

Possible Options on Venezuela

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Bogota, Colombia

Editor's note: As a private citizen, Steve Salisbury has provided observations to United States high-ranking officials of both Republican and Democratic administrations. Salisbury played what could be said was a key role as a de facto precursor "intermediary" between US officials and Colombia's FARC guerrilla group before the naming of a US presidential special envoy to the peace process between the Colombian government and FARC, which together signed a peace accord in late 2016. The report herewith is an edited, expanded version of one that Salisbury wrote and sent recently to US State Department senior officials and other US inter-agency officials who cover Venezuela.

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Introduction

While Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro is on much shakier ground following new rounds of massive street protests and marches of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans against his delegitimized and increasingly internationally unrecognized de facto regime after Venezuela's 2018 presidential elections were widely denounced as being rigged and a sham in light of major opposition candidates being barred or boycotting and complaints of voting irregularities--and while Venezuela's National Assembly President Juan Guaido invoked a Constitutional article to assume a "transitional presidency" of the country and has been recognized by the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Colombia and a growing number of countries and whose transitional government appears to be gathering more support--recent events in Venezuela are so far no guarantee that Maduro, who is digging in, will step aside or be forced out. Thus, from the standpoint of those supporting the anti-Maduro coalition, one should not be complacent, and it is not the time to sing victory--lots of hard work remains.

Notes Jorge Bustamante, the former head of Colombia's national agency of statistics DANE: If the momentum of recent events isn't sustained, there could be a risk of a bell curve-like peaking and then a decline in efforts aimed at Maduro's departure--as happened in previous years where there were massive marches and spikes in opposition resistance to Maduro only to mostly fizzle out for the time-being.

A big difference this time is the United States' and other countries' recognition of Guaido's transitional government, a new so far well-coordinated campaign of international diplomacy--interacting with the Guaido government--ratcheted up economic and other sanctions with real teeth, a (at least for now) subsiding of internal bickering among Venezuela's opposition to Maduro, and the anti-Maduro movement's rallying around Guaido.

On Which Side Does Time Favor?

On which side does time favor? It could be argued that it could be a mixed bag. Every day that Guaido is not arrested, killed or otherwise harmed and his transitional government survives, that seems to point to the greater the chances of the Guaido government gaining its sea-legs, consolidating and extending its reach, to the detriment of Maduro becoming increasingly marginalized even to degrees of irrelevancy--with perhaps an increasing chance of a fracturing in the Venezuelan Armed Forces, which are the main buoy keeping Maduro afloat, and in other *Madurista/Chavista* structures.

However, the longer Maduro stays in place, his bet could be on Guaido and the opposition losing steam; on the opposition falling back into its traditional internal bickering; on a supposed eventual loss of interest among the international community; on more time for his allies--including Russia, China, Iran and Turkey--to come more comprehensively to his aid, although they have relatively limited options on Venezuela; and on a possibility of dashing or dissipating high hopes among the anti-Maduro masses that Maduro and his cronies would be gone.

While there could be a possibility of a prolonged stalemate of "two presidents," there could also be another turn, as a United Kingdom Royal Navy retired Special Boat Service decorated member who once was attached to the British embassy in Bogota wrote to me: "I think the tide of international interest rising against the Maduro regime is encouraging and supports the shakier ground analysis. That said every day that man wakes up he is a day closer to what will likely be a messy end."

A "Messy End"?

Scenarios of a "messy end" for Maduro (or for Guaido on the flip side if Maduro troops attack him) and for the Venezuelan people in general--who are already suffering a humanitarian disaster and suppression of democratic rights, civil liberties and human rights--cannot be discarded. While civil war in Venezuela seems to be a remote possibility at this moment--and something that should be strenuously tried to be avoided--it or some sort of armed clashes cannot be ruled out in the future.

And while an international military invasion like that of Iraq would not seem to be the way to go in Venezuela--and which could be counterproductive and have prolonged negative consequences, even if it got Maduro out--forms of international

humanitarian intervention/action, perhaps with a military component (such in the facets of support, logistics, and protection) could be seen to have an eventual determining constructive role.

Embarking on the “Irreversible”

The United States’ National Security Council Senior Director for the Western Hemisphere, Mauricio Claver-Carone, emphasized in an interview published February 10 this year by Colombian El Tiempo newspaper correspondent Sergio Gomez Maseri for the *Grupo Diarios de America* that the path on which the United States is embarked regarding Venezuela--including getting Maduro out--is “irreversible.”

The NSC’s Claver-Carone said in the interview (my translation from Spanish to English): “It doesn’t correspond to me to enter in details about strategies. What is to come now is that we are going to surround Venezuela with humanitarian aid. It is to say, a kind of humanitarian siege in which we are working with Brazil, Colombia and the Caribbean. That is the stage that we are in now. Later, we will enter another stage in which we will define what to do so that it [the humanitarian aid] may get in.”

International Humanitarian Intervention/Action, a “Blueprint” Being Implemented?

While it may not correspond to US officials to get publicly into details of strategies at this moment, I wrote a “blueprint”/outline on a hypothetical international humanitarian intervention/action option regarding Venezuela in September 2018 which I sent to US State Department senior officials and other US and British inter-agency officials or contacts, and it appears that some observations of my “blueprint”/outline have been or are in the process of being implemented, whether by coincidence or not.

One that has not been yet implemented, but which could very well be on the drawing boards, is that there could be the creation of humanitarian enclaves/”safe havens” (or “*bolsones*” in Spanish) inside Venezuelan territory deemed suitable and propitious, most likely including border areas. The Guaido transitional government--being recognized by the United States, the United Kingdom and dozens of countries--would first have to make an invitation to the international community to establish such zones. If Maduro balks at and threatens it, the US-participating international coalition could consider using a military component to establish, support and protect the zones.

Why consider the option of humanitarian enclaves/safe havens inside Venezuela? Some reasons that could be argued for it would include: 1) It would relieve the catastrophe of the mass exodus of Venezuelan refugees which is overburdening and threatening to overwhelm and destabilize Venezuela's neighbors. 2) It would

be an even further element pressuring Maduro and his coterie not to stand in the way of a return of civil liberties and free and fair elections. If Maduro continues to dig in, the mounting pressure could lead to Venezuelans even in Maduro's own inner circles to (further?) discuss seriously his exit from the scene. 3) It would avoid a bloodbath of a traditional-style invasion like in Iraq, which is not necessarily in the cards nor necessarily under consideration. Of course, we don't want to see violence.

To Address Sensitivities to Past US Intervention in Latin America

In such a scenario, given Latin American sensitivities to a history of US military intervention in the region over the past century, Latin American countries could provide the on-the-ground personnel--including a possible military peace-keeping, support, logistical component in the humanitarian enclaves/safe havens. And countries like the United States, regional powers, the United Kingdom, or others would play leading or important roles one way or another, in close coordination and consultation with the Guaido transitional government.

Given that Colombia, Brazil and Guyana share borders with Venezuela, they may not want to risk souring relations with a significant segment of Venezuela's population (even if it is a relatively small fraction) for years by sending in their military troops; and thus, they may prefer to keep their participation just to humanitarian, diplomatic, economic, logistical or other support functions to the anti-Maduro movement (if an international military humanitarian force were to possibly go into Venezuela).

If *Madurista* Forces Attack Humanitarian Enclaves...

What if the Maduro forces were to militarily attack the humanitarian enclaves/safe havens? While Maduro might cite a viewpoint of defending Venezuela's sovereignty if he did so, it could look very bad for him--as his blocking the entry of international humanitarian aid into Venezuela has reaped condemnation against him--and raise an international clamor, which might be a factor for him to decide not to order an attack on such enclaves. But if Maduro ordered an attack on humanitarian enclaves/safe havens, the international coalition supporting the Guaido transitional government would have the sufficient capability to protect against it, and it could perhaps mean a forceful response in kind by the international community--within the parameters of international law and presumably with the endorsement of an international body such as the Lima Group or Organization of American States--which could result in a swift end of the Maduro regime.

Further possible options toward consolidating Guaido's transitional government; safeguarding and delivering international humanitarian aid in concert with Interim President Guaido's government to Venezuela's population suffering atrocious levels of hunger and desperate poverty under Maduro; and eventually carrying out free, fair and transparent presidential and other elections with international

verification include, but are not limited to, the following--by Venezuelans themselves inside Venezuela, and outside Venezuela by the international community and others:

BY VENEZUELANS THEMSELVES INSIDE VENEZUELA:

Interim President Guaido's government needs to strengthen its transitional "sea-legs" and develop depth--within Venezuela's Constitutional parameters. How? Some ways could be by:

A) The continuing to flesh out the transitional cabinet, Venezuelan regional/local official posts, especially regarding humanitarian aid distribution, and internationally, ambassadorships and special reps/envoys.

B) Guaido's government needs to solidify "chain of command."

C) A solid consensus plan of ascension/replenishment within the top levels of the Guaido transitional government—within Venezuela's Constitutional parameters--to fill voids of positions when they happen.

Keep in mind that there could be a possibility that Guaido and others at the top of the Guaido transitional government could suffer arrest or be killed or harmed otherwise by Maduro-related forces. If one of them is arrested or killed, then there should be someone credible, responsible and with backing among the Guaido transitional government to step in the void.

It cannot be discounted that Maduro may at this moment be trying to put his ducks in order perhaps plotting to do an arrest or "decapitation" operation against Guaido and his transitional government.

The United States sent a stern warning to Maduro not to harm Guaido or the Venezuelan people in general. (With no specificity of what that could entail, Maduro and his inner-circle might wonder if that were to include a possible option of a Tomahawk cruise missile strike against them.) As of now, it is unclear publicly what Guaido's own personal security arrangements are (and they shouldn't be made public for security reasons). It appears that the greatest protection for Guaido and those around him in his inner-circle are the masses of people circling ranks around him. But Guaido, his team members and National Assembly members opposed to Maduro ought to have some sort of security professionals helping them.

D) Maduro has declared a blockade against international humanitarian aid coming into Venezuela, and the bridge connecting the Cucuta,

Colombia area to Venezuela has been shut off by Maduro forces with a water tanker and heavy containers. *Madurista* military forces have been reinforced there on the Venezuelan side, while reportedly unpaid volunteers (Venezuelans, Colombians and of other nationalities) are in Cucuta amassing humanitarian supplies.

Interim President Guaido tweeted the afternoon of February 11 that a load of humanitarian aid got distributed inside Venezuela to health centers. But Maduro is holding tight to his rhetoric of blocking international humanitarian aid, saying that “we are not beggars” and calling the humanitarian aid a humiliation.

Maduro’s vice president Delcy Rodriguez claimed separately at a press conference that the US humanitarian foodstuffs included what she characterized as carcinogens (blue coloring added): “Various scientific studies have shown that this so-called food from the United States aims to poison our population with chemicals. We could say that this humanitarian aid is a biological weapon,” she was quoted as saying by the Reuters news agency. Spokespersons of the United States and other governments scoffed at Rodriguez’s accusation as false and outrageous.

On February 12, as massive throngs marched in Venezuela’s capital Caracas demanding that international humanitarian aid be let into the country, President Guaido announced that the Brazilian state of Roraima bordering Venezuela is another collection area for humanitarian aid and that February 23 is a target date for volunteers to form “human corridors” to take food, medicines and other supplies into Venezuela against Maduro’s efforts to block it.

A Colombian informal liaison person with Guaido’s supporters in Cucuta told me February 16 that a strategy was to take the humanitarian aid to as many capitals of Venezuelan county-like *municipios* as possible, starting with those nearest Colombia, such as just across the border from Cucuta in the Venezuelan city San Antonio, the county seat of the *municipio* Bolivar in Tachira state. The aid could then fan out.

In cases like this (and one could presume it would already be happening to some degree), Guaido government reps and/or humanitarian workers could try to talk with the Maduro local officials, making an appeal to their all being Venezuelans and to do the humane thing to let in the humanitarian aid. They could stress to the Maduro local officials that the Maduro local officials would be the “big-hearted persons” (even “heroes”) if they let the humanitarian aid into Venezuela.

As the United States and Great Britain did with effectiveness in Afghanistan with the “*loya jirgas*” (“big tent” understandings) among a variety of Afghan tribes--although the situations in Afghanistan and

Venezuela are very different--a case of persuasion could be attempted toward Maduro local border forces to allow (either tacitly, turning a "blind eye" or actively) humanitarian aid to come in, citing that so-and-so may be allowing it in, so why not them, too? And stress that the Maduro local forces don't look good keeping out the aid and could face future consequences for not allowing it in.

If Maduro local forces keep blocking the bridge and/or other border crossings, humanitarian aid could be crossed into Venezuela at other stretches of the border where there are no Maduro forces present--air drops could be considered--but security precautions would need to be taken and the Guaido government would need to be kept abreast of the efforts.

A Colombian Army colonel told me in Cucuta February 16 that there are plenty of areas away from border check-points where humanitarian aid can be smuggled into Venezuela. But he added that the question is: How would the Venezuelan Armed Forces respond? He said that some Venezuelan military personnel along the border have privately expressed to Colombian military personnel sympathy for the protesters' desire to let the aid in and recognize that the situation is bad, but that they cannot speak out publicly.

E) Venezuelans in refugee communities along borders in Colombia, Brazil or elsewhere could be mobilized into units according to a scale best suited for efficiency--in concert with the Guaido transitional government--to take humanitarian aid into Venezuela.

F) Venezuelans should carry out the predominant work of distributing humanitarian aid from staging areas in neighboring countries to the local "assemblies" inside Venezuela being organized by the Guaido transitional government. International aid entities and Guaido-supporting governments--in concert with the Guaido government--could pay as many Venezuelans as they can for this work (it helps to get the economy going, although unpaid volunteerism is welcome). There should be solid supervision and auditing that the operations and funds are being well utilized and not going into wrong hands.

G) Humanitarian aid should be clearly marked from where it originated. If the Guaido transitional government is helping in its distribution, there should be a statement saying so.

H) There could be consideration by the Guaido transitional government to declare as humanitarian-aid centers areas inside Venezuela identified to be suitable and strategic and to call the international community in to support them. (In the version of my report for US officials, I named some possible places.) To do this, Guaido's government would have to

coordinate with the international community to have naval, air and ground assets of those countries with sufficient resources--such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Spain, Canada, etc., to assist in ushering in and protecting Guaido government personnel and humanitarian workers. There could be pre-talks with the Maduro local forces so that they do not resist the overwhelming strength of the international/Guaido joint forces.

With the first area or two secured and lessons learned, this option could be considered as a model to open other humanitarian hubs on Venezuela territory.

These humanitarian centers could also serve as safe havens/points for potential defecting Maduro military units/individuals.

I) The Guaido government could engage in strictly governmental transitional talks with Maduro and (separately or together) with the Venezuelan Armed Forces. United States National Security Adviser John Bolton told FOX NEWS February 15 that “the key generals” who support Maduro are already in non-public conversations with the opposition.

While Maduro has talked about “finding consensus,” his authoritarian actions, including violent crackdowns, have been criticized as making a mockery of his reconciliatory talk and led the Venezuelan opposition and many in the international community to view Maduro’s offers of dialogue as a cynical ploy to keep himself in power with apparently fruitless endless talks and delays, although Maduro denies that.

If Guaido were to talk with Maduro and/or the Venezuelan Armed Forces, the talks should focus strictly on trying to lay out a path for free, fair, transparent, and internationally and nationally monitored presidential and other elections, with the creation of an impartial, competent, non-politicized elections supervisory entity. The issue of Maduro stepping aside--and the conditions and time-table of how he would do it--would be something to be talked about, too. Consideration could be given to having these conversations recorded and publicized, depending on circumstances, so that there would be no room for mischaracterizing or distorting them.

By the United States, the United Kingdom and International Community in General:

While Transitional President Juan Guaido has been impressive in his poise so far (especially for someone who is just 35 years old), and while Maduro has shown his pattern for clumsy comments or actions, the United States, the United Kingdom and the international community have an array of options, some being:

Ramping up support even more to the Guaido transitional government by:

A) Helping beef up the personal security of Guaido and other Guaido transitional government officials. This could be done by facilitating top-notch private-sector security professionals to address and fill the array of physical, communications, digital, transportation, and storage security needs, etc.

B) Assisting humanitarian and other constructive NGOs in carrying out their work in Venezuela, bordering countries and elsewhere. For example, help doctors, health-care personnel and other humanitarian workers to make connections with the appropriate Guaido transitional government reps or those of neighboring countries working on Venezuelan issues.

C) Continuing the momentum of concerted diplomatic action and tightening economic and other sanctions--including looking at secondary sanctions--against the delegitimized Maduro de facto regime. Explore or facilitate opportunities to investigate it further and deeper.

It was reported that Venezuelan insiders blew the whistle on Maduro members' supposed attempt to dispatch a plane loaded with tons of gold out of the country on a Russian private-contracted plane. Supporting and protecting whistleblowers should be a top priority.

D) Step up public diplomacy across multimedia platforms

E) Helping the Guaido government to form its governing and services infrastructure.

F) Helping the Guaido government in its efforts to woo over officers and other members of the Venezuelan Armed Forces to its side. In an address at Florida International University in Miami February 18 this year, United States President Donald Trump called on Venezuelan officials and military members who support Maduro to abandon Maduro and warned that if they don't: "You will find no safe harbor, no easy exit and no way out. You will lose everything."

There have been news reports of limited direct contacts between US officials and some Venezuelan military personnel. And Maduro's foreign minister Jorge Arreaza was reported to have said that there have been at least two meetings with US Presidential Special Envoy on Venezuela Elliott Abrams to listen to each other.

So far, at least one general and a couple of colonels have announced their defection from Maduro to support the Guaido transitional

government. And dozens of lower-ranking Venezuelan military personnel have mutinied against Maduro, scores of them being jailed and some tortured, according to human-rights activists.

While the National Assembly under Guaido passed legislation of amnesty for members of the Venezuelan Armed Forces, the Americas director of non-governmental group Human Rights Watch Jose Miguel Vivanco warned against vagueness or open-ended provisions in possible interpretations of this amnesty “that could effectively grant blanket impunity to officials responsible for serious human rights abuses. Any amnesty that guarantees impunity by absolving government and military officials responsible for the most serious human rights violations is incompatible with Venezuela’s international obligations.”

There apparently may have to be more incentive to get Venezuela’s officer corps to dump Maduro--who has bought off the top echelon of the Armed Forces by allowing it to run or have a hand in some government ministries, the oil industry, and food and health programs, which can result in all sorts of possibilities for its profiteering. Armed Forces officers and enlisted personnel face severe retribution from *Maduristas* if they bolt and would have to know that they will be protected and taken care of (and that means on the most basic levels of having food, housing and work) if they defect to the Guaido transitional government.

G) Some things that could perhaps foster (and potentially accelerate?) the fracturing of the Venezuelan Armed Forces are mentioned (in response to my asking) here in the following by a Western government official in a responsible position. (These are this official’s own personal academic-like observations and don’t necessarily reflect the official policy of his country.):

“The images of the VEN security forces using trunks to block a bridge to prevent the entry of humanitarian aid are powerful and shows the world and the people of VEN that Maduro doesn't care that his people are starving.

“I think the offer [of amnesty] is critical to win over the military but with the way it is offered now, the general who waits until the last minute receives the same benefit as the brave guys who switch early to Guaido. There has to be some sort of incentive to switch early and a penalty for those who wait until the "writing is on the wall" for Maduro. Some options are 1) a deadline or 2) a numeric limit; I am not sure, but I would lean towards a numeric limit. A recent news article said that there are over 3,000 VEN generals and admirals (compared to about 900 in the U.S.); so let's say the limit is the first 1,000 get complete amnesty, the next 1,000 get some sort of limited amnesty, and the last 1,000 get

no amnesty. Figure out the number of Colonels and Navy Captains and have some similar offer for them (you probably don't need to go below those ranks). The idea is to get them to compete with each other to get across the line. [sic]

“Again, there has to be a reward for those who jump early and a penalty to those who wait until the last minute.

“Also, it is more important for leaders of field units to make the jump, that is those commanding troops rather than those flying desks at an HQ. Those commanding troops can lead troops to protect protestors, food convoys, the National Assembly and the Interim Leaders, as well as stop the Collectivos [sic].

“...they must take extradition off the table [for] a very limited number of key, high ranking leaders who make the leap and bring others with them. This will be a hard pill to swallow for the US DOJ, but I think that just about every VEN general is looking at extradition for some connection to drug trafficking/money laundering and therefore a very long sentence in a US prison (roommates with El Sr. Guzman?). Perhaps the incentive is the first twenty key leaders that jump get the proverbial "get out of jail free" card. This would and limiting the overall numbers would start a stampede. [sic]”

This same Western government official added that during the Cold War the United States tried to spur defections of Soviet-bloc pilots by offering juicy rewards for them to defect with their planes to the West. The same approach could be used to try to get Maduro Air Force pilots to defect with their Russian-made Sukoi combat jets.

As the British retired Royal Navy Special Boat Service member told me: “When the Venezuelan Armed Forces fracture, people will be looking for their own interests. All will be looking for their own lifeboat. We should be able to offer lifeboats.” Which lifeboats are allowed to float and which to sink could be decided on a case by case basis, he added.

H) Helping the Guaido government to perhaps raise its own military entity to “add” to and “complement” (not to replace) the already existing Venezuelan Armed Forces. This idea would have to be studied further and done within the parameters of the Venezuelan Constitution.

I) The United States, in concert with the Guaido government, could deepen talks with Russia and China on the issues of Russia’s and China’s concerns over possibly losing their investments in Venezuela (such as in oil, among other things). If they knew that the departure of the delegitimized Maduro de facto regime doesn’t necessarily mean that

Russia's and China's investments are completely down the toilet, they may just let Maduro go.

J) Drill down in diplomatic discussions with Cuba on Venezuela. Cuba is worried about losing the reported some 55,000 barrels of subsidized oil it receives from Venezuela on average per day. It is also worried about its thousands of intelligence, military-adviser, security-forces, doctors and other personnel in Venezuela being vulnerable to “*revanchismo*” attacks/lynchings, and about losing revenues it receives for its personnel bolstering Maduro and his forces (paid largely or mostly by subsidized oil).

President Guaido's transitional government has already communicated to Cuba that the Cuban people per se are welcome, but that Cuban intelligence, military and security-forces personnel must leave and not prop up Maduro. The United States, the United Kingdom, the international community and President Guaido could see where there may be possible ways to address Cuba's concerns on oil and its other interests, if the delegitimized Maduro de facto regime goes away.

Cuba is not going to fall on its own sword for Maduro. When I was in Cuba during 11 trips between April 2013 and late September 2015 (with the approving eyes and encouragement of US officials) regarding the Colombian peace process talks being held there at the time between the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas, one of the Cuban “minders” following the peace process and well-connected to Cuban officialdom told me that Maduro “doesn't measure up” as a leader in the Cubans' view, but that Cuba stuck with him basically by default because it didn't see another option at the time that would safeguard Cuban interests. The inference by the “minder: If Cuba's interests were accommodated, Cuba could see Maduro as being expendable.

K) Sanctions Enforcement--including most notably on Maduro's attempts to ship oil--by the navies/coast guards of the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands, France, Spain, Brazil or whatever willing countries. For example, Venezuelan oil shipments to Cuba could be interdicted by the Guaido government-supporting coalition of countries. That would send a strong message to Cuba for it to consider to shift its policy on Venezuela and for Cuba to consider to go along with or at least not object to a transition of government in Venezuela where there would be a time-table toward free, fair, transparent and internationally verified presidential and other elections.

This could be done in bulk by the US Coast Guard, so as to not be seen supposedly as being “heavy-handed,” such as it might be viewed if it were to be done by warships.

L) United States and coalition naval/air/ground activities, in concert with the Guaido government, would be very important in enhancing the scope, distribution and impact of humanitarian aid and protection. Of course, the senior brass and top planners of the United States', United Kingdom's and other coalition countries' militaries are the best to make plans and counsel for such humanitarian contingencies with military components.

This could be a well-fitting role for the United Kingdom's new aircraft carrier the HMS Queen Elizabeth, given that a situation like this is one of its priority tasks for which it was designed and for which British tax-payers paid loads of sterling pounds. The HMS Queen Elizabeth's doing important humanitarian duty in the Caribbean could be welcome good news in the United Kingdom where headlines of Brexit have been dominating nowadays.

The HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier, in conjunction with, say, one or two US Navy amphibious assault ships like the USS Kearsarge or USS Iwo Jima (which are like mini-aircraft carriers) and/or a US aircraft carrier, and support ships--including hospital ships like the USS Comfort--could work together in international waters, along with other coalition navies, off the coast of Venezuela to carry out and safeguard humanitarian efforts.

The United States, the United Kingdom and other coalition countries, in concert with the Guaido transitional government, could have the option of making air drops or plane landings in secured areas of Venezuela to deliver humanitarian aid.

But a US retired senior diplomat warns: "I can't stress enough that the US has to take a low key approach (like your idea of Coast Guard vice Navy). The last thing we need is the rest of Latin America racing to defend Maduro in the face of 'American Imperialism' and that Guaido is an American puppet. So for me, either a dramatic event has to take place or the buffer humanitarian zones are needed. Otherwise we remain in a stalemate and the Venezuelan people suffer without pause of relief."

M) A vote of approval from the Lima Group, the Organization of American States or another international body on potential circumstances where appropriate military force in defense of humanitarian efforts could be authorized.

N) If Maduro forces try to attack humanitarian centers/zones, it would give the international humanitarian coalition supporting the Guaido transitional government legitimate self-defense reasons to respond with

the military force deemed fitting, and that could mean the end of the Maduro delegitimized de facto regime in very short order.

O) The United States Senate should not continue to delay a full-floor confirmation vote on a new US ambassador to Venezuela's important neighbor Colombia, especially at this critical time. President Trump nominated in November 2017 State Department career diplomat Joseph Macmanus to be US ambassador to Colombia. Having not been confirmed by the beginning of 2019 due to scheduling, procedural or political delays (including from a "hold" placed by Republican Senator Mike Lee over questions about Macmanus' being an executive aide to then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and about the 2012 Benghazi episode), Macmanus' nomination was returned to President Trump and is currently in limbo. If the US Senate won't act expeditiously on this, President Trump could consider his US Constitutional option of making a recess appointment for this ambassadorship.

When/If Maduro Is Gone

On February 13, President Trump received Colombian President Ivan Duque at the White House in Washington, DC. Responding to press questions with President Duque sitting alongside him, President Trump said about Venezuela, "I always have plan B — and C, and D, and E, and F... So we'll see. But there are many plans, and we'll see where we go."

While a US-participating international coalition could overwhelm (militarily or otherwise) the delegitimized Maduro de facto regime, a big question is: What dangers could happen after the Maduro delegitimized de facto regime were to depart?

There could be a possibility of the formation of *Chavista/Madurista* guerrilla groups, to be joined by Colombian Marxist guerrillas who have found sympathy and evident sanctuary from Maduro in Venezuela. There are already *Chavista/Madurista* "*colectivos*"—somewhat paramilitary-like militias supporting the Maduro de facto regime.

This could be a threat to international humanitarian forces which enter Venezuelan territory, whether Maduro is present or gone, and a possible development to be taken into account by policy-makers and others.

The needs and challenges of stabilization and rebuilding Venezuela post-Maduro would be enormous and would take years.
