

Political Destabilization in Venezuela and the Western Media's Double Standard

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While the opposition is responsible for the deadly violence which has plagued the country since February 2014, Western media continue to accuse the democratically elected government of Nicolás Maduro.

Since 1998, the Venezuelan opposition has consistently rejected the results of the country's democratic elections. There is a single exception: it recognized the legitimacy of its own victory in the constitutional referendum of December 2, 2007, something it won by less than a one percent margin. The right has been strongly opposed to the legitimately elected governments of Hugo Chávez, in office from 1999 to 2013, and that of Nicolás Maduro, in office since April, 2013. All means have been used in attempts to overthrow them: coups, political assassinations, sabotage of oil installations, economic warfare (since 1999), calls for revolt and media smear campaigns.

Since February 2014, Venezuela has been hit by deadly violence, violence that has killed more than 40 people, including at least five policemen and a government prosecutor. More than 600 people have been injured, including 150 police officers. Property damage exceeds 10 billion dollars and includes buses burned, subway stations vandalized, a university – UNEFA – completely destroyed by fire, dozens of tons of food destined for government-run supermarkets burned to cinders, public buildings and government offices looted, electrical installations sabotaged, medical centers devastated, electoral institutions destroyed, etc.[1]

Faced with destabilization attempts that are clearly intended to provoke a breach in the constitutional order, the Venezuelan authorities mounted a vigorous response and arrested several opposition leaders who had launched appeals for anti-government uprisings or promoted acts of vandalism, as well as arresting nearly a thousand people who had been involved in the violence.[2] Like any state governed by the rule of law, and in strict observance of constitutional guarantees, the Venezuelan justice system indicted the accused and applied sanctions provided for such acts by the penal code.[3]

Western media, which sides with the undemocratic and coup-prone opposition, have been content simply to denounce human rights violations. At the same time, they fail to report the murders committed by the protesters, the seizures of weapons and explosives carried out by police within groups that present themselves as peace-loving[4] and the destruction of public and private properties.

Western media outrage varies with the circumstances and is not applied universally. Indeed, the press maintains a surprising silence when other countries impose draconian measures for considerably less severe disorders than those that have occurred in Venezuela.

The case of France is revealing. On October 27, 2005, following the accidental death of two teenagers pursued by the police, urban riots broke out in certain Paris suburbs and other major cities around the country. The extent of the violence – which did not result in a single death – was less than what has occurred in Venezuela in recent weeks.

However, on November 8, 2005, President Jacques Chirac declared a state of emergency throughout the country and imposed a curfew, both of which remained in force for several months. These were actions permitted under Decree 2005-1386, an April 3, 1955 law that had been adopted during the war in Algeria, legislation that had not been used since 1961. The law allows for the suspension of constitutional guarantees and seriously undermines civil liberties because it “prohibit(s) the movement of people”, “establish(es) protected areas where the security and length of stay of individuals can be regulated” and, “in territorial circumscriptions or specific regions, allows for house arrest of individuals residing in an area established by the decree”.^[5]

Similarly, “the Minister of the Interior, for the entire territory in which a state of emergency has been declared, in conjunction with the prefect of the Department, may order the temporary closure of theatres, pubs and bars, indeed of meeting places of any kind as determined by the decree provided for in Article 2.” These authorities are also empowered to “ban meetings that are deemed likely to cause or encourage disorder.”^[6]

The law of April 3, 1955 confers to the “administrative authorities referred to in Article 8 the power to order house searches by day or by night” and empowers “the same authorities to take all necessary measures to ensure control of the press and publications of any kind as well as radio broadcasts, film screenings and theatre performances.”^[7]

This legislation also empowers military justice to replace the civil justice system. Thus, authorities “may authorize military courts to judge crimes and related offences that otherwise would have been responsibility of the Assize Court of the Department,” thereby undermining the jurisdiction of national common law.^[8]

To justify such measures, measures that contravene the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), Paris had relied upon Article 15 of the ECHR, which authorizes, “in time of war or public emergency threatening the life of the nation”, the suspension of obligations to which France had subscribed.^[9]

At no time has Venezuela – struck by far more serious violence than what occurred in France in 2005 – declared a state of emergency, suspended constitutional guarantees, infringed civil liberties or imposed military justice at the expense of civil justice.

A more recent example is equally illustrative. Following the riots of August 14, 2012 in the city of Amiens, which caused significant property damage (a school and several public buildings were burned) and injured 17 policemen, the French justice system severely punished the perpetrators of these crimes. Six people were sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to five years in prison without the possibility of parole.^[10] The juvenile court of Amiens sentenced five teenagers, aged 14 to 17, to prison terms ranging up to 30 months.^[11]

It would be easy to continue citing examples. When the New York police arbitrarily detained over 700 peaceful demonstrators who had been brutalized by the police, the Western media carefully avoided accusing the Obama administration of violating human rights.^[12]

Similarly, when the Brazilian police violently cracked down on peaceful protesters in Sao Paulo, arresting some 262 people in a single day as well as assaulting several journalists, the media did not question the democratic legitimacy of President Dilma Rousseff.[13]

Western media are incapable of being impartial when it comes to interpreting complex Venezuelan reality. The charter of journalistic ethics is systematically flouted by a press that refuses to fulfill its duty to provide truthful information and chooses instead to defend a certain political agenda. This agenda flies in the face of the basic principles of democracy and goes against the will, expressed repeatedly at the polls, of the Venezuelan people.

Original source:

<http://operamundi.uol.com.br/conteudo/babel/35356/venezuela+y+el+doble+rasero+de+los+medios+informativos+occidentales.shtml>

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Notes

[1] *Agencia Venezolana de Noticias*, « Violencia derechista en Venezuela destruye 12 centros de atención médica y electoral », March 27, 2014.

[2] Salim Lamrani, « Se a oposição venezuelana fosse francesa... », *Opera Mundi*, April 11, 2014. <http://operamundi.uol.com.br/conteudo/opiniao/34786/se+a+oposicao+venezuelana+fosse+francesa%85.shtml> (website consulted on May 20, 2014).

[3] *EFE*, « Lilian Tintori expone el caso de Leopoldo López ante autoridades españolas », May 18, 2014.

[4] Paulo A. Paranagua, « Leopoldo Lopez, prisonnier politique numéro un du président vénézuélien Maduro », *Le Monde*, April 22, 2014. http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2014/04/22/leopoldo-lopez-prisonnier-politique-numero-un-du-president-venezuelien-maduro_4405213_3222.html?xtmc=venezuela&xtcr=5 (website consulted on May 20, 2014).

[5] Loi n°55-385 du 3 avril 1955 relatif à l'état d'urgence.

<http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000695350> (Website consulted on May 20, 2014).

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Convention européenne des droits de l'homme, article 15.
http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_FRA.pdf (website consulted on May 20, 2014).

[10] *Le Monde*, « Emeutes d'Amiens : jusqu'à cinq ans de prison ferme pour les violences », May 16, 2014.
http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/05/16/emeutes-d-amiens-jusqu-a-cinq-ans-de-prison-ferme-pour-les-violences_4420337_3224.html website consulted on May 17, 2014).

[11] *Le Monde*, « Emeutes d'Amiens : jusqu'à 2 ans de prison ferme des mineurs », May 13, 2014.
http://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2014/05/13/emeutes-d-amiens-jusqu-a-deux-ans-de-prison-ferme-pour-des-mineurs_4416169_3224.html (website consulted on May 17, 2014).

[12] Sandro Pozzi, « La policía detiene a 700 indignados por ocupar el puente de Brooklyn », *El País*, October 2, 2011.

[13] María Martin, « Ativistas denunciam brutalidade policial durante o ato contra a Copa de São Paulo », *El País*, February 14, 2014.
http://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2014/02/23/politica/1393194512_885141.html (website consulted on May 17, 2014).

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