

PEACE AND SECURITY

VENEZUELA

Towards a peaceful political solution

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This paper is a response to the high degree of apprehension felt at this critical point in the development of the Venezuelan crisis and the risks represented by a growing polarisation between political groupings in the country in view of the domestic, regional, and international ramifications.



The proposals in this paper should be understood as an initiative seeking to add to the efforts directed at reversing the escalation in tensions and contributing to a peaceful political solution to the crisis.



Our objective is to show a path to encouraging open contact between the government and the opposition in Venezuela, concentrating primarily not on what would be desirable, but on what is possible.

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INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared against the backdrop of widespread concern about the critical situation Venezuela is facing and the risks represented by the increasing polarisation of the country's political forces with regard to the internal, regional and international ramifications of this development. In view of this situation, the idea of taking international action has arisen – action which, either on a unilateral or multilateral basis, could exacerbate the process of institutional destabilisation and lead to a general collapse of the country. Our proposal should be understood as an initiative that is seeking to complement the efforts directed towards reversing this escalation and contributing to a peaceful political solution in Venezuela.

The aim of this proposal is to help in the process of resuscitating a political process based on the need for a space for dialogue and the search for innovative dynamics which would favour peaceful management of the (thus far, political) conflict between the Venezuelan government and opposition forces in the country.

This text also aims to lay out a path which would serve to promote open contact between the government and opposition in Venezuela with a view to helping to avoid an outcome that, being neither peaceful nor political, can only render the crisis more acute and spread it across the region. In this context, we consider a definition of the conflict based on perceptions, readings, and narratives, and present alternatives which would discourage polarisation and generate debate based on a peaceful path towards, hopefully, the desired platform.

We have sought to produce a text which is more analytical and interpretative than it is normative. We do not claim to state what is desirable, but rather what could be achieved. We also present some evaluations conducive to the core objective of a peaceful political solution of Venezuela's profound crisis. With this goal in mind, it is essential to identify, precisely and even-handedly, the principle internal actors (in Venezuela) and external actors (both in and beyond the region), their political profiles, their specific proposals, and their explicit actions. This means that we need to identify those actors who choose, and act within, a logic of negotiation and those who operate in favour of a logic of confrontation.

Finally, it is worth adding that this analysis has taken other international experiences into account – from the past (for example, Central America), as well as more recent developments (for example, Libya) and those that are still ongoing (for example, Syria) – which help to illustrate the possible paths that could be taken in the case of Venezuela and those that should be avoided. It is essential to view the case through a historical and comparative prism in order to highlight the weight and complexity that external factors have acquired, especially the context of a defined multipolar order, in the development of the Venezuelan crisis. Increasing tensions between international powers have affected the process by which the space for internal negotiation in Venezuela has

been reduced, giving rise to an approach to the region without precedent in the post-Cold War world. If this is maintained, a hall of mirrors could be established giving strategic importance to Venezuela – and carrying considerable risks for the whole of Latin America. The comparative approach has been equally important in identifying potential scenarios in the short and medium term, bearing in mind that consequences will be derived from them both for Venezuela's political future and the conditions for its economic and social recovery.

This complexity points to the need to use new conceptual elements to analyse a situation that appears different from the Cold War. The three most important elements to be reviewed are: firstly, the need to recognise that, in the international sphere, the State shares decision making with multilateral, transnational, media and social actors (both individuals and collectives); secondly, the need to construct a broad agenda of issues that are interrelated in complex ways; and, thirdly, what is referred to in scholarly writings as the "inter-mestic", that is, how external factors interrelate with internal factors. Taking this into account, we provide a more heterodox view in this study of the Venezuelan political process.

In addition to this introduction, the text is divided into eight sections in which the situation in 2019 is described and the reactions and actions of various countries in the region are analysed, showing their different nuances; following this, we analyse the significance of the United States as the principal non-regional actor and the diversity and fragmentation of other international actors influencing the development of the Venezuelan conflict; we also include an interpretation of the internal situation in Venezuela as a "catastrophic stalemate" and offer a view of this situation based on some of the principles which guide the international system in the twenty-first century, such as the duty to protect, solidarity-based humanitarianism, and the principle of non-indifference; in conclusion, we propose a classification with various possible scenarios for the future outcome of the situation in Venezuela and make some final recommendations.

A PORTRAIT OF VENEZUELAN REALITY

With the election of Hugo Chávez in 1999, the political situation in Venezuela took a historic turn. From this moment, a debate was initiated between those who supported the proposals that brought Chavismo to power, seen by its supporters and sympathisers as a revolution which had caused a break with the past and a change of the elites, and had displaced a multiparty democracy based on political pacts. To its opponents, however, the experience of Chavismo is nothing more than a case of militaristic populism that has oscillated between democratic compromise and authoritarian inclinations.

Although Hugo Chávez maintained the leadership of this domestic and international process until his death in 2013, the historical development of this political process was not linear, undergoing a significant mutation between 1999 and 2013,

during which indications of sectarianism, electoral manipulation and ideological polarisation were observed. The project encountered major obstacles created by an opposition which competed with it in the electoral sphere, but refused on some occasions to take part in elections, supported the oil strike in 2003, promoted a military solution (the attempted putsch of 2002, known as “El Carmonazo”), and organised a series of street demonstrations both in 2014 and 2017. It must be emphasised that the opposition is not homogeneous: it has been fragmented; various leaders have followed one another; and within it, majority positions – favouring a rapid change of the country’s political leadership regardless of how this is achieved – coexist with minority positions more favourable to dialogue and negotiation. Such heterogeneity certainly also applies to the government, but the very situation and the high price of explicit dissidence prevent it from becoming visible.

From 2006, unyielding official positions, the first emerging signs of an economy coming to halt due to overreliance on the oil industry and the state sector, and the negative effects of Chávez’ personality cult, caused many governments and other international actors to doubt the effectiveness and efficiency of this political model known as “socialism for the twenty-first century”. Nevertheless, the government enjoyed wide popular support at that time, not only due to the improvements it achieved through its economic and organisational support for multiple social and economic initiatives (“missions”), but also through the political inclusion of broad sectors which, until then, had been excluded from all governmental decision-making processes; many citizens were empowered, while at the same time, the death of Hugo Chávez gave rise to a myth surrounding his person among a significant part of Venezuela’s poorer demographics.

Yet all this came accompanied by criticisms of human rights violations in the country, and by constant warnings that the economy was beginning to display negative signals in terms of foreign trade, growth, inflation, shortages, and the devaluation of the national currency, the Bolívar.

From 2012 on, these warning signs became increasingly visible, but it was only in 2018 that, for a series of reasons, such an extreme situation – the harbinger of what we are witnessing today – was reached. The refusal by Maduro’s first government of the petition for conducting a recall referendum, and the convoking of presidential elections in the same year, 2018, outside the constitutional time limit, are what sparked the general crisis that Venezuela is now suffering. Those elections opened the floodgates to what we can now see as the most significant set-back experienced by the regime since 1999. In the political sphere, the majority of the opposition refused to take part in these elections while obtaining the support of a significant part of the international community, transforming the ballot into a global boycott in which over 60 governments, multilateral organisations like the OAS, and non-governmental groups and organisations decided to refuse to recognise the results, and therefore victory of the winning candidate, Nicolás Maduro, who was re-elected for the period 2019-2025.

In addition to this electoral factor, the growing Venezuelan diaspora is an issue, as is the critical situation the country is suffering with regard to the economy, social matters, and health; then there is the growing de-institutionalisation of public life, as well as Venezuela’s oil crisis in view of the fall in both prices per barrel and the country’s production; taken together with the crisis in public services and the food shortage, this crisis makes for a thoroughly negative scenario when it comes to characterising the regime.

The issue of the duality of power is the most significant topic in the political debate on the Venezuelan crisis. While it is true that, since Maduro’s government controls a majority of the institutions and has the support of the armed forces and a significant number of countries, this duality is not symmetrical, Juan Guaidó, who was proclaimed president by the National Assembly (of which he is the president) has nevertheless been recognised, as of 1st May 2019, by over 60 governments (albeit less than a third of the total of 193 countries that are members of the United Nations), multilateral organisations and various domestic and international public and private institutions. As long as this duality and this lack of mutual recognition persist, it will be very difficult to encourage a process of negotiation between the parties with the goal of achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict in Venezuela.

The responsibility both these groups, i.e. government and opposition, bear for Venezuela’s current situation must be emphasised; and it is possible to discern a continuing game of ‘pass the buck’ between the two as the default setting in the future unless there is, at the least, a process of mutual recognition. The lack of a space for dialogue, negotiation, and agreement between the government and the opposition in Venezuela is the result of exclusionary behaviour on the part of all the actors who, in the years since 1999, have only managed to reach agreements on the course of the country’s political process on a select few occasions. In fact, a mutual lack of confidence, of bridges, and above all, of a firm commitment to develop a common agenda has prevailed. Since January of this year, these negative conditions have been exacerbated as never before, giving rise to the train-wreck we see today. Only a turn away from these positions towards a rapprochement between the actors involved might be able to provide the opportunity for negotiation.

The description as a “fireball” has caused the case of Venezuela to be categorised in accordance with negative stereotypes which dominate in circles of strategic thought and decision-making in the USA: there is a widespread view of Venezuela as a “narcostate” or an “outlaw” which legitimises a roll-back or regime change. On the other hand, various European and Latin American countries have, with the aim of preventing a violent outcome and generating a peaceful solution to the crisis, also proposed positive concepts such as conflict resolution, mediation, conciliation, negotiation, and international support, among others.

At the current time, in the field of ideas we can observe three opposing and competing narratives: one proclaims that the

moment has come for profound political change in Venezuela, encouraging the transfer of power from one government to another during a transition period and putting an end to the duality of power; a second narrative maintained by the regime alleges that the opposition and its external allies are committing an act of interference in the internal affairs of the country, and that, for this reason, a re-run of the presidential elections will not be accepted; and, finally, a third narrative seeks to promote a space for encounter between the government and opposition with the aim of achieving a peaceful solution to this state of affairs.

An analysis of Venezuela's present-day reality cannot sidestep the issue of the armed forces. According to the IISS, Venezuela today has between 130,000 and 150,000 professional soldiers and a militia of one million as part of its strategy of a "people's war", occupying 46th place in the world ranking of defensive strength; in 2018, Venezuela had a military budget of 4 billion dollars.

Studies on democratic transitions suggest that it is crucial to situate the armed forces adequately in the current and future political context. In this regard, two complementary questions must be asked, namely: does the space exist for an orderly transition or for some other type of transition? And: faced by one or other of these alternatives, will the armed forces exercise some degree of tutelage over political power? The quality of Venezuelan democracy in the next decade will depend to a large degree on how these questions are resolved in the mid-term.

After so many years and following various military crises – of which the short-lived civil-military *coup d'état* against Hugo Chávez in 2002 was the most dramatic – the Venezuelan armed forces have reiterated their support for the Bolivarian revolution, the what is referred to as the civil-military union has been strengthened as its members have only followed to a very limited extent the calls of the opposition, and various foreign governments supporting Juan Guaidó, to repudiate Nicolás Maduro (the latest attempt was the recent call of 30th April).

In this situation, it has been favourable for military support for the regime that there is a system for distributing economic resources, secured by formal and informal mechanisms, and specific political links have transformed the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB) into an organic component of the Chavist project and its allies; indeed, the armed forces form an integral part of the movement to the extent that the project itself would disappear without their support.

POLITICAL NUANCES IN REGIONAL REACTIONS AND ACTIONS

The present crisis in Venezuela is embedded in a regional and international context. One possible way of approaching the role of the region in the development of the crisis in Venezuela is by way of analysing regional initiatives. In general, the main effect of these initiatives has been the distancing of

the region from its accomplishments since the middle of the twentieth century which made it into a zone of peace and democratic stability. Broadly speaking, until 2017, the Union of South American Nations (USAN; *Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*, UNASUR) attempted to provide assistance in overcoming the successive impasses between the opposition and the government, but without questioning the position of Maduro. This was, to a certain extent, in tune with the approach taken by the Obama administration: the aim was to bring about an opening of the regime and to do so without directly confronting Caracas and having only limited contact with the internal opposition. From 2017 onwards, the Lima Group – whose creation was, de facto, intended as a reaction to the anticipated collapse of USAN – oriented its actions towards greater harmony with the Trump administration: the aim now was to isolate, encircle, and denounce the Maduro regime. Throughout this entire period, covering the Obama and Trump administrations, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América, ALBA) maintained a low profile with respect to its mentor, with neither Nicaragua, Bolivia, nor Cuba seeking to coordinate politically so as to jointly influence Caracas; this reflected the fact that Venezuela continued to hold ALBA's "strong suit" thanks to its oil reserves and its policies in the Caribbean basin. At the present time, Washington identifies Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua as the "troika of tyranny", and it does not appear that the governments in question are able to provide each other with mutual assistance or to widen their support in the current ideological climate prevailing in Latin America.

In its latest declaration, the Lima Group speaks of the "negative impact" of certain countries on Venezuela, explicitly mentioning Russia and China, among others, and suggests, from the viewpoint of those supporting Guaidó, that the "intervenor" is not Washington but Moscow – which could open a Pandora's box of criticism, denunciations, and actions in future as a reaction to an alleged extra-continental "intervention".

In various recent presidential elections and those to come in the Southern Cone, the crisis in Venezuela has been referenced in the preceding campaigns. By the same measure, to some extent, the "neoliberal reflux" after a decade of the so-called "pink wave", has meant that the issue of Venezuela has crossed over from the electoral dimension and has become an insistent and pertinent issue in the domestic policy of American countries. A case in point in this regard is Argentina: even after the electoral victory of Cambiemos in 2015 and in the run-up to the presidential election of 2019, the government of Mauricio Macri has missed no opportunity to raise the spectre of Venezuela as a disastrous potential scenario which was averted four years ago, and as a possible disastrous scenario that could unfold if the opposition in Argentina were to triumph now. Furthermore, Macri recently referred to Venezuela in an unusually disrespectful way for an Argentine leader when he stated that the policies of his government must be maintained, reminding his audience that "to fail is Venezuela".

At this point, it is essential to point out that the question of Venezuela is not only an issue in the country's own internal politics and a topic linked to the management of relations with Beijing and Washington, but is also a social issue to the extent that a growing – and wholly unprecedented – number of Venezuelans has been arriving in Southern Cone countries. Although these states have a tradition of receiving large numbers of immigrants, they find themselves facing severe economic and social difficulties with increasing unemployment, the persistent focus on the primary sector in production and exports, the rise of organised crime, the increase in social polarisation, and incipient outbreaks of xenophobia. Thus, countries of the extreme Southern Cone which historically do not have major interests at stake in Venezuela – i.e. countries which are close, but not immediate, neighbours, with very limited investments of recent origin, trade that is limited and conditioned by the deterioration of the Venezuelan economy, very limited military connections, few scientific contacts, etc. – nowadays have societies which, in different ways and through various mechanisms, will be affected by Venezuela's future.

The actions of the region in view of the Venezuelan crisis have led to decisions and positions without historical precedent. There is, in this case, little innovative about the activism of some Latin American countries; on the contrary, it indicates the lack of a truly regional capacity. The new wave of Pan-Americanism has swallowed the possibility of an autonomous regional initiative, and for this reason the emphasis is on finding positions which do not promote autonomous initiatives in the face of Washington's unilateralism. The reactivation of inter-American linkages, based on organisations such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), has strengthened this movement.

Three countries complement each other as direct assistants of the United States in its policy of isolating the current Venezuelan government: Colombia, Chile, and Brazil. All three have governments which recently took office with foreign policies stressing alignment with the United States as an essential pillar. Only in the case of Chile, however, is there any indication that this approach is an option with broad support from the civilian and military leadership. In addition, Chile has been pressured by Washington to distance itself from Beijing (China represents 30% of Chile's international trade and is Santiago's main partner), which has led the government of Sebastián Piñera to raise its profile and to criticise the Maduro regime. Thus, Venezuela has become something of a "trading card" for Chilean diplomacy.

Colombia represents a unique model of hegemony in South America, with all the contradictions arising from the temporary predominance of differing sections of the elite, with its combination of coercive resources and consensual mechanisms, and without a clear distinction between the Cold War and the post-Cold War in terms of its close association with the United States. In Colombia, the issue of the military, linked with the struggle against insurgency and combatting the production and trade of illegal narcotics, has been an

enduring feature. There is a peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) which the present government of Colombia is reluctantly fulfilling in a piecemeal fashion. Colombia has been a key protagonist in the Lima Group, and, together with Chile, a driving force behind the Forum for the Progress and Development of South America (*Foro para el Progreso y Desarrollo de América del Sur*, PROSUR) as part of the induced collapse of USAN. Its leaders have been vehement in their criticism of the Maduro regime and have even been tempted – for now, it is no more than that – to join a more aggressive strategy towards Venezuela on the part of Washington.

It should be added that, at this juncture, Colombia's significance to the United States has risen notably since Washington defined a so-called "axis of tyranny" consisting of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, and the only Latin American country which also has tense relations with these three nations is Colombia. Following the collapse of the talks between the Colombian government and the Army of National Liberation (ELN), which were held in Havana, friction has developed with Cuba – a country with which Colombia otherwise maintained very good relations due to Cuba's role in the negotiations with the FARC; a bomb attack in Bogotá brought an end to the negotiations with the ELN, and Bogotá has demanded the extradition of the ELN members taking part; Havana has stated that there is a protocol for breaking off negotiations that must be followed. The government of Iván Duque has heightened its criticism of Cuba to an unusual degree. Moreover, tensions with Venezuela began when President Chávez took power and increased considerably following the failed *coup d'état* in Venezuela in 2002. Finally, Colombia maintains a historic dispute with Nicaragua on maritime boundaries; this led to a decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in favour of Nicaragua, and another judgment of the ICJ is pending that may exacerbate the already poor relations between Colombia and Nicaragua.

At the same time, it must be noted that Colombia has played an active role in support of the Pacific Alliance, but that, since the government of Andrés López Obrador took office in Mexico, it has withdrawn somewhat and strengthened its ties with another rightist government in the region, that of Sebastián Piñera in Chile. If Bogotá has, historically speaking, looked north – expressed in the Colombian dictum *respice polum* – and had close relations with the United States, it is now embracing Washington with greater ideological conviction and pragmatic motivation, hoping that the outcome in Venezuela will favour Colombia's geopolitical objectives.

At the same time, it is important to note that non-state actors in Colombia maintain a complex set of relations with the neighbouring country. The dissident groups of the FARC, the regrouping of the ELN, the reach of paramilitary forces which were never truly dismantled, the illegal drugs business, and the surge in organised crime – in some cases using Venezuela as a sanctuary for armed groups, in others, as a platform for expanding illicit activities – mean that non-governmental actors on both sides of the border with Venezuela have a bearing on bilateral politics and diplomacy.

In Brazil, the approach to Venezuela is linked to a traditional practice of manipulating political mirages using polarised realities in neighbouring countries to sustain and emphasise differences in internal processes of ideological confrontation. Since the early years of the Dilma Rousseff government, relations with Venezuela were a target of anti-Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT) attacks by groups ranging across the political spectrum, from the centre to the extreme right wing. The determination among the ranks of the PT to maintain a loyalty to Chavismo that persists even today has come to be a sensitive issue in internal considerations seeking a redrawing of forces to confront institutional anomalies and the electoral victories of the right. At the same time, the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro in 2019 signified an immediate commitment on the part of Brazil to regional initiatives such as the Lima Group which promote the destabilisation of the Venezuelan regime. Immediate contacts with opposition forces in Venezuela were important in strengthening the Guaidó option, both internally and regionally. Nevertheless, presidential diplomacy, shared by Brazil's foreign minister and nourished by enthusiastic ideological similarities with Trumpism rather than by pragmatic considerations, has come up against barriers that were quickly raised by the military, with vice president Hamilton Mourão playing a particular role. Apart from the primacy of the doctrine of non-intervention, border issues – we refer especially to the state of Roraima's dependence on energy and the constant flow of Venezuelan migrants – have dictated a prudent approach.

The regional context briefly sketched out above helps to understand the favourable conditions on which Washington can count to construct a basis for regional support for its policy of weakening the Maduro government. Following its own tradition, the United States seeks to keep bilateral channels open in order to feed the expectations of those countries that support it. The other side of the coin in this dynamic is collective action with a low level of autonomy and a tendency towards a dispersal of the capacity to take initiatives, even when the tone can be described as strident – as has been demonstrated in meetings of the Lima Group and the creation of PROSUR. In fact, the initiatives for regional political coordination in face of the Venezuelan crisis reject the history of Latin American regionalism and ignore the principles that have given it an identity of its own in the recent past. The aim is to give fresh impetus to the concept of an inter-American collective, with Canada gaining an unprecedented political role.

Alongside the positions and initiatives briefly sketched out above, some countries in the region are seeking to promote a negotiated and peaceful solution to the crisis in Venezuela. Notable in this regard are the roles played by Mexico and Uruguay in the current situation. Both are removed from the dichotomy Guaidó-Maduro, and neither country positions itself as an ally of the United States, nor has either thrown their weight behind the extra-continental support to Venezuela from Russia and China. In the case of Mexico, the president, Andrés López Obrador, has expressly stated his opposition to foreign military intervention, in accordance with the principle of non-intervention constitutionally mandated in Mexico. His foreign minister, Marcelo Ebrard, together with

his colleague in Uruguay, Rodolfo Nin Novoa, and representatives of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) proposed the "Montevideo mechanism" as a form of facilitating dialogue and negotiation in Venezuela. To this must be added the position of the president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, in favour of joining forces with various European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) and with the European Union as a whole to seek political solutions through exercising the joint presidency of the International Contact Group on Venezuela together with the Italian political scientist, Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The possibility of making progress in a peacekeeping dialogue with international mediation could, and perhaps even should, involve the constructive presence of Cuba. The Cuban government has been extremely cautious with regard to putting itself forward as a facilitator of such dialogue, perhaps so as not to compromise its loyalty to the Chavista government and in view of its defence of the principle of non-intervention. However, participation in the search for a discreet diplomatic arrangement respecting Venezuelan sovereignty would be consistent with this posture and with Cuba's historic approach to other conflicts. Some might object to Cuba's presence as a trusted broker, given its close relations with the Chavista regime, but three arguments counter this "pre-judgment". The first is of a historic nature: although it was allied with the FSLN, the FMLN, and Guatemalan guerrilla organisations during the Central American wars, Cuba operated as a moderating factor on these forces, and although it did not participate in the negotiation mechanisms (Esquipulas, Contadora) due to a veto from the United States, it continued to cooperate in the search for a negotiated solution through its close relations with the government of Mexico. Secondly, and with a similar logic, although the Cuban government was historically an ally of the FARC and the ELN in the Colombian negotiations, this relationship did not hamper, but rather facilitated the search for peace and showed Cuba to be a key factor in the negotiations leading to the Peace Agreement of 2016. Thirdly, Cuba's presence in Venezuela is a reason for it to participate in a round table of international actors such as the one proposed, as this would increase the confidence of the Chavista government in the reconciliation mechanism. In short, Cuba's possible involvement as a regional actor at a stage where progress is being made towards dialogue could be decisive. For this reason, it is fundamental that Cuba's fulfilment of this role in the recent past (the Colombian peace accords) be recognised internationally (beginning with the United Nations), rather than naming this country as part of a domino theory aiming at the elimination of socialist models of government in the region, starting with a possible fall of Maduro in Venezuela.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF THE UNITED STATES

Washington's dissatisfaction and concern regarding Caracas is not new, and during the administration of President Barack Obama, this four key issues were discernible: a) the *leitmotif* of applying focused and personal sanctions could be framed with the goal of "regime opening"; b) sanctions appeared to be more a response to the demands of a Congress in which both houses were controlled by the Republicans rather than the result of a hard-line and high-profile strategy on the part of the executive; c) the inception of a more punitive policy corresponded with what the military, specialised media and experts in U.S. military strategy – especially those linked to the Southern Command – had been pushing for years (for example, the threat of what was called "radical populism" and its possible projection into neighbouring areas, with a special emphasis on Colombia); d) the relative caution of the United States was in part due to the existence in the region of a number of reformist, national-popular governments of the centre-left, which prevented the establishment of a solid anti-Maduro coalition.

When the Trump administration took office, some important changes occurred: a) a definitive decision was taken in favour of regime change; b) the logic of domestic politics provided an impetus for this change from mid-2018 onwards – before the Congressional elections; this logic did not arise simply from greater pressure from the legislature, but also emphasised the importance that certain states of the Union would acquire in the 2020 election (as is the case of Florida); c) the influence of the military and the Southern Command increased, not so much due to the internal nature of the regime but rather in response to the increasing presence of China and Russia in South America and the need to repel the influence of Beijing and Moscow; and d) a change in the goal of sanctions, now augmented by measures with a general effect on the economy, could rely on the support of the new wave of neoliberalism in the region.

This development has led to a shift in the terminology of the main public officials in Washington, who have moved from describing Venezuela as a "failed state" to calling it an "out-law state". This is essentially an attempt to justify the transition from classic coercive diplomacy to a typical bellicose strategy vis-à-vis Venezuela in terms of terrorism and links with Hezbollah and Hamas. Deliberation gives way to obfuscation and the tact of career diplomats is replaced by aggressive partisan zealots, while at the same time, a media campaign aligned with this approach is rolled out.

In other words, the United States is the only external actor with a broad range of options for the use of force in relation to Venezuela. Neither China nor Russia, still less Iran or any linkage between these countries, have at their disposal a punitive arsenal comparable to that of Washington. In addition, the United States has never limited its options to any single instrument, resource, or measure in its coercive or retaliatory behaviour towards a country when it perceives that some vital, strategic, or superior interest of its own is at stake. Ven-

ezuela has clearly been identified as a target which can be used to reassert positions of power in an international context that is shifting on the basis of the dynamics of growing tension. Washington is a player that, when other high rollers appear in a crisis, never loses sight of the long game in which it is prepared to compromise or reach agreement to avoid defeat, save face, reach a higher goal, or achieve a special purpose (among other examples, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 comes to mind). Including Venezuela in this scenario, apart from putting the country into play on the high-stakes table of power politics, exposes the region to tensions unprecedented in the post-Cold War era.

In the case of Venezuela, the United States' use of its punitive arsenal reveals an increasingly hard-line trajectory from 2017 onwards. At the end of 2018, the White House had already decided to link discourse with action, giving rise to a determination to promote regime change; the sustainability of this goal depends on progress and recognition from the international community. In parallel to exerting pressure to bring about the collapse and isolation of the Maduro government, the Trump administration attempted to secure political and interventionist support in the United Nations. The collective recognition of the opposition leader in the next, 74th period of sessions of the Assembly General of the United Nations in September of this year could represent a condition sine qua non in the medium term for generating multilateral involvement in intervention in Venezuela.

Once the first impacts are felt, the use of coercion as a power resource has immediate repercussions on confrontation and its dynamics. If, on the one hand, pressure is applied and punishment meted out, on the other hand, responses based on resistance, resilience, and the widening or deepening of international support networks will be strengthened. In this context, the risks are considerable, as will be discussed in the section of this text looking at various scenarios.

Observing developments since 23rd February of this year, what is clear is that the United States is, for the moment, attempting to avoid a direct military invasion of Venezuela and prefers to take the path of political pressure and economic sanctions on Maduro and his international allies. Punitive actions have begun on a standardised implementation schedule, but rather than being discarded, the option of military action has been kept on the table as a sword of Damocles. At the current time, the government of Donald Trump has the power to determine the course of action taken by external actors who support the Venezuelan opposition, and this commanding role became more visible as soon as the European Union and the Lima Group did not follow Washington's expectations, deciding not to take a harder line on Venezuela and pile on pressure to bring about regime change there. At the same time, this shift strengthened the Southern Command's apprehensive view of the risks posed by radical populism in Latin America, and its doubts about the extent to which existing conservative governments will act with what Southern Command sees as the requisite degree of firmness. In this context, for both the White House and Southern Command, the installation of governments of the right in various

countries in the region makes alliances possible which would permit the construction of a hemispheric anti-Maduro coalition, irrespective of the fact that the scope of action that such a coalition could support is somewhat uncertain: would it opt to impose devastating economic sanctions, the like of which have not been seen in the region for many years? What about deploying troops? There are various and variable misgivings regarding outright military action, whether conducted exclusively by the United States or with South American participation.

The central role of the United States in the Venezuelan crisis makes it an actor with direct influence on all aspects of its development. Peace processes in the recent history of Latin America, preceded by phases of mediation and dialogue with the participation of domestic and international actors (the cases of Central America and Colombia deserve special mention), hold two lessons relevant here. The first is that the United States has occupied a central role in the escalation of the violence, ideological polarisation, and militarisation which have characterised the processes of confrontation in the region. The second lesson is that as soon as the United States decides to change its role and contents itself to be a “back-seat driver”, the conditions are generated for reaching a negotiated solution among the parties to the conflict. Washington’s approval, its determination to keep hold of the baton, are indispensable conditions if other actors and multilateral organisations are to adhere to its objective of forcing regime change in Venezuela.

The United States has stressed the internationalisation of the crisis in Venezuela with the objective of putting various forms of external intervention onto the table. If we look at other international experiences with similarities to this situation, we can identify two lines of argument meant to give legitimacy to this course of action. The first, which has the greater capacity to garner support, is based on a sense of urgency to assist broad sections of the local population in a severe humanitarian disaster. The second, which involves choosing political allies and making agreements, links intervention to regime change. This is an equation whose use is familiar and whose results are questionable; but this does not mean for a moment that it will be ruled out by the Trump administration.

DIVERSITY AND FRAGMENTATION OF INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

A clarification on the distribution of power in the global system is required here. Most approaches to this topic are excessively centred on statehood and on predicting the order to be built, flanked by an uncertain but nevertheless promising view of a global scenario discernible on the horizon. In contrast to such an approach, we suggest that other premises and assumptions should be taken into account. Besides other aspects to be reviewed, these include the fact that we are in an era without a key axis based around an anchor state, but rather a world with various different loci of power and various sources of disorder; hence, it is probable that the principal characteristic of the current global situation is defined

intricacy, mutability, and hybridity. In other words, we are seeing a scenario unfold which is characterised by multiple polarities, both at the state and the non-state level, with various legitimate and illegitimate actors and forces interacting and combining complex and contemporaneous levels of co-operation and conflict in a world showing (contradictory) signs of both fragmentation and integration. In this context, processes of transition do not necessarily lead to a more promising set of circumstances. To paraphrase Jorge Luis Borges, the world is faced by “paths which bifurcate”: it could develop in a progressive direction or, alternatively, it could move onto a regressive trajectory. At the present time, prevailing indications and tendencies point to this second path.

The Venezuelan crisis has had a global impact and is currently a relevant issue on the international agendas of world powers, emerging powers, and even of mid-tier countries, regional and international multilateral organisations, the media and the global networks, all of whom proceed in a pronouncedly reactive way and with a high degree of uncertainty. As such, a diffuse pattern of actions can be discerned which could either deepen the tendency towards confrontation or contribute to breathing new life into the situation. Incidentally, these possibilities do not mean roles which are unchangeable or exclusionary.

With regard to the international dimension, it must be emphasised that this is the occasion on which a regional case has become an affair of “high politics” more clearly than at any other time since the Cuban missile crisis. It should be pointed out that to classify an issue as “high politics” is to imply that the combination of geopolitics and security is of vital importance.

There is no doubt that the Venezuelan crisis is a national crisis to the extent that it has largely been produced by domestic dynamics, factors, and actors. However, it is a matter which has ceased to be local, regional, or continental and has now become a global issue. What are the implications when a specific crisis becomes a global affair? Various issues tend to surface: a) the direct and indirect involvement of multiple state and non-state actors; b) the participation of various agents, both legitimate and illicit, unarmed and armed; c) the display of interests of various kinds, including those of the media; d) the presence of players with global reach, differing preferences, and distinct objectives; e) the competition of various institutions with a wide geographical reach; f) the establishment of complex coalitions and alliances between internal and external protagonists; and g) the difficulty in finding solutions for the main domestic protagonists that are satisfactory, sound, and prompt.

The Maduro government has made no small effort to build a platform of support consisting of countries also villainised by the United States and other Western powers. However, the links with China, Russia, and Iran are not all the same. Russia seeks to achieve a certain influence in the proverbial sphere of influence of the United States and, possibly, to use the case of Venezuela as a bargaining chip with Washington in

some issue that is sensitive for Moscow; it also wants to support Maduro in view of what is perceived as the bankruptcy of “regime change by tweet” and the United States switch to a more aggressive attitude towards Venezuela. For its part, China has specific interests in Venezuela (it must be remembered that Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela amount to 90% of total Chinese investment in Latin America); as such, China seeks to avoid irritating or provoking Washington in Latin America and would be more than ready for a bloodless transition which would guarantee its material and financial assets. By contrast, Iran is an actor of secondary importance lacking the capacity to effectively project power or influence in Venezuela; in this regard, it must also be remembered that many joint projects announced over the years have not been realised.

In summary, Moscow could either contribute to a solution in Venezuela or could sabotage it, while Beijing could play a more balanced, pragmatic, and prudent role. These are not minor differences, and they have become apparent in the three meetings of the UN Security Council held to consider the situation in Venezuela. When China and Russia join forces to exercise their veto against intervention – even when it is declared as humanitarian – the former predicates its position on support for finding peaceful resolution, while the latter favours confrontation in view of punitive or destabilising action on the part of the United States. In this scenario, Teheran does not appear to be a crucially important protagonist, even though the United States designates it as such in order to characterise Venezuela as a threat to its national security.

Other countries such as India, Israel, and even Australia and New Zealand, are equally, or perhaps even more relevant in this scenario: India, for its capacity to refine large quantities of Venezuelan crude oil (a capacity only surpassed by the United States and China), its sensitivity to American pressure, and its ambitions for an autonomous foreign policy both at a regional and global level; Israel, as a kind of service provider to the principal Western power, more of a backstage player than one in the front line of confrontation; the two antipodean countries are clearly concerned by the humanitarian issue and demonstrate significant capacity to cooperate in this regard. In the European sphere, the possibility that Spain could become involved as an actor or facilitator in establishing spaces for negotiation and dialogue should also be highlighted, and the results of the recent elections in Spain provide a basis for such an expectation. It must be emphasised that the results of Spain’s April 2019 elections, as well as the proposal for a new relationship with Latin America announced by Germany’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, could well facilitate a more proactive role for Madrid and Berlin in overcoming by political means the current Venezuelan crisis.

Finally, the European Union and its members must be examined with great attention. Profound causes and structural forces explain the growing disengagement between Europe and Latin America. The immediate post-Cold War world bears little resemblance to the world today: among other aspects, in those years, the triumph of the West was undeniable and globalisation was a synonym for prosperity; neither

of these things can be said of today. The power shift in favour of Asia and the Pacific is accompanied by spirited resistance on the part of the United States and Europe to sharing power and influence with the emerging powers in the South or the heirs of a superpower that has disappeared. Globalisation in its current form is thus seen as the epitome of insecurity and vulnerability for broad sectors of society in the centre and the periphery. At the same time, the relationship between the state, society, and the market represents a further issue: political dialogue between Europe and Latin America has become futile and ineffective with regard to issues such as the environment, immigration, and illicit drugs.

In the context of relations between Europe and Latin America, there is no lack of assurances that this or that country is a strategic partner, a vital counterpart or an exemplary friend; eloquent rhetoric is not in short supply on either side of the Atlantic. It will always be possible to argue that the partners only appear estranged due to circumstantial matters of minor importance; and there will always be profitable business deals to be done between the continents. Cultural ties, too, can always be asserted; and there will always be organisations willing to claim that the two regions are mutually important to one another. There is nothing unusual or detrimental about any of this, but a longer-term view or interpretation reveals its limits: among other factors, the scope of the transformations in Latin America and Europe, the shifts in global power, and the effects this has on both regions, as well as the diversity of the strategic options available for each counterpart give rise to differing approaches and options.

In sum, and given the obstacles referred to above, this does not appear to be the time for ambitious goal-setting, grandiose prospects or transformational initiatives. At the most, and with the aim of stemming a continuous decoupling, it would be preferable to focus on a few specific political issues. Of these, the most important for both of the regions at present is Venezuela.

A CONCEPTUAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE CHARACTERISATION OF THE INTERNAL SITUATION

The use of the term “catastrophic stalemate” to characterise the situation in Venezuela is appropriate since the reality of the confrontation is that, at the present time, it is not defined by armed conflict, but by the clash between two options of power. It is a dispute between groups, rooted in people’s strongly-held convictions. The confrontation between the government and the opposition, with its advances and retreats, alternating or simultaneous, maintains this stalemate, anchored as it is in the dynamics of the “trench warfare” between the government and the opposition. The situation is by no means set in stone, however, but rather resembles a complex ballet of advances and retreats in a hall of mirrors – a confusing display expressed at the international level in the tension occasioned by the discord among the world powers (viz. the United States, China, and Russia) regarding Venezuela. Hence the prolonged process of crisis and confrontation

points to the need for conflict resolution, preceded by conflict prevention measures.

It is important to highlight the singularity of the Venezuelan case: that is, we are faced with a “degraded catastrophic stalemate” which can be seen in many arenas – institutional, political, economic, social, and environmental. It is worth noting that this degradation affects both groups in the confrontation. In such conditions, it is very difficult to persuade the principal protagonists of the value of dialogue and compromise, let alone negotiation. Instead, the logic in force is that it is the “other side” who has more to lose in the short and medium term; this of course represents a failure to grasp that this attitude obscures wider prospects and the fact that both sides suffer (and will continue to suffer) the effects of an unresolved situation.

In the context of a “degraded catastrophic stalemate”, destructive incentives tend to prevail – that is, a series of threats, proclamations, and actions intended to weaken or defeat the opponent. If we look at the behaviour of the principal internal protagonists and the key external actors, we can see that there is a disinclination to positive incentives; silence, and rejection of the idea that a dialogue between the parties is possible, prevail. Neither party is inclined to give a signal, make an announcement, or adopt a measure which would foster some degree of confidence between the parties. The diversity of, and the increase in, negative incentives are elements which speak volumes about the degradation of the situation. With this in mind, it may be that only an unexpected event of major significance – accompanied by some kind of reciprocity – could interrupt, even if only momentarily, the destructive spiral of the existing tie.

This raises the question of what will be the outcome of this complex situation. There is nothing which would intrinsically suggest that the “solution” to Venezuela’s current crisis will come through more, better, or a renewed democracy. Depending on which opposition sector manages to establish hegemony over the transition, which external actors and contributions support such a group and its initiatives, what degree of redress and revenge is sought in the political and social sphere – whether on a collective or individual basis (something that would not necessarily be under the control of the victorious hegemonic grouping, if there is such a thing), and what initial decisions are adopted by the new government, a combination of changes could lead to a democracy under tutelage or even to covert modes of other forms of authoritarianism with some international support (different from the support enjoyed today by the Maduro government but perhaps, for instance, inclined to sacrifice democracy on the altar of the free market).

AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE. DIFFERENTIATED APPROACHES TO INTERVENTION

Although the concept of the “responsibility to protect” (*R2P*) has emerged as a legitimising label in the nexus established between the opposition and an active segment of the inter-

national community, its application in Venezuela has been prevented by the facts. Born of the idea that sovereignty is a responsibility, not a right, and the assertion that states incapable of protecting their citizens from acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, wars, and crimes against humanity should seek support from the international community, the responsibility to protect has been used to argue that when states which fail to appeal for help, it was the task of that same international community to take responsibility to protect the population concerned. This definition, widely accepted by the Western powers and by multilateral organisations, was coined in 2001 by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty and represented a new normative paradigm to justify humanitarian interventions.

This definition of humanitarian intervention as a global responsibility stimulated the formulation of alternative concepts intended to reduce the impact of interventions undertaken with partisan political objectives. We can refer to the principles of solidarity-based humanitarianism, non-indifference, and even the fleeting proposition of a “responsibility when protecting”, all developed with the goal of mitigating, limiting, or rejecting outright the imperatives for intervention applied by Western powers to deal with what were identified as humanitarian emergencies. The concept of non-indifference was first used formally in 2002, in the Constitutive Act of the African Union (AU), which attributed to this regional organisation the right to intervene in any of its member states in the case of certain extreme situations: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. The concept of responsibility while protecting was a proposal submitted to the UN Security Council on the initiative of Brazil with the objective of reframing the *R2P* norm. According to its proponents, the concept of responsibility while protecting strives for a limited use of coercion, a preference for peaceful means of conflict resolution, and the authorisation of the Security Council for the use of force.

In recent times, interventions motivated by strategic concerns have led to severe humanitarian crises. The most dramatic examples are Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. Furthermore, it is worth drawing attention to the inclusion of simulated interventions in which the methods of coercive diplomacy are imposed; special mention can be made in this regard to the application of economic sanctions. Cases in point are Iran, Cuba, North Korea, and probably Venezuela today. The political, military and economic actors which dominate the scene create permanent tensions with the multilateral and non-governmental organisations carrying out humanitarian missions; in all these cases, the politicisation of humanitarian action implies a new linkage between peace, security, and development – to the detriment of the premises of human security. Here, we identify three types of impact caused by this development: i) the deepening of stereotypical views of the most vulnerable segments of the developing world; ii) the decline of generous humanitarian aid delivered in the name of liberal ideals; and iii) the prevalence of selective and volatile criteria used to identify humanitarian crises worthy of attention and effective resources, leading to a growing number of

disasters condemned to negligence and abandonment. In the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, this last possibility is reflected in the current situation in Haiti.

The first attempt to apply the R2P norm to Venezuela occurred on 23rd January of this year when the United States orchestrated an operation to send humanitarian aid into the country despite resistance to and public refusal of the initiative by the Maduro government. The successful pressure of the main protagonists of international humanitarian law, led by the Red Cross, thwarted the actions promoted by USAID and those governments which support Washington's policy towards Venezuela. At the same time, the international humanitarian system opened pathways to dialogue with other significant donors such as Russia, China, and even India, and the delinking of humanitarian aid from the objective of regime change gained traction.

SCENARIOS

Given that a peaceful political solution is in Venezuela's best interests, the only scenario which can lead to this result is negotiation. This is therefore the scenario to which most attention should be devoted, with all its advances, setbacks, and possible stalemates, because it is the one which would put Venezuela in the best position in the future – even though it is clear that it is not always possible to establish negotiations and, when this occurs, that they will not always be successful.

This is not the only possible scenario, nor even the most likely. It is possible to identify five other alternative scenarios, each of which is linked to the success or failure of economic sanctions and potential military action on the part of the United States. There are many such forms of intervention, including: encouraging a *coup d'état*, deploying kinetic action (a military operation briefly executed by commando groups; territorial occupation by special forces (safe haven); abduction of highly-important persons etc.); the use of a proxy to provoke a military incident or to become a fifth column in an invasion; launching a military operation coordinated with some allies to overthrow the government; nurturing an insurgency with material and political resources with the objective of generating chaos, undermining the government and possibly bringing it down; organising a commando group consisting of foreign agents to carry out a major act of terrorism in the country; coordinating sabotage operations against infrastructure; sponsoring popular revolts accompanied by military uprisings, etc.

Of the five scenarios not involving negotiation, the first consists in the implosion of the regime, that is, its internal decomposition. A historical example of this can be seen in the process that the Soviet Union underwent between 1989 and 1991 following the death of Leonid Brezhnev in 1982, the orthodox governments of Yuri Andropov (1983) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984-85), and the perestroika (restructuring) process launched by Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-91) in the face of this country's continually worsening situation.

The second possible scenario is a *coup d'état*, such as the one that occurred in Egypt in July 2013 when General Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, president of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, overthrew president Mohamed Morsi.

Foreign military intervention (regional and/or extra-regional) represents the third alternative, as occurred in Libya in March 2013 when military forces from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States attacked the country, leading to the death of Gaddafi and generating chaos in Libya and severe instability in the region.

The fourth scenario is civil war, with or without international support for the parties. Various cases in Africa illustrate the possibly devastating effects: the civil wars in Somalia since 1991, for instance, or the more recent conflict in Southern Sudan in 2013, without mentioning the internal campaigns at the end of the last century in the Congo (1997-1999) and Angola (1975-2002).

In the fifth and final scenario, the regime is preserved due to the erosion of the opposition and the decline in its international support; this is currently occurring in Syria, where Bashar al-Assad has remained at the head of the Syrian government due to the weakening of the Islamic State (almost to the point of its disappearance from the territory), the withdrawal of US troops, and the continuing support of Russia.

It should be noted that the construction of these six scenarios is based on the assumption of three points of decision that we regard as fundamental.

The first relates to whether change occurs in Venezuela with or without negotiation. If this fork in the road is the only one taken into account, there is one scenario with negotiation and another scenario which ends with the continuation of the regime or with the opposition taking office. In this view, binary logic prevails: the path is one of negotiation or conflict; either Guaidó wins or Maduro wins. If neither of these results arises, a catastrophic stalemate ensues which could lead to the destruction of institutions, the devastation of the economy, and social chaos in Venezuela.

A second point of decision relates to international and/or regional pressure, which might occur via foreign military intervention (regional and/or extra-regional) or via political and economic pressure such as that exerted by the United States, which will fully come into force on 28th April of next year.

A third potential point of decision is the role of the military in resolving the conflict in Venezuela, since the military could be a principal or a minor actor in the process. The strength or weakness of Venezuela's future democratic system will largely be shaped by the participation or non-participation of the armed forces as an indispensable actor in any possible solution to be agreed between the government and the opposition.

Table 1
Possible scenarios depending on the existence of negotiation, the type of international pressure, and the role of the Venezuelan military.

		International pressure			
		External political/economic pressure		Foreign military intervention	
		Role of the Venezuelan military		Role of the Venezuelan military	
		Principal actor	Secondary actor	Principal actor	Secondary actor
Negotiation	Yes	Type II Agreements under tutelage	Type I Negotiated solution	Type VIII	Type VII
	No	Type III Coup d'état	Type IV Implosion or preservation of the regime	Type V War/extended civil war	Type VI Civil war

Source: Fraunhofer IAO 2013.

Based on these three issues, a typology with eight ideal types (two of which remain “vacant”) has been developed. In the diagram above, they are arranged anti-clockwise, starting with the principal type, the negotiated solution.

As can be seen, if there is a process of negotiation in the frame of the current external political and economic pressure, and if the military does not take on a central role, it is possible to envisage a peacefully negotiated settlement which would permit the restoration of democracy (type I).

If, by contrast, the negotiating process unfolds with the military as principal actors, the compromises reached will be agreements under tutelage and this will compromise the future of Venezuelan democracy (type II).

Type III will be the outcome if the resolution of the current situation arises from a military coup as the result of a switch in loyalty on the part of the Venezuelan armed forces.

Type IV has two sides: the external political and economic pressure aggravates the crisis, or this pressure declines; and the opposition, lacking both internal and external military support, defects, meaning that the regime is preserved. It should be noted that the intensification of the crisis could lead to an implosion of the regime, not at a discrete and easily discernible point in time, but as the crystallisation of more profound structural tendencies which reach a climax when the political and military forces currently in government abandon power as a result of the exhaustion of Venezuela’s entire economic and social system.

If there is no negotiation process, a foreign military intervention occurs, and the Venezuelan military resists, type V will be established – a conventional war which will probably

quickly turn into a guerrilla conflict or a civil war extending into neighbouring countries, thus regionalising the conflict (with indirect support to the conflicting parties from outside the region).

By contrast, if the role of the military is secondary, with its loyalties divided between Maduro and Guaidó, and if no type of negotiation is established, the result will be a civil war (type VI) with external support to the conflict parties; it must be emphasised that if a civil war is unleashed, it is highly improbable that this would only involve internal actors or that military action would be limited to the territory of Venezuela. Civil war could occur between two clearly defined sides, or among various groups defined by ideological, political, territorial, or economic differences; it could also occur among a myriad of groups and factions acting in a situation of generalised chaos, with foreign forces that one day give support to coalitions which are structurally unstable and the next day withdraw from the scene of confrontation or change their support depending on who can provide the country with a modicum of stability, rather than sharing mid-term or long-term objectives regarding the future of Venezuela.

Finally, types VII and VIII are vacant types, given that, if external military intervention takes place, there will be no possibility of negotiation in Venezuela.

How are these ideal types linked to the scenarios we have proposed?

The negotiation scenario occurs both with type I and type II, depending on whether the solution is negotiated by the political system without significant military intervention (the first of the types indicated) or whether agreements are reached under military tutelage (the second of the types indi-

cated). This latter variant could be based on a process of facilitation by part of the international community and on talks, dialogue and negotiations leading to a peaceful solution, accompanied by significant humanitarian aid implemented by neutral international organisations under the auspices of the United Nations, and respecting the human rights of the Venezuelan people (both civil and political rights and economic and social rights) in accordance with protocols of conflict resolution. In this variant, the government and the opposition overcome the current state of affairs peacefully and return to prioritising the national interest above that of various segments and demographics.

The first of the alternative scenarios is the implosion of the regime. It occurs when type IV results (absence of negotiation, external political and economic pressure, with the military playing a secondary role) as international pressure is maintained over time and the opposition demonstrates greater resilience than the government. Given the political uncertainty and, at the same time, the complex international situation, various countries' boycott of Venezuela, and the deepening of the economic crisis, the conditions for regime change could arise by coercion and threat, or by the specific application of force by means of covert operations. The social and economic crisis affecting Venezuela could lead to the Maduro government losing its internal support and, if it is not able to honour its international financial commitments, it could lose a significant part of its external support. Internal change could be delayed by humanitarian aid sponsored by the United Nations or accelerated by the coming into effect of the economic sanctions imposed by the United States, both domestically and internationally.

The second proposed alternative scenario (*coup d'état*) is type III: the military's leading role in face of powerful external political and economic pressure and the lack of negotiations puts an end to the Maduro regime as a result of a chaotic situation which affects the interests of the military to a degree which overrides its loyalty to the governing regime and puts at risk the privileges it currently enjoys.

The third scenario, external military intervention, is type V (war): a central role for the military arises in defence of the regime, and external intervention leads to an armed conflict. Numerous state and non-state actors, both Venezuelan and from neighbouring countries – above all those operating on the border between Colombia and Venezuela – could become involved in the conflict, giving rise to an extended civil war with a sub-regional character.

The fourth alternative (civil war) is type IV; in this alternative, the fractionalised Venezuelan armed forces fight among themselves with direct or indirect external support to one or both sides with no possibility of negotiation.

For the last two of these alternative scenarios, it is extremely difficult to estimate the duration and the extent of such generalised armed confrontations (in Venezuela and the areas closest to it) and their destructive effects on Venezuela's social, economic, and institutional fabric; however, they will

undoubtedly lead to a decades' long decline in all conceivable indicators and an extraordinarily high price in human life.

Paradoxically, the fifth alternative scenario (preservation of the regime) also corresponds to type IV (absence of negotiation, external political and economic pressure, and the military assuming a secondary role), as does the first scenario. The difference is that in this last scenario, there is a decline in international pressure on the regime, the military status quo is maintained, and the opposition is eroded by the passage of time and the lack of results. Hence a gradual democratic retrogression of the Venezuelan state arises through the application of coercive mechanisms, with a slight possibility of regime change in the medium term. In this scenario, the government will not alter its foundations and positions as long as it does not feel threatened by internal factors, for example, by a strong opposition coalition, military imbalance, the generation of uncontrolled violence or a generalised protest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The prevailing internal and external views on the Venezuelan crisis are trapped in a zero sum logic inclining towards lose-lose interactions. In order to reduce the intensity of the confrontation, it is essential to identify options that imply the use of variable sum and win-win calculations. Thus, it is necessary to define these measures and assess the conditions in which they could be implemented. The role of mediators is crucial to breathe life into the process and to open new pathways which should be added to existing channels, many of which are suffering from evident fatigue and inactivity even before achieving any results (see the Montevideo Mechanism); nevertheless, the flame is still being kept alight, with China referring to mediation attempts in the tense debates in the UN Security Council and an agenda of new meetings and dialogue about to take place.

There is a category of conflicts which are, at first glance (and perhaps permanently) "intractable" – that is, insurmountable or unsolvable. They are conflicts with an overburdened agenda due to past confrontations, current pressures and tensions, and future uncertainties; they are conflicts of immense density involving critical issues and are contentious in the extreme. The Venezuelan case can be situated in this category, and this makes the construction of political solutions of a peaceful nature extremely complex, laborious, and fragile. In this framework, it is very important to consider the difference between a settlement and a resolution. There can be a specific agreement on one or two key issues without the existence of a general or comprehensive resolution of the whole set of doubts, dilemmas, and demands encapsulated in a highly conflicted situation. With this objective, we point to the relevance of creating or locating an "oasis", a space which could facilitate minimum agreements and establish a dynamic of incremental progress. The combination of humanitarian aid implemented by neutral international organisations with the support and participation of the United Nations, together with growing respect for human rights in Venezuela, in a context of peace: these are the three funda-

mental ingredients for the construction of an “oasis”: without water, food, and shade for protection, no “oasis” is possible. Undoubtedly, other elements should be added to this space of democratic coexistence, but this will form part of the process of negotiation itself. This is the tacit objective of this study: to contribute to a reflection on the construction of an oasis, initially small, where mutual recognition, genuine dialogue and – Why not? – a comprehensive negotiation process can occur without trying prematurely to reach full resolution of all the aspects of confrontation and polarisation existing today and built up over the course of time.

In the same way, the intention is to identify the obstacles (domestic and international) to constructive dialogue between the parties blocking the start of a process of setting up spaces for a minimum of agreement (i.e. what we call oases here). This kind of development would imply overcoming two interlinked obstructions: political polarisation on the one hand and the lack of neutral external and internal actors on the other. Its principal result should be to initiate a peaceful process directed towards the resolution of this conflict.

If we take as a starting point the fact that, in the short term, it is difficult to conceive of effective negotiations culminating in a peaceful political solution in Venezuela, and that we are still far from a constructive dialogue between the government and the opposition, then a step prior to dialogue and negotiation would be to facilitate an oasis which would permit the building of trust, the de-escalation of the crisis, and the demonstration of verifiable progress. This facilitation will not arise spontaneously; rather, it should be supported by the efforts of specific actors with a track record of affinity with the issues which need to be unblocked. To this end, as already indicated, we identify a trio of “gardens” as constitutive elements of the “oasis” (although this does not imply that others could not be added).

First, there is the **humanitarian** dimension. Basic humanitarian principles – independence, neutrality, and impartiality – must constitute the cornerstone of a process for which it is indispensable that international institutions, foreign governments, and the key internal actors – the government and the opposition – come together. The events of 23rd February of this year were tangible evidence of a distorted use of humanitarian aid and the existence of numerous hidden agendas among international and domestic players. Recently, there have been indications that this will be reversed as a result of an agreement between external and internal agents, and to ensure that this orientation prevails come what may, it will be crucial that significant humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross, UNHCR, OCHA, and the World Health Organisation be committed to monitoring the actions taken. The coordinated presence of prominent actors in the international humanitarian system would strengthen this path. Among others, Turkey, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Japan should join the process; we consider it important that the United States should be involved in this effort as an actor *inter pares*. In this case, actions should avoid the duplication and fragmentation that is so common in the context of serious humanitarian crises. Shared coordination, based on map-

ping exercises and the search for updated information on nutritional deficiencies and healthcare needs, are the evident starting points for creating this first “garden”.

The second is **human rights**. We regard it as crucial that the government of President Nicolás Maduro should recognise the need for dialogue and that progress can be made on the basis of three kinds of gestures of political tolerance. It will be necessary to take well-judged and specific steps ranging from the release of opposition leaders and former members of the regime, both civil and military, allowing demonstrations by the opposition without recourse to paramilitary repressive forces, and putting an end to the numerous and recurrent forms of human rights violations. In this sphere, the specific signals, announcements and measures taken by the government will be of key importance, including greater tolerance of all forms of freedom of expression. Paving the way for this will require a process of gradual negotiation. In this case, we suggest collaboration among mediators, including organisations such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, which is an international entity seen as credible and legitimate by the parties. It is also necessary to assert the role of Venezuelan non-governmental organisations in the sphere of human rights since they could well be significant agents in handling this issue. Moreover, a kind of “citizen diplomacy” with regard to human rights could emerge, fostering dialogue and confidence-building.

This part of the oasis calls for reciprocal gestures, statements, and actions based on an intertemporal approach; this entails the gradual creation of an environment of shared achievements over time.

The third anchor is **peace-building**. Latin America represents a zone of peace with a limited and comparatively insignificant inclination for intrastate and interstate conflict; we believe it is crucial to prevent the Venezuelan crisis from reversing the efforts of states and societies to build this heritage. Venezuela’s difficult reality should represent an opportunity to strengthen this inheritance rather than setting the continent on the path to weakening it. Venezuela’s own experience in 2002, when international mediation was successful, managing to establish a round table for dialogue between the forces of Chavismo and the opposition, should serve as a model for progressing in this direction. The shared responsibility of local, regional, and international actors is vital in order to avoid taking a dystopian route which would have the inevitable effect of dragging the country downwards. As the first step, all international and domestic actors should join in delegitimising the use of force in all its various aspects as an opportune way of resolving the acute crisis in Venezuela. It is evident that in any process as complex and contradictory as the case of Venezuela, in which many issues linked with the diverse interests of various actors must be settled, the parties involved will usually show a combination of firmness and flexibility. However, firmness need not be expressed as dissuasive action. The crisis in Venezuela does not, in fact, represent a threat to the national security of the United States or to international peace; and that it is on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council should not be

taken as evidence of such an interpretation. Making headway in the construction of a peace process will be a very difficult and uncertain route dependent on the first two “gardens” in the “oasis” bearing fruit. A series of successive mediations will be inevitable, as has been demonstrated in other regional and extra-regional experiences. The Contact Group and the Montevideo Mechanism can be seen as part of this same process. Their moorings will depend on compromises which will, initially, be extremely fragile, with parallel discussion tracks which should incorporate actors who provide legitimacy to the process. We believe that the option of including countries such as Canada, Cuba, Argentina, Norway, and India should be considered. The creation of an oasis of peace requires, among other things – and perhaps to a greater extent than the other two oases – a gradual but discernible change in the language used.

Any contribution to conflict resolution must bear in mind that peace has its own timeframes, related to the ripeness of the confidence-building process. If we are to make progress in proposing solutions, it will be necessary to build bridges which do not immediately weaken under stress. If we consider the existence of a “painful stalemate” as the condition to which a confrontation gives rise and which, at a certain point, facilitates a peaceful negotiated solution: where is Venezuela today, at this specific juncture? Viewed from outside of decision-making circles – with the limitations and drawbacks that this entails – neither of these two conditions is discernible.

The events of 30th April and 1st May 2019 reveal a rise in internal confrontation and growing international restlessness. This makes it all the more necessary to foster specific initiatives like the ones envisaged in this paper.

The three gardens of the oasis that we have briefly described by no means exclude the possibility of adding other areas which could fulfil similar roles; we regard the economy and infrastructure, for instance, as a central field which should be taken into account with a view to lighting the way out of the dark tunnel in which Venezuela finds itself today. The incremental search for minimal agreements on the economic model to be developed and the options for managing energy and mineral resources could be an essential part of the oasis. We believe that this fourth possible garden, which should be understood as forming part of the political economy of the transition, should include a mechanism which encompasses and integrates actors and interests. In this case, we view it as vital to include the social dimension and, specifically, the rights of workers, the victories achieved by them in the twenty-first century, and the creation of conditions for the reintegration of the extensive Venezuelan diaspora into the country.

It would be unwise to forget that, as already mentioned, in any negotiation that takes place, there will be a combination of firmness and flexibility on the part of both internal actors and external agents. It is no easy undertaking to establish how much of either is required; what is certain is that there exists a “memory” of opportunities for negotiation that

failed (for various reasons) which makes the political management of this combination difficult; that is, it may be that, at this stage, all actors (internal and external) will opt (in terms of interests and goals) for firmness and that there will be no proponents of the flexibility and accommodation which are so necessary in cases like this.

In summary:

In the first place, it is necessary to enhance the role of international humanitarian organisations, other organisations of international civil society, and influential persons with a significant impact on the formation of global public opinion and with a record of commitment to defending and promoting human rights in the world.

Secondly, it is necessary to work with all available political instruments to discover this oasis in the journey through the desert on which the Venezuelan people finds itself.

Thirdly, together with governments, social organisations, and intellectuals in Latin America and the Caribbean, we must insist that the situation in Venezuela represents a problem for the region, and that if the region does not become actively involved in solving this problem with a certain degree of autonomy, it will, in the near term, grow into a regional crisis.

Fourthly, there must be a convergence of the groups and actors facilitating processes of dialogue and negotiation such as the Montevideo Mechanism, the International Contact Group, the Vatican and others. It is important to underline that Latin America and Europe could proactively come together, stating their willingness to contribute to a peaceful political solution in Venezuela.

Fifthly, and finally, the United Nations should act as a guarantor of the process of peaceful transformation of Venezuela’s present situation.

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VENEZUELA

Towards a peaceful political solution



The events of recent months bear witness to the increase in internal tensions in Venezuela and increasing international exasperation with the situation. In this context, the responsibility of two groups, the government and the opposition, must be stressed for a state of affairs characterised by mutual distrust, a lack of common ground, and, more than anything else, the absence of a reliable spirit of compromise on which a joint agenda could be advanced.



Responses in the region to the Venezuelan crisis have led to decisions and positions without historical precedent. There is, in this case, little innovative about the activism of some Latin American countries; on the contrary, it indicates the lack of a truly regional capacity. As such, this analysis aims to work with a process of political resuscitation which is predicated on the necessity of offering a space for a new kind of dialogue which leaves behind the frustrated attempts of the past and searches instead for innovative approaches favouring peaceful management of the conflict.



By examining the potential scenarios, we reach the conclusion that the most desirable solution for Venezuela – a peaceful, political exit from this situation – can only be achieved through negotiation. We identify a further five potential hypothetical scenarios, including accords under military tutelage, a coup d'état following a shift in the allegiance of the armed forces, an implosion of the government or the exhaustion of the opposition, armed conflict – either conventional or guerilla – following a foreign intervention, or a civil war with high potential for regional contagion.



In the short term, it is difficult to conceive of an effective negotiation leading to a peaceful political solution in Venezuela; even a constructive dialogue between government and opposition seems, at present, very distant. One potential way leading to an exchange and, later, negotiation, would be to create a kind of “oasis” in which confidence could grow, with pressure taken out of the crisis and verifiable progress documented.



As part of this “oasis” concept, we identify three “gardens” or “green spaces” from which trust and cooperation might grow: humanitarian aid, human rights, and peace-building (both internally and externally). Moreover, we outline the economy and infrastructure as potential avenues which should be taken into account with a view to lighting the way out of the dark tunnel in which Venezuela finds itself today.

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