



VENEZUELA'S PRESIDENTIAL CRISIS 2019, AMERICA'S INTEREST AND THE TENDENCY TOWARDS AN EXTERNAL MILITARY INTERVENTION BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT: *In recent times, US infringement in the Venezuelan Presidential Crisis of 2019 has spurred reactions all over the world. Washington's support for the self-declared opposition leader of Venezuela, Juan Guaido, over the legitimate and democratically elected President, Nicholas Maduro has intensified since the former was recognised as the country's leader over the latter by the US and her allies. Venezuela became a nation to reckon with since the discovery of crude oil in 1922. Presently, she has the highest oil reserves in the world with over 300 billion barrels. Since the discovery of oil, different Venezuelan regimes have been faced by several attempts by the United States of America to gain control over the Nation's oil wealth, just like history bears record in Iraq and Libya before it. It is against this backdrop of US infringement into the affairs of oil rich Nations and their ultimate bid to ensure their interest in control their resources by any means, not excluding an external military intervention, that this paper focused on. Adopting a qualitative research method and the content analysis data collection and data analysis technique, we were able to establish the assumption that the US is strongly inclined to an external military intervention in Venezuela in order to ensure that the interest she has at stake-the Venezuelan oil reserves – eventually falls into her hands.*

KEYWORDS: External Military Intervention, Interest, Oil Resources, Venezuelan Presidential Crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Venezuela, the nation with the largest oil reserves in the world was plunged neck deep into a political crisis, an aftermath of the presidential election held in 2018 which evolved into a power tussle between the incumbent and democratically re-elected president Nicholas Maduro and the leader of the major opposition party Juan Guaido. On the 23rd of January 2019, 13 days after President Maduro took the oath of office for the second term, Guaido swore himself in as the substantive president of Venezuela.

Being the leader of the opposition and by parallel, the Venezuelan National Assembly, the self-acclaimed president, Guaido, immediately got the recognition and support of the United States of America. He was publicly recognized by President Donald Trump of the US as well as some of her allies as the leader of Venezuela.



The Venezuelan oil Reserves has been of utmost interest for America. Gaining control of the oil reserves becomes a motive for America to infringe on Venezuela's internal Crisis so as to gain control over her oil wealth. An opportunity for this was made possible by backing Guaido in order to oust the not so US- friendly Maduro from power.

The Presidential crisis, a tussle between Maduro, the legitimately and democratically elected president and the US backed self-acclaimed President Guaido, has been on since then till date. Like other cases before the Venezuelan experience, it has caused a division around the globe, the dilemma is who to recognize as the legitimate leader of Venezuela, President Nicholas Maduro or leader of the opposition and pro US Juan Guaido. While the US backs Guaido for their selfish Interest, Russia and China lead other Nations to express support for and insist that the legitimacy of Maduro must be recognized.

Thus, the growing support by the US and her allies for the opposition leader, Guaido has intensified since January 2019 with calls for Maduro to step down as president, thereby paving way for the US choice of President, who will serve and propagate the US oil interest in Venezuela, Guaido to come to power.

Historical Background of Venezuela's Politico-Economic Crisis

The Latin American nation of Venezuela has been in the Limelight since the discovery of oil in the 1920s. Precisely in 1922, Royal Dutch Shell geologists at La Rosa, a field in the Maracaibo Basin, struck oil which blew out at what was then an extraordinary rate of 100,000 barrels per day. In a matter of years, more than one hundred foreign companies were producing oil. Annual production exploded in the 1920s from just over a million barrels to 137 million, making Venezuela second only to the US in total output by 1929. By 1935, when the regime of Juan Vicente Gomez ended, with his death, the Venezuelan oil had shoved aside other sectors to account or 90 percent of exports. (Labrador: www.cr.org). Since then, Venezuela has steadily grown to become the holder of the world's largest oil reserves, running into 297 billion barrels as at 2014 estimate. By 2017, it has risen to 300 billion barrels. (US EIA statistics 2017), beating countries like Saudi Arabia, Canada and Iran arms down.

Table1: Comparison of Proven oil Reserves from some widely used sources (billions of barrels, as at 31 Dec. 2014/1 Jan. 2015)

Source	CANADA	IRAN	RUSSIA	SAUDI ARABIA	US	VENEZUELA
BP	172.9	157.8	103.2	267.0	48.5	298.3
OPEC	4.2	157.5	80.0	266.6	36.5	300.0
US Central intelligence agency	171.0	157.8	103.2	268.3	36.5	298.4
US Energy Information Administration	172.5	157.8	80.0	268.3	36.9	298.4

Culled from enwikipedia.org

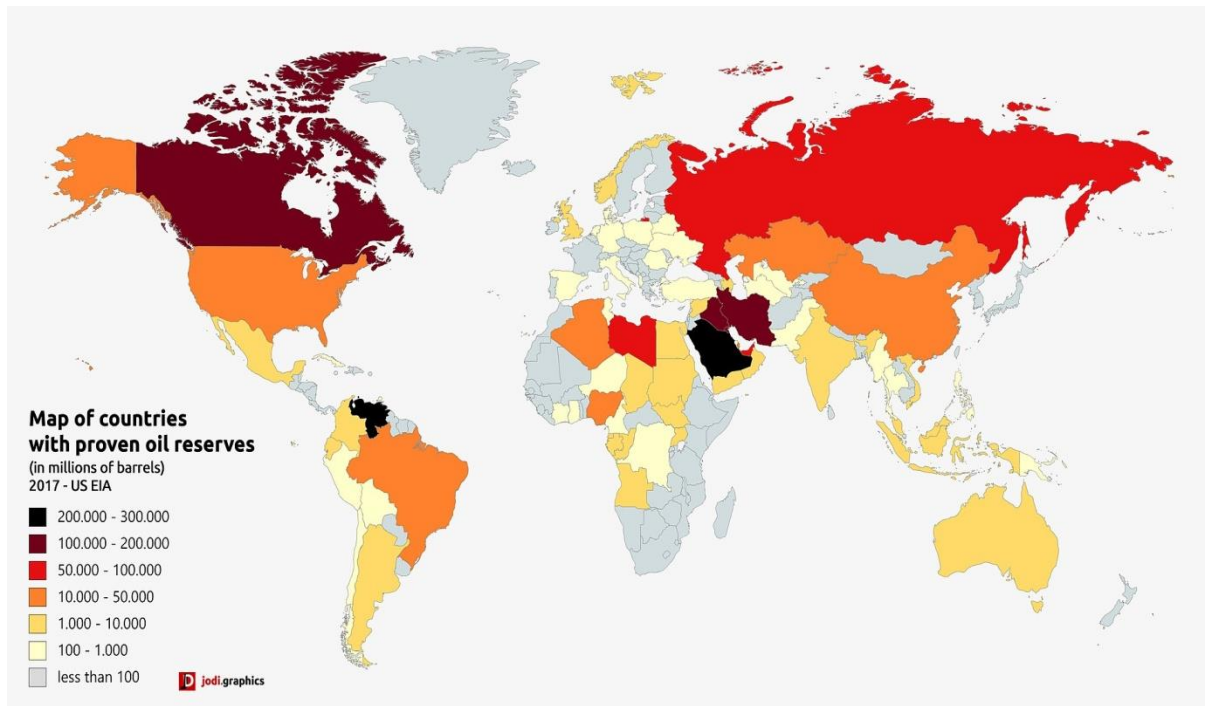


Figure 1: Map of Countries with Proven oil Reserves- Source the US EIA (Start of 2017)

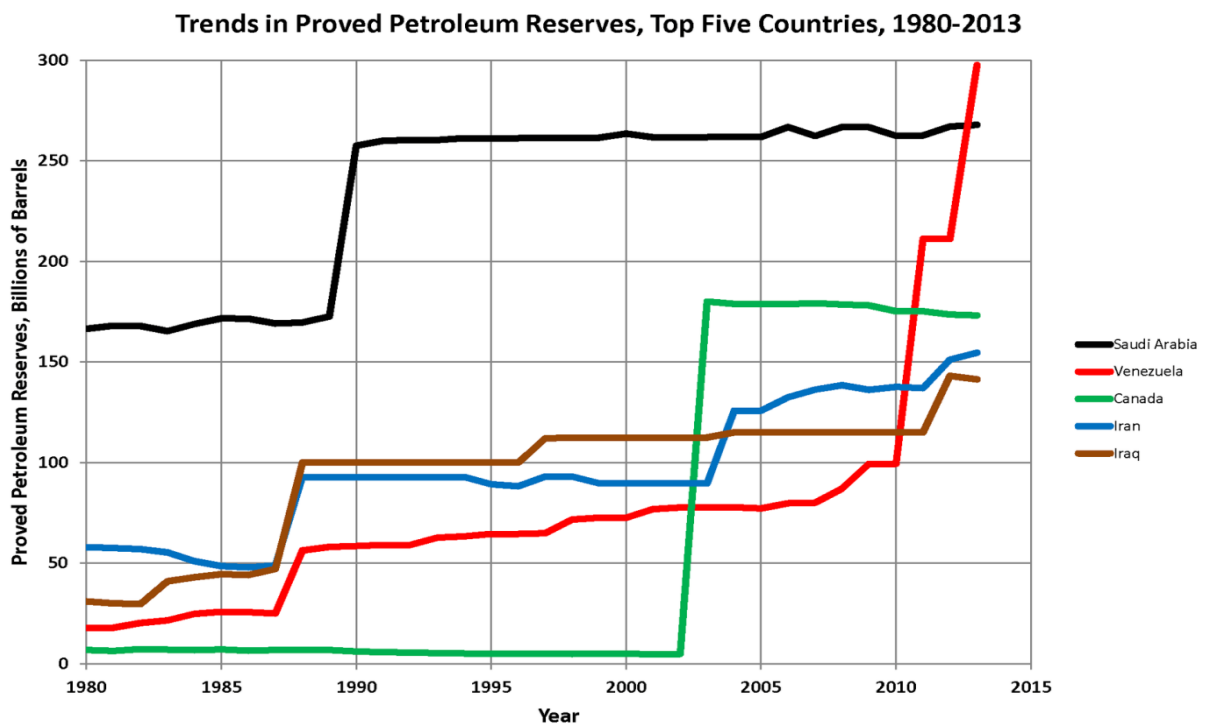


Figure 2: Trends in Proven Oil Reserves in Top 5 countries, 1980-2013. Data from US Energy Information.



Apart from oil, the third highest export commodity in Venezuela is Gold, coming only after crude oil and refined petroleum. Before 2012, the Central Bank of Venezuela had 211 out of its 365 tonnes of Gold reserves in US, Europe and Canadian banks. 160 tonnes of it worth \$9bn was repatriated under the orders of President Chavez in August 2011. (en.m.wikipedia.org)

As at Jan 2019, Venezuela's Gold reserves had fallen by 69% to US\$8.4bn during Maduro's presidency. (Emen:2019). Another \$900m worth was exported to Turkey in 2018 by the regime. (Lobrana 2019). But the World Bank has refused to release the country's Gold worth \$1.2bn in her custody. Another 14 tonnes with the Bank of England owned by the Central Bank of Venezuela, Banco Central de Venezuela, has being seized by the former. (Al JazeeraNews).(Yahoo.com 2019). These were actions executed at the request of the US Secretary of State, Pompeo and the National Security Adviser, Bolton, in order for the US to cut off the Maduro's Regime oversees assets. (Stuart et al 2019).

Like every nation that has wealthy Resources in excess, Venezuela has suffered long years of Economic and Political Crisis that has Plunged the oil Rich Nation into a chasm of Crisis with no end in sight. This is an instance of the consequences of the combined variables of abundant oil wealth, poor government institutions and unending external interference from Nations Interested in the oil and the Gold wealth can cause a Nation.

Venezuela has been relatively stable between 1998-2012 when President Chavez was in power. (Petras in www.globalresearch.org: 2019) When he died, the incumbent President Maduro came to Power in a democratically elected manner in 2013. But as a result of the inability of the US backed Candidate, Guaido, to emerge victorious in the 2018 elections, Washington resorted to instigating violent revolts, sanctions and propaganda to force the Elected President Maduro out of office and get their preferred candidate in who will serve their interest in Venezuela.

The US Interest that led to her Infringement in Venezuela

“Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world and they own it and we want it”- Anonymous Trump Official.

(Petras :2019)

America's history of hostility and efforts at overthrowing the Venezuelan Government since the 19th Century following the US desire to control the oil wealth has formed an inglorious history for not only Venezuela but the entire Latin America as a whole. Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatamela, El Salvador and Mexico all have experienced a history of America's infringement into their polity because of her selfish interest which has always left behind a trail of bloodshed, external manipulations, external interventions and a wave of unending crisis and hardship on the citizens. (Petras :2019)

The US intervened and occupied Genada in 1983 and Panama in 1989, institutionalizing regimes throughout the Latin American world that backed US banking and corporate oligarchs which exploited resources, workers and peasants. (Petras:2019). These were all geared towards securing one interest or the other that America possesses in that region.



The Venezuelan Presidential Crisis of 2019 and the role of the US

In a build up to the 2019 Crisis, Washington has backed various Venezuelan regimes to be able to gain control over her oil wealth. In 1989, America supported the then regime to unleash untold hardship in form of austerity programs on the citizens. This provoked demonstrations and civil unrest that led to the ascending to power of President Chavez, who refused to serve US's interest. He faced a series of coup and counter coups but managed to remain in power, with the support of his citizens, until President Maduro, another anti- US leader, was elected to succeed him. (Petras:2019)

However, his regime has faced series of sanction in order to either get him out of power and replace him with another leader who will serve the US interest or force him to succumb to serving the dictates of America.

Numerous sanctions were placed on individual members of the Maduro Administration during the crisis of 2019 by the US and some of her allies within the EU. Allegations of human rights abuses, corruption and undemocratic practices formed the bane of these sanctions. But the ripple effects of these sanctions further compiled the plight of the common Venezuelan as hyperinflation drove as many as 3 million citizens to flee to neighbouring countries. (Vidal et.al:2019 in Public Radio International).

America under Trump, levied more serious economic sanctions on the regime of Maduro as humanitarian crisis deepened, plunging the nation into a worse state of economic crisis (Vidal et al 2019). In January 2019, the US placed sanctions on the PDVSA, the state-owned oil and natural Gas Company in order to pressurize Maduro into resigning (Lee et al:2019). These sanctions were expected to reduce Venezuela's ability to purchase food and other imports which could result in further shortages and worsen its economic position. (Binnie in Reuters:2019).

However, Russia's Rosneft, Spain's Repsol, India's Reliance Industry Ltd as well as trading companies like Trafigura and Vitol kept up with constant supply of the Venezuela's oil industry as at April 2019. (Binnie in Reuters:2019).

The US department of treasury also placed restrictions on transactions with digital currency by or in the name of the Government of Venezuela, referencing "Petro", a crypto currency also known as "petromoneda" (Infobae: 2018) and on Venezuela's gold industry (Wyss in Miami Herald:2019). In March 2019, the US further sanctioned the Venezuelan bank, BANDES and its subsidiaries (France 24:2019). As at April 2019, the US has announced new restrictions on three countries they referred to as the Troika of Tyranny-Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. Maduro replied that the sanctions were "totally illegal" and that "central banks around the world are sacred. All countries respect them...to me, the empire looks crazy, desperate. (Reuters 2019).

The US has seized billions of dollars in Venezuelan assets and oil refineries in the US, sanctioned the Venezuelan regime to a point where hyperinflation and death of Venezuelan citizens due to the scarcity of food and medical products has become the order of the day. All theses in order to take control of the Venezuelan oil.



Path to an External Military Intervention

From Ivory Coast to Libya, Iraq to Yugoslavia, external military intervention in any guise or disguise is nothing new to the US, acting either alone or under a supposed coalition of the willing. America spares no time to launch an external invasion in any country where her interest is at stake. The US never involves herself in any intervention she does not have an interest in.

In reality, some of the world's strongest supporters of external military interventions are western countries such as the US, UK, France and Canada. (Emeribe 2018: 63). According to Welsh, the US has made claims of not intervening in any nation she does not possess any national interest. (Welsh 2004:180 in Emeribe 2018) Thus, interest becomes the underlying reason why Nations intervene in other nations and not out of humanitarian or ethical concerns. (Emeribe 2018: 63). Cases like Yugoslavia, Iraq, Cote d'Ivoire, Libya come to mind as instances. When in the recent case of Syria, Russia and China twice vetoed the resolution to intervene externally, they received strong condemnations from international actors, including the then UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, who accused them of refusing their responsibility to protect the Syrian populace (Emeribe 2018: 64)

Cases like Dafur, Myanmar, DRC, Sri Lanka and Rwanda were left un-intervened by the US and her allies because, fundamentally, there was no underlying Interest at stake worth intervening for, despite the alleged gross abuses being unleashed by their respective regimes on its citizens. (Emeribe 2018:).

In the case of Venezuela, the oil and gold wealth she possesses is likely to become more than sufficient enough a reason for the US to push for an external military intervention in Venezuela so as to be able to gain control of these resources just like she did in Iraq, Libya and Ivory Coast.

A regime change, whether directly through an external military intervention or through supporting an illegitimate opposition government, such as the case with Guaido, becomes an opportunity to infringe and or intervene militarily in Venezuela. As the days go by, the US seems desperate and totally committed to fuel and support a civil crisis in Venezuela, one that will be a subterfuge for launching an invasion and thereby justifying an external military intervention.

CONCLUSION

Justifying external military interventions under the guise of Humanitarian intervention is centuries old. In the specific case of the US, however, the interest at stake is the determining factor or intervention, not humanitarian. As presented in the paper citing various past cases, interests, not humanitarian considerations form the basis of all external military interventions.

Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits nations from using force or threat of force against their fellow nations. But in reality, this seems to be just in paper, especially when the powerful nations are involved. The same charter of the United Nations, Article 39 seems to contradict this by authorizing the United Nations Security Council, which US is a permanent member, to respond with force to any threat of peace, breach of the peace or threat of



aggression. (www.un.org). But history has record of unauthorized military interventions like Bosnia and Kosovo which the US launched against them. It becomes worrisome that such trend seems to be waiting to be repeated in no time at all in Venezuela.

The interest(s) which the US possess in the afore mentioned nations drove her to the point of launching unauthorized military interventions against them. Even the UNSC authorized interventions, in most of the previously mentioned cases was either moved as a motion by the US or led by Washington.

It is with this assumption that the likelihood of an external military intervention by the US, acting independently or as a coalition, authorized or not, becomes more realistic in Venezuela as days go by for the sole purpose of gaining control of her oil. History will only just be repeating itself in Venezuela sooner than later.

SUMMARY

This paper has examined the Venezuelan Presidential Crisis of 2019, the build up to the crisis and the obvious interference and infringement by the US on the anti US but democratically elected regime of President Maduro. The history of the US in launching external military interventions has been cited as a reference to justify the assumption that an external military intervention, whether authorized or not is not outside the bounds of the US in Venezuela and such becomes a greater reality as the days goes by and the crisis deepens.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that Washington's disposition towards launching external military interventions arbitrarily in other nation must be checked by the United Nations Security Council.

Anti-American Nations like Russia and China should be prepared to veto US whenever the case arises or an arbitrary external military intervention upon a sovereign state. Whether individually or as a coalition, such must be checked.

It is important for the committee of nations to uphold the sanctity and sovereignty of any nation and encourage civil crisis to be settled amicably among the various internal actors. Every nation state, government and people owe themselves a responsibility to do so. External infringement of worst still, a military intervention is by no means a pacific conflict resolution template. Rather, it worsens the situation, the nation in question and further worsens the plight of its citizens.



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