

Endorse or disavow Maduro on Jan-10, the future of Venezuela

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Two months have passed since Nicolas Maduro implemented his economic plan based on the monetary reconversion (eliminating five zeros off the bolívar fuerte), the monetary anchoring to the petro (accounting unit and public debt) and the increase in gas prices (without setting an actual price), among others.

Maduro's intention with these measures – the red economic package as it is called - was to control hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicines, while recovering economic growth in Venezuela.

After 60 days of the red economic package, prices of goods and services have skyrocketed, shortages have increased and recession has worsened. Hence, the effects of the red package have been the worsening of macroeconomic imbalances and, consequently, the destabilization of the economy, generating a devastating impact on the majority of Venezuelans.

The fundamental cause of the current Venezuelan economic crisis is the country's political leadership. It is tied to the legacy of Hugo Chávez, to the Plan de la Patria, a plan that in Maduro's presidential term (2013-2019) has generated economic contractions for the last sixty months, reaching levels of gross domestic product similar to those of 1955.

Consequently, the October 12 announcement made by Maduro, in which he said he will appeal to the Constituent National Assembly to present the Plan of the Nation 2019-2025, "to be approved as a constitutional law in force and mandatory compliance of the nation", allows the assumption to be made that Venezuela will continue to experience a critical social and economic situation in the coming years.

In addition, the approval of the Plan de la Patria (Plan of the Homeland) 2019-2025 by the ANC seeks to legitimize Maduro as president of Venezuela for the 2019-2025 term, in the same way as the Supreme Court of Justice did with the principle of "administrative continuity" after Chávez's death.

This way of handling the political stability of Maduro – the "we will cross that bridge when we get there" way- has allowed his Cuban supporters to advance in the consolidation of him as the strong man of the regime. Not only has the fragmentation of the opposition forces been achieved, but it has also purged Chavismo leaders, mainly from the 4F movement.

On January 10, 2019, the expiration date of the 2013-2019 presidential term, a new bridge will have to be crossed. The PSUV, Havana, Beijing and the Kremlin all know that holding the Executive power is an uphill battle. He does not have the legitimacy of origin necessary to execute the office of President of Venezuela.

The May 20 presidential election was not recognized as valid by the main opposition candidate, Henri Falcón, nor by the great majority of democratic countries around the world. Of the 76 countries with full and imperfect democracy in 2018, according to The Economist's Democracy Index, 54 disavowed the last presidential election in Venezuela. The countries that recognized it are authoritarian and hybrid regimes.

To pass the bridge of illegitimacy, Maduro and Havana will fall back to the magical weapon they have used so far: a dialogue. On this occasion, due to the humanitarian crisis that impacts the region as a consequence of the Venezuelan exodus, the spokespersons for the dialogue will be the president of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the United States Senate, the president of the Spanish government, and behind the scenes Pope Francis and the former Spanish President Rodríguez Zapatero. The speakers for the internal opposition (locked inside the country) who have adapted to the oppressor-oppressed dynamics within the Venezuelan crisis are political figures without majority support from political parties. In the United States, they represent a fraction within the State Department and Congress aligned with the political solution of a soft landing.

This scenario, "business as usual" or "more of the same", will consolidate the Mafia-like state, as William Brownfield recently defined the Maduro regime. The exodus of Venezuelans will continue to impact South American countries, reaching alarming levels due to the impact on public services and welfare provided in these countries. Also, Venezuela will consolidate its position as the beachhead for jihadism and terrorist groups like the Colombian guerrillas. The Maduro regime will be a threat to security in the region.

The other scenario, "accelerating the collapse", involves choking the Maduro regime by cutting its income from crude exports, and imports of refined petroleum products coming from the United States.

The National Assembly, the Supreme Court of Justice in exile and Attorney General Luisa Ortega Diaz would form a government abroad that would be recognized by the 50 countries that disavowed the May 20 presidential election as the legitimate government of Venezuela.

The National Assembly moves its headquarters to the border city of Cúcuta, Colombia. The Law on Humanitarian Aid, Reconstruction and Rule of Law of the United States authorizes the political and financial mechanisms for Maduro's exit. At the same time, the Venezuelan Parliament, with the OAS working group for the migration of Venezuelans, recollects information to support the R2P doctrine that the State has with its nationals, with the objective of building consensus for a UN-sponsored humanitarian aid.

The actors in this scenario are: the opposition abroad, the Secretary-General of the OAS, the UN Security Council, senators of the Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate, the presidents of the United States, Colombia, Chile, France, the Prime Minister of Canada, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, and political leaders and social leaders in Venezuela.

The critical factor for success in the “more of the same” scenario is the regime's commitment to engage in dialogue, freeing political prisoners and approving constitutional reform. While in the scenario of “accelerating the collapse”, the critical factor of success is the positioning of a leader with the capacity to bring together most of the opposition factors both abroad and within Venezuela.

Therefore, the political, social and economic future of Venezuela will be decided by the endorsement or the disavowment of the Maduro regime.