clearly that state control over an economy leads to mismanagement, mal-investment, massive shortages, and finally economic collapse. That is why those of us who advocate free market economics constantly warn that US government intervention in our own economy is leading us toward a similar financial crisis.

But there is another factor in the unrest in Venezuela. For many years the United States government, through the CIA, the National Endowment for Democracy, and US government funded NGOs, have been trying to overthrow the Venezuelan government. They almost succeeded in 2002, when then-president Hugo Chavez was briefly driven from office. Washington has spent millions trying to manipulate Venezuela's elections and overturn the

results. US policy is to create unrest and then use that unrest as a pretext for US intervention.

Military officers play an important role in defending the United States. Their job is to fight and win wars. But the White House is becoming the war house and the president seems to see war as a first solution rather than a last resort. His threats of military action against a Venezuela that neither threatens nor could threaten the United States suggests a shocking lack of judgment.

Congress should take President Trump's threats seriously. In the 1980s, when President Reagan was determined to overthrow the Nicaraguan government using a proxy army, Congress passed a series of amendments, named after their author, Rep. Edward Boland (D-MA), to prohibit the president from using funds it appropriated to do so. Congress should make it clear in a similar manner that absent a Venezuelan attack on the United States, President Trump would be committing a serious crime in ignoring the Constitution were he to follow through with his threats. Maybe they should call it the "We're Not The World's Policeman" act.

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