

Regime Change with a Human (Rights) Face: Trudeau's Venezuela Policy

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Relations between Venezuela and Canada are currently at its worst moment. Although previous Canadian governments did not hide their dislike for our policies aimed at reclaiming sovereignty over our natural resources and prioritizing social policies, none had so actively imitated the U.S. regime change policy as much as the current Trudeau Administration. Canada is making a calculated and ill-intentioned use of human rights discourse in order to effectively undermine Venezuela's democratic institutions and promote illegal sanctions that cause enormous pain on the majority of all Venezuelans.

Although Trudeau had been Prime Minister since 2015, it was in 2017, after Donald Trump took office, when Canada escalated its interventionism in Venezuela's affairs. Prior to that, our foreign ministries were in constant communication and met at least 9 times in 2016 to discuss bilateral issues. After notorious disagreements with Trump over climate change and to a lesser extent, on the terms of a new free-trade agreement for North America, Trudeau found in Venezuela an issue he could openly support Trump in and in exchange obtain regional leadership that would help him win a seat in this year's election to the U.N. Security Council. In addition, he would also help the interests of corporate Canada who was longing for occupying Venezuela's place as the heavy crude supplier in U.S. refineries, and why not even take over Citgo, a U.S. subsidiary of Venezuela's State oil company, PDVSA.

Nowhere to be seen in this plan was real concern for Venezuelan democracy, human rights or even stability. Trudeau picked up a playbook designed by the likes of John Bolton and issued four rounds of illegal coercive measures against Venezuela imitating and in some cases even amplifying the list of U.S. targets. Officials sanctioned are responsible for organizing elections, carrying out diplomatic duties, and even implementing the country's official human rights policy. Even Olympic athletes known to sympathize with the government have been blocked from entering Canada and completing their trials for the next Olympics. However, former general Manuel Christopher, who in April of 2019 plotted a failed coup against President Maduro, was swiftly pardoned and erased from the list.

Since 2017, Canada, under U.S. close supervision, engaged in the creation of the Lima Group, a cartel of neoliberal governments in the American continent who failed to carry the majority of votes at the Organization of American States (OAS) to harass Venezuela and were seeking a platform to portray Venezuela as a regional threat in order to benefit the pro U.S. opposition. Where were Canada's humanitarian concerns when through the Lima Group it sought to revive the Rio Treaty to be used as a framework for a potential military intervention?

Venezuelan democracy has also taken a backseat in this interventionist policy. During the elections of May 20, 2018, Canada was the only country in the world that specifically forbade Venezuelan diplomatic missions – the Embassy in Ottawa and the consulates in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver – from opening as voting centers for Venezuelan citizens living in Canada. Rather, Ottawa’s government has engaged in recognizing self-proclaimed interim President Juan Guaidó in violation of the Venezuelan Constitution. Since, Canada has politically and materially supported Guaido’s lobbying to other governments in the region and appointed a special advisor, Allan Culham, to use his “network of contacts to advocate for expanded support to pressure the illegitimate government”, as it refers to the democratically-elected government of President Nicolas Maduro.

In supporting Guaido’s Washington-designed farce, Canada has also been complicit in the plunder of Venezuela’s foreign assets. Citgo’s Simon Bolivar Foundation, once dedicated to financing social programs such as low-cost heating oil for low-income North American families or specialized bone marrow treatment for Venezuelan patients, now uses its funds to finance a so-called NGO – the Venezuelan Engagement Foundation, whose board in Canada is filled by Orlando Viera-Blanco and his family, an opportunists who Ottawa recognizes as Guaido’s Ambassador to Canada.

This week, during the Canada continued lobbying the European Union on behalf of the U.S. with the purpose of questioning the upcoming Legislative Elections of December 6. Millions of Venezuelans -both government and opposition supporters – want to vote, to renew the National Assembly and fulfill the Constitutional mandate, yet Canada, always seeing itself above Venezuelan law, considers otherwise.

On August 20, I had the rare pleasure of addressing Canadians at the invitation of the Canadian Foreign Policy Institute on these issues. Today, I reiterate the invitation to minister Champagne and the Canadian government to return to diplomacy, to seek a realistic understanding among our nations and to cease this dead-end policy that the Trump Administration has laid out for Ottawa. Unconstitutional and illegal adventures should no longer be encouraged by Canada. Our invitation is to return to electoral politics as an option, to diplomacy as an option. Only then will Canada be again looked upon as a good neighbor and not as the accomplice to the greatest aggression to the Venezuelan people in its modern history.

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