

Resilience and Strength of Venezuela's Armed Forces. While Maduro warns of Vietnam 2.0; a Syrian Analogy Beckons

Caracas on the Road to Damascus

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Theme: [History](#)

In the CIA's greatest hits (Arbenz, Mossaddegh, Allende etc.) the overthrown government had been in office for only a few years. Victims never really governed. They confronted calculated obstruction from their malevolent predecessors' state machines. Chavez faced this in 2002. Reaction struck with force, and failed; thereby inoculating the Bolivarians.

For 20 years Chavez's Bolivarian movement has overseen Venezuelan armed forces recruitment and promotion. The old guard is history. Chavez and Maduro maintained high ratios of generals to troops; they dismissed the recalcitrant, and routinely shuffled seating arrangements. Few potentially disloyal generals command followings of devoted cadre. Not only do Venezuela's coup-plotters struggle with marshalling a strike force; they must lookout for legions of uniformed Maduro loyalists.

Divisions within the armed forces are not the coup-plotters' gravest concern. In 2009 Chavez sought to deter coups, and invasions, by launching the Milicia Nacional Bolivariana (MNB).

MNB's troop strength and battle readiness are state secrets about which Venezuelan officials release contradictory information. Pronouncements about MNB numbering 1 million are aspirational. Maduro recently announced plans to increase MNB to 1.6 million members; each "*armed to the teeth*." Presently, about 400,000 civilians routinely engage in MNB combat training.

Venezuela's armed forces have 350,000 personnel including 150,000 ground troops dispersed across several services.

Given the difficulties coup-plotters encounter garnering a critical mass from within the armed forces proper, the MNB's presence prevents most malcontents from even *thinking* about a coup. Analysts too, should stop thinking about "coups" and start talking about a foreign-sponsored insurgency presaging full-blown war.

Maduro loyalists hold the keys to the arsenal doors. These guarded chambers contain 300,000 assault rifles; FNs and AK103s. (Venezuela's AK103 factory may, or may not, be operational.) These arsenals also contain 45,000 sniper rifles.

In anticipation of asymmetrical warfare Bolivarian doctrine emphasises "heavy infantry." The MNB will bring to battle several hundred: large mortars, small howitzers and heavy

recoilless rifles – each towable behind pick-up trucks. Maduro loyalists possess thousands of infantry portable anti-armour weapons; and 5,000 shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles of a design that downed a few dozen US helicopters in Iraq.

The implications of this elude Trump. He suffers from “blow-back.” He relies on Deep State misinformation that denies the Venezuelan Government any popular base.

In 2006 Chavez’s coalition (in power since 1999) regrouped as the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV). Over two parliamentary and three presidential elections PSUV averaged 6.8 million votes. In 2018 Maduro received 6.2 million votes (a greater share of the electorate than voted for Trump). PSUV also performs well in municipal elections. A million PSUVers participate in candidate selection and platform drafting. PSUV is a larger socio-political bloc than are the US Republicans.

Since 2011 the PSUV-led government’s Great Housing Mission has constructed 2.5 million apartments therewith endowing 20% of Venezuelans with modern, dignified, affordable housing. Rural land reform and related programs have earned PSUV strong support from small farmers and agricultural labourers. PSUV’s network of 50,000 neighborhood councils hold meetings, elect representatives and lobby governments. (A recent decree asked each council to send one delegate to the MNB for combat training.) Another PSUV auxiliary, the “collectivos,” consists of thousands of politicised paramilitaries.

The point being:

Maduro’s government won’t be dislodged by anything short of war. If bombed out of the cities the Bolivarians will regroup into a galaxy of rural cooperatives populated by compatriots skilled in that crucial guerrilla warfare technique: farming. While Maduro warns of Vietnam 2.0; a Syrian analogy beckons.

In 2010 Syria had 21 million citizens. During 2011 foreign-funded anti-government protests turned increasingly violent. In November combat broke out in select urban areas. Mercenaries brandishing imported arms played leading roles. 500,000 Syrians have since perished. 13 million are homeless; half of whom fled the country. \$100 billion worth of buildings lay in ruins. This fate awaits Venezuela because certain imperial circles prefer this outcome to the status quo’s trajectory.

The improvised imperial strategy, circa February 15 2019, is to use aid shipments to instigate clashes between authorities and oppositionists. Ensuing violence will justify tightening the embargo and arming the opposition. Mercenary-led insurgents will establish camps along the Colombian border and will barricade those urban enclaves where opposition support is concentrated. This scenario, in fact every scenario, leads down the road to Damascus ...unless Trump miraculously sees the light.

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