

Maduro's psychological operation: The case of Rocío San Miguel

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"It's always darkest before the dawn." - goes the Irish saying

Illuminating the recent forced disappearance of human rights lawyer and activist Rocío San Miguel, president of Control Ciudadano. This event marks another instance of coercion by Nicolás Maduro's regime against opposition leaders and credible figures who have dared to criticize the government following the October 22 primary. Her arrest at Maiquetía International Airport last Friday, accused of being linked to the "White Bracelet" operation—one of the supposed five plots to overthrow the president, which he disclosed in his annual report—is yet another psychological tactic aimed at instilling fear among the Venezuelan populace.

With the arrest of Control Ciudadano's president, Maduro's regime aims to silence both civilian and military voices critical of the situation in Venezuela, especially those denouncing human rights violations. Maduro, with a mere 8% popularity according to the latest Meganálisis poll, seems determined to eliminate any threat to his power, mirroring Daniel Ortega's actions in Nicaragua, who did not hesitate to jail and exile political opponents, Catholic leaders, and students perceived as threats to his reelection.

The steadfastness of opposition leader María Corina Machado, refusing to betray the mandate she received from the primary, either by naming a successor or going into exile, has frustrated Maduro. The tactics that allowed him to remain in power in 2014 and 2019 are no longer yielding expected results. In this context, Maduro tries to divert attention from criticism of his rule by raising issues like the territorial dispute with Guyana and attacking civil society.

The use of the Esequibo dispute, involving Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino, aims to distract from the presidential election theft. San Miguel's detention fits into this script. Recent reports from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), based on satellite imagery, have revealed suspicious military movements near the Guyana border, suggesting preparations for a possible military escalation. At the end of 2023 and in January, Maduro moved armored vehicles and light tanks to Anacoco Island on the Cuyuní River, with construction works indicating military base expansion.

The arrest of Control Ciudadano's president highlights the regime's authoritarian tendency to act outside the law, with evident irregularities in the arrest process, from unclear arrest orders to a lack of information about her whereabouts and legal proceedings.

This case, along with recent AP news agency work, forces Maduro to drop the facade concerning his interest in a fair, free, and competitive presidential election. The DEA's undercover "Money Badger" operation on drug trafficking in 2018 involving the regime, as well as testimonies from Cliver Alcalá and El Pollo Carvajal in New York trials, have Maduro and his cronies cornered, knowing there will be consequences once they are out of power.

The frustration caused by Rocío San Miguel's arrest must be channeled to continue fighting against Maduro's dictatorship. Witnessing innocent voices, mostly women, stripped of their human rights is harrowing. San Miguel's story and the impact on her family, including the forced disappearance of her daughter, brothers, and ex-husband, highlight the human cost of the struggle for democracy in Venezuela.

Another goal is to shatter the morale and resolve of María Corina to defend the popular mandate until the end.

Facing this psychological operation with wisdom and courage is crucial. The Venezuelan people's desire for freedom (80%) is a testament to their resilience against dictatorship fear. Let us always remember that it is darkest just before dawn.

In summary, the ordeal Rocío San Miguel faces is not an isolated act of repression but part of a strategy to silence opposition and perpetuate authoritarian control in Venezuela. This event underscores the use of the judicial system as a political tool against regime challengers, highlighting a deep crisis of human rights and fundamental freedoms. By attempting to intimidate the population and opposition figures like San Miguel and María Corina, Maduro exposes his vulnerability due to a lack of popular support. The manipulation of territorial conflicts and border militarization serves as a distraction from internal failures and an effort to legitimize oppression under national defense pretenses.

Resistance, both within and outside Venezuela, and continuous denouncement of these human rights violations are essential to counter the normalization of repression and advocate for a return to democratic practices and respect for fundamental freedoms. The fight for democracy in Venezuela is not only a political challenge but also a battle to redefine what society deems acceptable and just.

The Venezuelan people's determination to confront this psychological ploy and their longing for freedom shine as a beacon of hope. Despite the prevailing darkness, Venezuela's history and the resilience of its people suggest that the dawn of democracy and justice is on the horizon. The battle against Maduro's dictatorship is arduous, and the path to freedom is fraught with challenges, but the hope and courage of those committed to the democratic cause are stronger than the fear instilled by the dictatorship. The night is indeed darkest just before dawn.