

Venezuela's imminent shift: power and unrest

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"Cursed be the soldier who points his weapon at the people." – Simón Bolívar

Venezuela is currently at a critical point in its history, where the role of security forces is pivotal in either upholding or undermining democracy. María Corina Machado and Edmundo González Urrutia have appealed to the military and police to stand with the people, condemning what they see as an electoral self-coup by the regime of Nicolás Maduro. This appeal holds significant importance in breaking down the backbone of the regime: the military leadership.

The impact of this message was evident when the Minister of Defense, along with the commanders of the Strategic Defense Regions (REDI) from all regions of the country, publicly declared their loyalty to Maduro, who claims to have been elected president for the term of 2025-2031.

The Unitary Democratic Platform has presented evidence of fraud in the July 28 presidential elections, where González Urrutia supposedly won by a large margin. However, the regime disregarded the result, and the National Electoral Council declared Nicolás Maduro the winner with figures that cannot be verified. This massive electoral fraud, which is supported by 81% of the records published online (www.resultadosconvzla.com), once again highlights a legitimacy crisis at the inception of Maduro's presidency. This crisis violates constitutional principles such as popular sovereignty and has involved brutal repression to maintain power. The Bolivarian security forces, including the armed forces, national police, militia, and armed groups, have been crucial in quelling protests, harassing the opposition, and currently, upholding the dictatorship.

The Maduro regime's dependence on these security forces is not coincidental. As protests intensified, the military leadership held a press conference where they publicly declared their support for Maduro, who they see as the legitimate president since 2019. Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López stated, "We are witnessing a coup orchestrated once again by these fascist elements of the extreme right".

Since the era of Hugo Chávez (1998-2013), a security apparatus has been established, which includes a complex network of military, police, and intelligence structures that oversee each other. This network has complicated any efforts of civil-military disobedience by creating an environment of constant control and surveillance. State terrorism, which has criminalized

civilians, particularly those associated with democratic forces, has become a strategy to suppress democratic forces and instill fear in the population.

The most significant threat to Maduro's regime does not stem from nonviolent activists but from the "men with weapons". In his recent book "How Tyrants Fall", political scientist Marcel Dirsus draws on historical data to state that the downfall of dictators between 1950 and 2012 was caused in 67% of cases by their inner circle and not by popular uprisings. To evade this fate, Venezuela—first under Chávez and now under Maduro—has solidified a network of loyalties, bolstered by lucrative positions given to the military leadership, even at lower levels, thereby solidifying a survival pact between the government and the military sector. Currently, 14 of Maduro's 33 ministers are active or retired military personnel, as reported by the NGO Control Ciudadano.

María Corina and González Urrutia have stressed that Venezuelans are not enemies of the Armed Forces and have urged the military not to suppress the people in their nonviolent struggle. On the contrary, they urge the armed forces to disregard illegal orders and respect the popular sovereignty expressed at the polls. This appeal includes promises of protection for those who fulfill their constitutional duty, asserting that there will be no impunity for those who commit human rights violations. This message is aimed at encouraging military disobedience, fulfilling the constitutional mandate to defend sovereignty and protect the people.

It is more relevant than ever to remember the words of the father of the nation: "Cursed be the soldier who points his weapon at the people". The fulfillment of the Constitution and the refusal of security forces to suppress the people spurred a massive mobilization for national liberation, as "when tyranny becomes law, resistance is a right".

The electoral situation in Venezuela reflects the systematic manipulation of the process by the ruling state. The Supreme Court of Justice has favored Maduro by accepting his electoral appeal and preventing audits by the National Electoral Council. The Supreme Court does not have the authority to "certify" the election. This strategic move would allow the regime to buy time to reorganize, correct flaws, and strengthen its control over the electoral apparatus. Furthermore, the presence of generals Vladimir Padrino López and Domingo Hernández Lares, commander of the Operational Strategic Command (CEO), at the filing of the appeal before the Supreme Court underscores the militarization of politics, undermining democratic principles.

The resistance of the regime's top figures, including Nicolás Maduro, Jorge Rodríguez, Cilia Flores, Vladimir Padrino López, and Diosdado Cabello, to acknowledge the victory of Edmundo González demonstrates their denial of the democratic process and perpetuates an ongoing crisis in Venezuela.

To support a democratic transition, it is important to find ways to reduce associated costs. One potential strategy is to negotiate exit conditions that provide assurances to the “Band of Five”, such as immunity or a certain level of conditions. These negotiations could be crucial in easing the transition toward a peaceful and organized process. Furthermore, it is essential to encourage disagreement within the existing power structures, particularly among the security and military forces. Fragmentation of these institutions can undermine the regime’s ability to enforce repression, thus creating opportunities for democratic changes.

In conclusion, Venezuela is at a critical juncture where the actions of security forces will play a crucial role. The country needs a strong commitment to democratic values and a clear move away from the authoritarian structures that have propped up Maduro’s leadership. Although the “Band of Five” may seem strong, their stability is fragile. While they have the power of weapons, they are fallible humans who can make mistakes, especially within systems that restrict access to accurate information. For democratic forces, the challenge is to support the courageous citizens fighting against oppression and utilize all available means to undermine the regime. History has proven that dictatorships can and will be overthrown despite their appearance of invincibility.

The international community and democratic forces must continue pressing for a peaceful transition, emphasizing justice and respect for human rights, to prevent the nation from sinking further into repression and authoritarianism.