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Debate

In Defense of Venezuela

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Boaventura de Souza Santos, the Portuguese academic and activist, was a leading figure in the anti-globalization movement in the early years of this century. He has been a strong, if critical, supporter of Venezuela's Bolivarian revolution. Earlier this year, he caused some controversy when he signed a declaration launched by a group of left intellectuals from Argentina, which was very critical of the Venezuelan government.

In this new text, he clarifies his support for the Bolivarian process:

Venezuela is living one of its most critical moments in its history. I have followed the Bolivarian Revolution from the start, critically and in solidarity. The social achievements of the last two decades are indisputable. To prove this one only needs to consult the 2016 UN report on the evolution of the Human Development Index.

The report states: "The Human Development Index (HDI) of Venezuela in 2015 was 0.767" which places the country in the high human development category, positioning it in the 71th place out of 188 countries and territories. This classification is shared with Turkey. From 1990-2015, the HDI of Venezuela increased from 0.634 to 0.767, an increase of 20.9%. Between 1990 and 2015, life expectancy at birth increased by 4.6 years, the average level of education increased to 4.8 years and the years of general education increased, on average, by 3.8 years. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita increased by 5.4% between 1990 and 2015."

It must be noted that these advances were obtained in a democracy, only momentarily interrupted by the attempted coup d'etat in 2002 organized by the opposition with the support of the United States.

The premature death of Hugo Chávez in 2013 and the fall of the price of petroleum in 2014 caused a profound commotion in the processes of social transformation currently underway at that time. The charismatic leadership of Chávez did not have a successor, the victory of Nicolás Maduro in the following elections was by a narrow margin, the new president was not prepared for the complex tasks of the government and the opposition (profoundly divided internally) felt that their moment had arrived. A moment that was, once more, supported by the United States, especially when in 2015 and once again in 2017, President Obama considered Venezuela a "threat against the national security of the United States," a declaration that many considered an exaggeration, if not ridiculous, but that, as I will explain below, was completely logical (from the point of view of the United States of course).

The situation continued to deteriorate until December 2015 when the opposition reached a majority in the National Assembly. The Supreme Court (or Supreme Tribunal of Justice) suspended four members for alleged electoral fraud which the National Assembly disobeyed and from that moment the institutional confrontation worsened progressively spreading in the streets. It was also fed by the grave economic crisis and the lack of provisions which has since exploded. In this chaotic situation more than 100 are dead.

Meanwhile, President Maduro has taken the initiative to invoke a National Constituent Assembly (NCA) elected on July 30th and the United States has threatened with more sanctions if the election continues. It is known that this initiative looks to overcome the obstruction of the National Assembly dominated by the opposition.

This past May 26, I signed onto a manifesto written by Venezuelan intellectuals and politicians from various political tendencies appealing to the political parties and social groups in conflict to stop the violence in the streets and initiate a dialogue that allows for a non-violent, democratic solution without the intervention of the United States. I decided

then to no longer comment on the Venezuelan crisis.

Why do I do it today? Because I am alarmed with the bias in European social media, including Portugal's, regarding the crisis in Venezuela. There is a distortion that runs through all media that demonizes a legitimately elected government to stir up the social and political fire and legitimize a foreign intervention that'd have incalculable consequences.

The Spanish press has reached the point of embarking on the future diffusing false news about the position of the Portuguese government. I declare myself encouraged by the good sense and equilibrium the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Augusto Santos Silva, has shown regarding this topic. Recent history will show us that economic sanctions affect innocent citizens more than governments.

One most only remember the more than 500,000 children that, according to the UN report in 1995, were killed in Iraq as a result of sanctions imposed after the Gulf War. We must also remember that in Venezuela live half a million Portuguese or Luso-descendants. Recent history also reminds us that no democracy is strengthened by foreign intervention.

The mistakes of a democratic government must be resolved democratically. This will be most consistent with the least amount of foreign interference. The government of the Bolivarian Revolution is democratically legitimate. Throughout many elections during the last twenty years it has never given signs of not respecting election results. It has lost some elections and it can lose the next and it would only be worth criticizing if the results are not respected.

But, it cannot be denied that President Maduro has constitutional legitimacy to call for a National Constituent Assembly. Of course Venezuelans (including many critical Chavistas) can legitimately question this opportunity especially taking into account that they have the Constitution of 1999 promoted by Chavez and they possess the democratic means to manifest this questioning next Sunday. But nothing justifies the insurrectional climate the opposition has radicalized in these last weeks and whose object is not to correct the errors of the Bolivarian Revolution but to put an end to it, impose neoliberal reforms (like what is happening in Brazil and Argentina) alongside everything this would mean for the poor majority of Venezuelans.

What must worry democrats, although this does not worry the global media who have already taken the opposition's side, is the form in which the candidates are being selected. If, as is suspected, the bureaucratic apparatus of party of the government has hijacked the participatory impulse of the popular classes the objective of the National Constituent Assembly to democratically amplify the political force of the social base of the revolution will have been frustrated.

To comprehend why there will probably not be a non-violent solution to the crisis of Venezuela one must know what is at play in the global geopolitical plan. What is at stake are the largest existing oil reserves in the world in Venezuela. For the global dominance of the United States it is crucial to maintain control of the largest oil reserves in the world. Whatever country, however democratic it may be, has this strategic resource and does not make it accessible to the multinational oil companies, a majority of which are North American, will become the focus of an imperial intervention.

The threat to national security of which the presidents of United States speak of is not solely in access to petroleum but above all in the fact that the global exchange of oil is denominated in U.S. dollars, the true nucleus of power of the United States since no other country has the privilege of printing the bills they wish without this significantly affecting their monetary value.

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This is the reason why Iraq was invaded and the Middle East and Libya razed (in the last case with the active complicity of France's Sarkozy). For this same motive there was interference, now documented, in the Brazilian crisis because the exploitation of the pre-salt oil fields was in the hands of the Brazilian people. For this same reason Iran returned to being in danger. Likewise, the Bolivarian Revolution has to fall without having the opportunity to democratically correct its grave errors its leaders committed in recent years.

Without foreign intervention, I am sure that Venezuela would find a nonviolent and democratic solution. Unfortunately, what is underway is using all available means to set the poor against Chavismo, the social base of the Bolivarian Revolution and those which most benefit from it. And, in concomitance, provoke a rupture between the armed forces and as consequent military coup to depose Maduro. Europe's foreign policy (if one can speak about such) could constitute a moderating force if, in the meantime, it had not lost its soul.

[Telesur](#)

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