

## Transcript: Venezuela in Washington's Crosshairs, Webinar 1: Why the US is Attacking Venezuela

*This is the transcript of the first of three webinars presented jointly in early January 2026 by Just World Educational and the Task Force on the Americas, and co-sponsored by the U.S. Peace Council, Code Pink, Veterans for Peace, and the Nicaragua Solidarity Coalition. Full multimedia records of all the webinars in this project can be found at [Bit.ly/VZ-learning-hub](https://bit.ly/VZ-learning-hub).*

**[Helena Cobban]**

Hello everyone, I'm Helena Cobban, the president of Just World Educational. Welcome to today's webinar, which is the first in the three-part series, Venezuela in Washington's Crosshairs, that Just World Ed is presenting jointly with the US-based organization Task Force on the Americas. We are delighted that today we'll have three fabulous speakers with us, María Paéz-Victor, Professor Marjorie Cohn, and Leonardo Flores.

A big welcome to all the speakers who are behind the scenes right now. Thank you so much for being with us. Throughout this series, Roger Harris of the Task Force on the Americas and I will be co-moderating the webinars, and I am happy that for today's session, Roger will be the lead moderator.

Quickly, before I hand over to him, just a few housekeeping notes. One is that we'll be presenting two further webinars in the near future. This coming Thursday, January 8th, we'll look at geopolitics and double standards from Caracas to Gaza, and next Tuesday, January 13th, we'll look at how the 'Donroe' doctrine and the US attacks are reshaping the Americas.

We have fabulous speakers lined up for both those sessions. You can find full details at this post on the Just World Educational blog. Also, we'll be preserving and sharing the multimedia records of all the webinars in this series on our website at [www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org).

Expect to see the records of today's session there within one or two days. Two last points. We have an experienced tech support person working with us behind the scenes, Mustapha Mohammed.

If you have tech questions, please contact him via the chat box that you should find at the bottom of your screen. Finally, we hope there will be time to take questions from attendees. Send your questions written as succinctly as possible via the Q&A box at the bottom of your screen.

So now, over to you, Roger Harris.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you, Helena, and thank you for everybody who's attending today. Venezuela is clearly the number one priority, US foreign policy priority. If they understand why Venezuela is the number one priority, we also must understand it.

And we must understand it for the same reasons that they want to destroy the Bolivarian Revolution. People of peace want to preserve it because it is the hope for the future. The present US administration has made it clear that the blatant enforcement of a Pax Americana won't stop with Venezuela.

Venezuela is only today's topic. As the US president has said, Colombia is next, followed by Mexico, Cuba, Nicaragua. And that's a warm-up for dismembering Russia and a path to the unthinkable war with China.

But the peaceful people need to intervene in this imperial scenario. And so this webinar series will be talking about the importance of Venezuela in the context of the larger geopolitical situation. And to start off with, I'm very happy to introduce Maria Paez Victor.

Maria is a Venezuelan-born sociologist. She was schooled in Caracas, the UK and Canada. And she's now retired from academic teaching.

She is the activist founder of one of the many Bolivarian circles. Ours is in Toronto. These are groups that stand in solidarity with the Venezuelan government, with their chosen leadership and with the people of Venezuela.

She's the author of the book on the War of Independence in South America. And for over 16 years, she's produced the only radio program on Venezuelan politics in Canada. So Maria, please tell us what's happening and maybe you might want to start with this weekend and how that impacted everybody.

So Maria, if you could start. Hello... Good to see you.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Well, thank you so much. This is quite an honor that you have asked me for this panel with so many wonderful people here. In this absolutely terrible moment for Venezuela, I think it's one of the darkest moments in its modern history.

We had an absolutely horrendous attack. I mean, we've always thought, oh, yes, they might attack. But you know, I guess you aren't prepared when it actually happens.

And the fact that they actually were able to kidnap the president and his wife, in which, you know, they killed all his personal guards, 30 of whom were Cubans. The count is now about 80 dead, including civilians. And I do want to say something.

There's been a lot of rumors around now. People who kind of think that they know about Venezuela, they've never written about Venezuela, are now talking about, you know, that there was treason and all of this kind of thing, because how is this possible? Well, first of all, there was an enormous cyber attack.

It overwhelmed the defenses. It overwhelmed the communications between the units. So it knocked out their communication.

So there was an uncertainty in the chain of command. And if you think that this is a small thing, let me remind everyone that, first of all, that Maduro is no dictator. He was duly elected, democratically elected.

But in 2024, during the elections, what the CIA, along with Machado woman, wanted to do was to destroy the highly computerized voting system. And what happened was, and this was verified, there was a massive cyber attack that involved an astonishing 30 million attacks per minute for 20 hours on the system. And this, of course, delayed the voting.

This delay was used by the opposition to say there was fraud. But a United States company called Columbus helped with the situation. It was the one that verified that it indeed was a massive cyber attack.

Well, the fact is that Venezuela doesn't have that technology. And this is one of the things that happened. I want to also impress upon you that Cilia Flores fought also, and she insisted that they take her too, because she would not be separated from her husband.

It was incredible devotion on her part. But let's look at the consequences. First of all, Trump did not get a regime change.

The strength of the institutions and the constitutional order was pristine. Delcy Rodriguez had a wonderful swearing in sort of ritual in which the person holding the constitution for her to put her hand on was none other than Nicolás Maduro's son. And the person to whom she gave the swearing in to was her own brother, who is the head of Congress.

So this swearing in made a huge impact because it was pristine. It was a profound link to history, to Chávez, to her own personal revolutionary father. And it was a call to unity and resolve.

So Delcy Rodriguez now has obviously publicly obtained legitimacy. She's been sworn in by the Supreme Court and by Congress. So now the tables are turned, you know.

Now, Delcy Rodriguez and Venezuela are legitimate. They are legitimate actors. And the illegitimate actor in all of this is the United States.

And she gave a very clear response to Trump's fantasy of him and his cohorts there ruling Venezuela. No, she's in charge. The other consequence within Venezuela was that the Bolivarian Revolution, activated by her first orders as president in charge, activated the emergency preparedness with the armed forces, the militias, and the collectives.

And they are all in place in the prepared plans for asymmetrical guerrilla defense of the country. So Chavismo has showed its unity. There's been no inside fighting, no civil war.

It has been solid because they thought, oh, you take away the president, they're all going to start killing each other and there will be chaos. No, nothing of that happened. But we have to look at the international danger.

The USA thumbed its nose to international law. It asserts its power in Latin America and the Caribbean and perhaps the world. Trump threatened Delcy already and the country saying

that we're going to attack them again if she does not follow orders, if she not do what he wants.

In other words, the mask has fallen. It's to give them the oil. That was all about.

Maite is right. There's no more excuses about, oh, democracy and drugs, you know, that they killed 100 people in those little boats and they said that they were hunting for drugs. Well, then why did they go for the oil tankers?

It was all a drug. This was an imperial resource robbery of the most blatant way. Now we know this is what they want.

They want the oil. Then Trump has publicly said that Colombia is next, that Mexico is next, as well as Greenland and including Canada. It's a maniacal sort of territory greed.

They despise Europe. Miller said, oh, Europe isn't going to fight for Greenland, so we're going to take Greenland. The world right now is a very dangerous place.

The United States has really hit very hard all the probabilities of world peace. Trump has said that the Venezuelan oil in the land belongs to them. This is untrue.

Neither the natural resources, the oil, nor the land of Venezuela was ever, ever handed over to foreign oil companies as property. They were always from 1900 under a production contract. Oil companies were given compensation in the 1970s, which was when the oil was nationalized and at market prices.

Then under Chavez, when they refused to work under private public contract, again, the oil companies were paid off. All in all, they had about \$100,000 million. Except for Chevron, Chevron did accept the conditions of Venezuela.

The oil companies were told before telling Congress, they were told that they were going for Maduro, that they were going to be abducted, because Trump wants the oil companies to go in there and get that oil. What happens is the oil companies are business people, and they are not jumping at the chance because they have to rebuild the infrastructure. It's very costly and at a moment where the oil prices are low.

Now Trump, please listen, all of you citizens of the United States, Trump is now offering them subsidies. It doesn't offer subsidies for the things that the American people need or want. He's going to offer them subsidies to go in.

We'll see what happens. Now I want to say a little bit about Canada. Canada is in the same boat as Venezuela, even though Ottawa and politicians there may not want to see that.

They might want to think, oh no, we Canada, we're special. We're not. That 51st state is no joke.

Canada is including the latest version of that Monroe Doctrine, which is called Monroe Doctrine on Steroids, the security plan of the United States. They mentioned that they will come for Canada's oil, Canada's water, Canada's potash and control of the Arctic. And Canada should not be hamstrung by buying US war planes.

Canada should now have a plan for its defense in a serious manner. The enemy is not in faraway Russia or China. The enemy is just a few miles south.

So Canada needs better armaments, but not from the United States, greater recruitment, youth groups, collective emergency preparedness plans and to streamline its transport system. But above all, Ottawa should show real solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean because it will need their goodwill and support for Canadian sovereignty. Canadian sovereignty is also, well, I would say really any country's sovereignty is on the line if Trump wants it.

So I would say to Canada that it's not enough to say, oh, elbows up, we're going to diversify economically from the United States. Well, it doesn't work unless Canada also sort of separates itself from this lethal foreign policy that the United States has. And Canada has to show more solidarity for Latin America and the Caribbean.

As for the people in the United States, well, the onus is on them. I wrote an article recently when I said, who's going to put the bell on the cat? Well, in fact, the only ones who could put the bell on the cat are the United States, the citizens of the United States.

How much are they going to tolerate this thug at the head of their government? Because he is trashing not only international law, he has trashed their constitution. You know, I lived for a while in the United States and the constitution was taken as this sacred document that everyone sort of adored.

Well, this man has just said, thumbed his nose at it and said, I'll do what I want. And it will really be a test of the United States' mettle as to how far they're going to let this man wreck their own constitution, their own separation of powers, and use the presidency as a way of enriching himself and aggrandizing himself. I'm going to say something, and it may be a bit fanciful, but in all of this, Venezuela now has managed to get the publicity and the sympathy of the world.

Before you said Venezuela, and everybody thought, oh, Venezuela, terrible place, dictatorship, all of this. But now Venezuela has the high road. Venezuela is now the legitimate country and the illegitimate one is the United States.

So perhaps something well will come of this, but we cannot discard what Trump has said, that he would attack Venezuela again. I think the second time around, Venezuelans will be more prepared. We have a saying, *guerra avisada no mata soldado*, which means if you announce a war, you will not kill the soldiers.

I hope it doesn't come to that because Venezuela is a peaceful country, and this has really been a shock to the whole country, that they should receive these bombs and these people killing. There were lots of civilians killing too. So let's hope that he backs out or that they make him back out from attacking other countries.

So thank you very much for this opportunity.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you so much, Maria, and thank you for those words of wisdom and direction. I want to thank also some of our other co-sponsors. These webinars are co-sponsored by the Code Pink, the U.S. Peace Council, and Veterans for Peace. We thank those three co-sponsors as well, along with Just World Education and Task Force on the Americas. We'll have two more speakers. They'll go on for about 15 minutes each.

Then we'll open up the panel to a little bit of interaction between the panelists and then to questions and answers. If you have Q&A answers or questions, please enter them at the bottom of your screen. There's an icon that says Q&A.

Please enter them there. Our next presenter is a person who I'm so happy is joining us, another Venezuelan, this one a Venezuelan-American. Leonardo Flores has been on the streets the last three days, and when he's not on the streets, he's been on webinars, on television, on radio, propagandizing, and I mean that in a positive sense, for peace in Venezuela.

He's an activist and an analyst, one of the really outstanding national leaders with ties to the social movements in Venezuela. Leonardo Flores worked as an analyst for the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C. for many years. Before that, he has also worked as an organizer for Code Pink, one of our co-sponsors.

He is a founding member of the Venezuelan Solidarity Network. Leo, maybe you can start off by telling us a little bit about what you've been doing the last few days and if you've gotten any sleep.

### **[Leonardo Flores]**

Thank you so much, Roger, and also Helena and Just World Educational, Task Force on the Americas, all the other co-sponsors. Yeah, I mean, I think, you know, I woke up at maybe 1.30 in the morning, Friday night, Saturday morning, just because my phone was buzzing and buzzing and buzzing, and since then, it's really been non-stop action on the streets, organizing webinars, organizing with different coalitions, appearing on the media, and, you know, here I am on another webinar, and I think it's really important right now to have voices, particularly of Venezuelans, who support their government, because as we know, it's seen in the media, as Maria alluded to, often the focus from the mainstream media is on those Venezuelans who hate the government, and many of those don't even live in the United States, excuse me, don't even live in Venezuela, they live either in the United States or Europe. And, you know, I was going to speak briefly about, you losing President Maduro, having him kidnapped, having Celia Flores kidnapped in such a kind of audacious and disgusting way. Despite that, the Bolivarian Revolution continues, exactly as Maria said, there has been no regime change, and in fact, it was the people who first came out on Saturday, before any national leader said, come out on the streets, defend the revolution, they were already there.

The grassroots people, the Venezuelan people, Venezuelan social movements and unions and communards were on the streets demanding the return of President Maduro. And as we know, he's now in detention in New York City awaiting some ridiculous trumped up

charges. And I want to talk a little bit about some of these narco-trafficking, narco-terrorism charges, because they're so incredibly bogus.

And I think it's going to help us, both as citizens of the United States, as activists, some of us to understand how these lies are coming together to punish President Maduro, to punish the people of Venezuela. And I think the first thing to understand is that Venezuela, first of all, has absolutely no production or trafficking of fentanyl. And fentanyl has been the drug that's been kind of used by the Trump administration.

So there's a huge crisis that we have to deal with. And then the answer to this crisis is to bomb Venezuela somehow. Well, not bombing Venezuela at first, but bombing boats in international waters.

And then, of course, the other drug that's brought into this conversation is cocaine. And in cocaine, Venezuela doesn't produce any cocaine. And this is well known, not only by the DEA itself, but by UN agencies, EU agencies.

There's no production of cocaine in Venezuela. And at most, and all these agencies coincide, that at most 5% of the world's cocaine is trafficked through Venezuela. Obviously, all the world's cocaine is produced in South America, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador to a lesser extent.

Here's the thing. When the Trump administration is talking about a lot of these so-called cartels in Venezuela, he talks about the Tren de Aragua and the Cartel de los Soles. But the Tren de Aragua, there's a DEA report called the National Drug Threat Assessment.

It's published every single year. And in the one published last year, they characterized the Tren de Aragua, and this is a direct quote, as small scale drug traffickers. In fact, in a National Intelligence Council memo that was leaked last spring, the US intelligence admits that Maduro doesn't control or collaborate with the Tren de Aragua, and that the Venezuelan government is actually fighting the Tren de Aragua.

Based functionally, the Tren de Aragua has been destroyed in Venezuela for several years now. Some of its leaders escaped and created networks in other countries, but this is hardly a cartel. It's certainly a criminal organization, but it does not engage in mass drug trafficking.

And then with regards to the Cartel de los Soles, this has been a very difficult one for me to explain over the years because it's a cartel that doesn't exist. But that explanation just got a lot made a lot easier because I'm not sure if you all saw the recent headlines, but the Justice Department is now dropping the Cartel de los Soles from its indictment, from its charges against Maduro, because they too now agree that it doesn't exist. In fact, in these National Drug Threat Assessment reports that I mentioned, I look back at those going 20 years, I found maybe 17 or so that were publicly available online.

All of them contain pages and pages of information on cartels. Not once is the Cartel de los Soles ever mentioned, not once. In fact, you have to understand where this name even comes from.

It comes from a CIA operation. So there's a 60-minute segment from back in 1993, I believe. It's called the CIA's Cocaine.

If you're interested, I suggest after this webinar, go look it up. The CIA's Cocaine. It's about a 10-minute segment.

And in it, they mention the creation of this Cartel de los Soles. And it's created by the CIA as a way to infiltrate Colombian drug cartels. And they use the Venezuelan general in the National Guard.

And it was called the Cartel del Sol because at the time, the National Guard had a patch of the sun on their uniforms. And they use that cartel to smuggle in about 1000 tons of cocaine into the United States. And who knows what happened with that money.

But it was the CIA funneling drugs into the United States as they've done time and time again. If there's a government that is actively involved in the drug trade, it's not the government of Venezuela, it's the government of the United States. In fact, in this 60-minute clip that I mentioned, they say that the DEA at the time, this was the early 1990s, estimated that 53% of the world's cocaine transited through Venezuela at the time.

Today, it's down to 5%. So this idea that somehow Nicolás Maduro was a narco-dictator is a complete, complete fiction. You know, if he actually were a narco-dictator, you would have seen Venezuela actually become a hub for major cocaine transit, not one where cocaine traffic has been decreasing year after year, and then where it started decreasing even faster once Venezuela kicked out the USDA, the Drug Enforcement Agency, out of Venezuela.

I believe that was roughly in 2008-2009. So if it's not drugs that is leading this attack on Venezuela, what is it? I mean, I think there's at least four kind of major reasons.

Obviously, the first one is oil and mineral loss. And I don't know that we need to talk much about that, because I think almost everyone knows that Venezuela is very rich in oil. What you might not know is that it's also very rich in natural gas, rare earth minerals, gold, iron, bauxite, water.

Venezuela has a lot of mineral wealth that the United States has been after for a long time. And in fact, one of the former heads of Southern Command, Laura Richardson, when she was still acting as head of SOCOM, she went on this kind of tour of think tanks, talking about how important it was going to be for the United States to guarantee access to those minerals for U.S. corporations. That's exactly the same rhetoric that Trump is now employing when he says that the Venezuelan oil belongs to the U.S., and not just the oil, but the land somehow belongs to the U.S. Obviously, the Venezuelan people are going to have a lot of say in who controls that oil. Other two reasons for this attack that I'll just mention briefly, one is anti-communism, right? You have a guy like Marco Rubio, who's an ideologue, who is very strictly anti-communist and sees getting rid of Venezuela as a way to overthrow the government in Cuba. Another reason is white supremacy.

And this was a reason that I didn't even come to terms with until pretty recently, because there was an article in the Washington Post where Stephen Miller, Trump's right-hand Nazi, as I like to call him, featured a saying that he initially wanted to bomb Mexico as a way to



get rid of migrants. But then when he saw that bombing Mexico wasn't going to fly within the administration, at least at the time, who knows what will happen now, because Trump said that now is saying that Mexico is controlled by cartels, the same sort of rhetoric that was used against Venezuela. So he wanted to bomb Mexico.

And when he found out that he couldn't do that, then he switched to agreeing with Rubio on Venezuela. And he said very clearly that, well, if we start bombing Venezuela, then we can impose the Alien Enemies Act, and then we can start deporting all of these people out of here. And that's exactly what the United States has done, deporting obviously Venezuelans to Alligator Alcatraz, to the torture prison in El Salvador.

And not just Venezuelans, this has been an attack on migrant communities of all nationalities and ethnicities. And then finally, the other major reason why the United States is against Venezuela is geopolitical reasons. So Venezuela has been, since the Bolivarian Revolution, has played a major role in creating integration between countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

And during this time of the Bolivarian Revolution, there were at least three major bodies that I'm going to mention, that multilateral bodies that were created, and that Venezuela was really strongly behind. And at that time, President Maduro was the foreign minister. So he was very strongly behind these bodies, which are UNASUR, the Union of South American Nations, CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of the Americas.

And on top of that, so these were all kind of a way to counter US hegemony, to counter US domination in the region by building bridges of integration between different countries. To greater or lesser extent, these have been undermined by the United States, particularly since the Obama administration declared Venezuela an unusual and extraordinary threat in 2015. Another example of this, of Venezuela challenging the United States in geopolitics, is that Venezuela helped stop the free trade agreement of the Americas.

That was George W. Bush's kind of premier plan for foreign policy for the Americas, and it was going to be implemented with almost no opposition, until Presidents Chavez and Presidents Kirchner in Argentina and others started saying, no, we're not going to let US corporations destroy unions throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, which is exactly what it would have done. It would have been a total giveaway to corporations, destroying any sort of unions and also public expenditures.

It would have been austerity for all, basically. And then more relevantly to what we've been living over over the last two and a half years, and particularly what the Palestinian people have been living through, is that Venezuela is strongly anti-Zionist. It's one of the world's leaders in competing countries and denouncing Zionism.

So, for example, President Chavez in 2009 broke off all relations with Israel over the bombing of Gaza then. We're talking about 17 years ago, when Israel was bombing Gaza, Venezuela broke off relations. President Maduro was perhaps maybe the first head of state to call what was going on, the genocide in Gaza, a genocide.

And in fact, Netanyahu, we all knew who Netanyahu is, he was here in the United States, in Washington, D.C. over the New Year. And then there was a very quick shift in the narrative about Venezuela. Suddenly, it wasn't about drugs.

Suddenly, it wasn't about democracy. It was about Iran and containing Iran and breaking the alliance between Venezuela and Iran. So between that visit and then by Saturday, there was an attack in Venezuela.

This is right after Netanyahu's visit. So there's a very clear correlation. And in fact, what we're seeing now is that some Venezuelan authorities are saying that Mossad was likely involved in this attack, presumably on the cyber attack dimension that Maria mentioned.

When we look at this attack, it's not the first attack that the Venezuelan people have faced from the United States because there's been an ongoing hybrid war against Venezuela. But why the attack happened is that the Venezuelan people have been defeating the hybrid war. So the Venezuelan people, led by President Maduro, defeated two CIA-backed color revolution attempts, and that was in 2014 and 2017.

They defeated the Guaido parallel government attempt in 2019 and 2020. And then they really turned the tables around when it comes to the economic war in Venezuela. So in terms of the economic war, we're obviously talking about sanctions, which are, in a legal term, "unilateral coercive measures."

We use sanctions as shorthand. But sanctions make us think that there's somehow a legitimacy behind them when they're not legitimate at all, unless they are imposed by the United Nations. And when the United States is doing it, it's a unilateral coercive measure.

And so these UCMs, as they're called it, they led to a 99% drop in government revenue. That's wild, right? And we're talking about a government that was spending roughly 80% of its budget in social investment, in housing and healthcare and education and infrastructure.

And suddenly those funds started drying up nearly overnight. At the Venezuela Solidarity Network, where I organize, we had a member of the Central Bank join us on a webinar, and he said that according to his calculations, the economic war in Venezuela had cost the country \$630 billion in economic losses. And so when you lose that much to your economy, when your economy is hit that hard, that's going to kill people.

And sanctions killed 40,000 people in Venezuela in 2017-2018 alone. And that's according to a study by the Center for Economic and Policy Research. In fact, according to a different study in "The Lancet" that was published this summer, and The Lancet is one of the premier academic journals in the world, sanctions kill 560,000 people globally.

Over half of those are children. So while the United States or Israel, the United States through Israel has been bombing children in Gaza, they're also starving children worldwide, having children die from preventable diseases worldwide through banks and through financial sanctions. The sanctions on Venezuela roughly to a greater or lesser degree destroyed the public health system, destroyed the education system, public transit infrastructure, and they are direct cause for the migration that Venezuela suffered for so many years.

And that migration has now slowed, if not been eliminated entirely. But now given this attack, who knows, who knows if it's going to begin again. And to be honest, I think the economic damage from these sanctions could have been much, much worse than it actually was.

So when President Maduro first ran for office in 2013, and in that campaign, I remember very clearly, he promised an end to extreme poverty. And he was going to do that by kind of coordinating all the social missions in Venezuela, and having them articulate in a different way and going directly to the most defective people in communities. Well, that plan kind of got thrown out the window because of the economic war, it became impossible to eliminate extreme poverty.

But it was implemented in a different way in what's called the CLAP system, Local Committees for Supply and Production, that in these local committees were very local, street level, neighborhood level, community level, and they were charged with producing food and serving as hubs for supplying food at little cost to working class and poor families. The CLAPs prevented a famine in Venezuela. And on top of that, the government has put so much effort in restarting production, so much effort into building homes, 5 million homes delivered to working class folks, and investing heavily in communes, and in kind of producing at home, so much so that Venezuela went from importing roughly 80% of its food to importing nearly 100% of the food that the population needs to survive.

And all that relief has paid off because Venezuela has undergone five straight years of economic growth. It was the fastest growing economy in Latin America last year. And the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, a UN agency, predicts that Venezuela is going to still have positive growth next year.

Obviously, that's going to depend on what happens with this new strategy of seizing tankers and blocking tankers. I think a lot of that might be more of a bluff by the United States because they haven't seized a tanker in several weeks. And we know that there are some tankers turning in, although others are turning back.

But the economic war is where it's really my focus, because as shocking as the deaths of 80 people were, we're talking about tens of thousands. The order of magnitude has been much, much worse with this economic warfare, but the Venezuelan people are finding a way to deal with it. And I have full faith that the Venezuelan people are going to find a way to deal with this current crisis and the Bolivarian revolution will continue.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you so much, Leonardo. You make a very important point there that the current offensive against the Venezuelans has been escalating precisely because the Venezuelans have been successful in resisting, and they will be successful. So thank you very much.

I also was remiss in not thanking one of our other co-sponsors, the Nicaragua Solidarity Coalition, part of the solidarity movement of people uniting against US imperialism. And speaking of which, it used to be that we had to expose the hypocrisy of US imperialism. But lately, our government itself has been exposing it for itself.

But there's still blatant illegality. And to speak about that, we've asked our next speaker, Marjorie Cohen, to address that. She is a professor emeritus at the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, and currently the dean of the People's Academy of International Law.

And she was the past president of the very important political and economic, excuse me, political and legal group, the National Lawyers Guild. And she sits on the National Advisory Board of Veterans for Peace. And her latest books include Drones and Targeted Killings, Legal, Moral and Geopolitical Issues.

And as well, she's a very active columnist with Truthout, and has written several articles about aggression in Venezuela. So tell us a little bit about this blatant lawlessness and where it's going.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Well, thank you, Roger, Helena, and all the co-sponsors of this really important program. And I'm honored to be on the same panel with Maria and Leonardo. So thank you again.

In utter defiance of the mandates of the UN charter, the US forces launched a massive military attack and kidnapped President Maduro and First Lady Flores. The US, one of the drafters of the charter, is a party to that treaty. And under the US Constitution, the Supremacy Clause says that treaties are the supreme law of the land, and judges throughout the country are bound by them.

Article 2.4 of the charter says all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The only two exceptions to that very, very clear prohibition are when a country acts in self-defense after an armed attack, or when the Security Council approves the use of force. The attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping did not constitute self-defense, nor did the Council authorize it.

Venezuela had not launched an armed attack on the US or any other country, nor did it even pose an imminent threat. And in a stark example of the tail wagging the dog, General Dan Cain, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that the invasion, after the invasion, that the US military engaged in multiple self-defense engagements as the force began to withdraw out of Venezuela. So they mount an illegal attack, and then when there is resistance, lawful resistance, they say, oh, we're acting in self-defense.

Indeed, it is Venezuela that has the lawful right to exercise self-defense in response to the armed attack by the United States. Now, this attack constituted illegal aggression. At Nuremberg, the tribunal said to initiate a war of aggression is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.

Under the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court, an act of aggression means the use of armed force by a state against the sovereignty, territorial integrity, or political independence of another state or in any other manner inconsistent with the UN Charter. And that includes the invasion or attack by the armed forces of a state of the territory of

another state. The US military attack violated the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of Venezuela, and thus constituted aggression.

Now, Trump, in addition to raising this spurious issue of Maduro's involvement in drugs, which Leonardo has very masterfully deconstructed, Trump said he intends to take over Venezuela's oil and sell it to other countries because it belongs to the United States and U.S. corporations. The U.S. has never owned Venezuela's oil or territory. In 1976, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez nationalized Venezuela's oil industry, and in a process that was contemporaneously described by the New York Times as peaceful and orderly, U.S. and European oil companies that had previously been operating in Venezuela were compensated with about a billion dollars. Foreign oil companies have lodged and won awards in further complaints against Venezuela in the World Bank's state corporate dispute arbitration system after former President Hugo Chavez nationalized other segments of the country's oil production in 2007, which Venezuela has not fully paid out. Now, even if Trump's bizarre claim that the U.S. owns Venezuela's oil was true, that would not provide a legal basis for his military attack. Rubio put forth still a different rationale for the military operation.

He claimed it was largely a law enforcement operation to arrest Maduro and Flores on charges in a U.S. indictment alleging that they and other members of the Maduro government committed narco-terrorism and conspiracy to import cocaine. But a state has no enforcement jurisdiction in the territory of another state unless that second state gives its consent. Without the consent, it's a violation of Venezuela's territorial sovereignty.

Moreover, under customary international law, Maduro has head of state immunity from foreign enforcement jurisdiction. Now, the U.S. withdrawal of recognition of him as head of the Venezuelan government does not negate his personal immunity under customary international law. These are two defenses that Maduro will raise when his case is heard in the U.S. courts. Now, in an attempt to justify its illegal aggression against Venezuela, the Trump administration will undoubtedly rely on a 1989 opinion written by the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel, or OLC. It was dated six months before President George H. W.

Bush invaded Panama, in which the U.S. arrested General Manuel Noriega on drug trafficking charges. This opinion, which has been largely discredited by most reputable constitutional scholars and has never been upheld by the Supreme Court, it says that the president has inherent constitutional authority to order an extra territorial arrest even if it violates customary international law and intrudes on the sovereignty of another country. This opinion also says that domestic U.S. law trumps, no pun intended, the U.N. charter, which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity of any state. It says that the charter doesn't prohibit the executive as a matter of domestic law from authorizing forcible abductions abroad. Now, to say that the U.S. government, the U.S. president can abduct somebody and it doesn't violate the U.N. charter, in other words, that the domestic law trumps the U.N. charter, is patently absurd since the U.N. charter as a ratified treaty is part of U.S. law under the Supremacy Clause of the Constitution. There are also significant differences between the Noriega and Maduro cases.

First, before Bush ordered the arrest of Noriega, Panama's General Assembly had formally declared war against the United States and Noriega never served as president of Panama. He was a military dictator. He was never president.

Now, after Maduro's abduction, Trump said that the U.S. would basically occupy Venezuela and run the country. Forcible regime change is illegal. In addition to the U.N. charter, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights all guarantee the right of people to self-determination. And the two covenants have the same first sentence in their Article I. All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right, they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.

By kidnapping Maduro and removing him from Venezuela, Trump engaged in illegal regime change and violated the right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination. And Leonardo discussed Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, who was sworn in, and Trump has actually threatened that if she doesn't go along with the U.S. agenda, she's going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro. It's a very, very serious threat.

Now, Trump told reporters at the press conference following the attack that he was not afraid of boots on the ground in order to secure Venezuela's oil. In essence, Trump was stating his willingness to maintain a U.S. occupation of Venezuela. An illegal occupation violates the U.N. charter. If the use of force to establish the occupation was not justified by self-defense or U.N. Security Council authorization, it is unlawful. A U.S. occupation would violate the right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination. The International Court of Justice, the world court, the judicial arm of the U.N., says no territorial acquisition resulting from a threat or use of force shall be recognized as illegal. Occupation is a temporary situation to respond to military necessity, and it cannot transfer title of sovereignty to the occupying power. There is no military necessity for the U.S. to occupy Venezuela. And the U.S. as an occupier would be forbidden from exploiting Venezuela's natural resources, including its oil, minerals, etc. So Trump's attack on Venezuela cannot be validated by self-defense or council approval, and therefore a U.S. occupation of Venezuela would be illegal. Now, under U.S. law, the War Powers Resolution allows the president to introduce U.S. armed forces into hostilities or imminent hostilities only after Congress has declared war or in a national emergency created by an attack on the United States, its territories or possessions or its armed forces, or when Congress has specifically authorized it by statute. But before mounting their regime change attack on Venezuela, the Trump administration refused to brief leaders of the Senate and House Armed Services Committee.

Now, Trump did brief oil companies, U.S. oil companies before and after the invasion. Think about that for a minute. Didn't brief Congress, did brief the oil companies.

The Senate will vote this week on the War Powers Resolution that a number of people have, including Tim Kaine, have sponsored. And it says Congress hereby directs the president to terminate the use of United States armed forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela unless explicitly authorized by a declaration of war or specific authorization for the use of military force. When asked whether the administration had notified Congress before the military attack on Venezuela, Rubio claimed, and this is a quote, we called members of Congress immediately after.

This was not the kind of mission that you can do congressional notification on. And then Trump added, quote, Congress will leak and we don't want leakers, unquote. Neither of those claims excuse the administration's failure to comply with the War Powers Resolution.

Trump has intimated that Mexico and Cuba might be next, Colombia, Greenland, you name it. His new national security strategy includes the Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine signaling a return to U.S. military interventions in Latin America. Trump said Cuba is going to be something we'll end up talking about because Cuba is a failing nation right now, very badly failing nation.

And Rubio, who's been gunning for a regime change in Cuba his whole life, added, so yeah, look, if I lived in the government, I'd be concerned at least a little bit. In an interview with Fox News on January 3rd, Trump said something is going to have to be done with Mexico after he said that the cartels, not Claudia Scheinbaum, are running Mexico. Masses of people around the world have taken to the streets to protest Trump's imperialistic aggression in Venezuela.

The military law task force of the National Lawyers Guild issued a statement calling for international resistance to the U.S. invasion, asking, for example, for foreign military and civilian workers to refuse to assist U.S. military warships and warplanes, and for foreign governments to withdraw from military cooperation agreements with the U.S. and to hold responsible officials accountable through the means at their disposal.

We must make it clear in every way that we can that we oppose U.S. imperialism in Venezuela, in the rest of the Western Hemisphere, and indeed, around the world. Thank you.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you, Professor Cohen, and thank you to all those panelists. Terrific presentations. May I ask all the panelists to turn on your videos, and Helena as well, and we'll have just a short interaction between the panelists.

Boy, there's a lot to cover. And then we'll open it up to Q&A. So please continue to put questions in the Q&A.

And it's hard to know even where to start because there was such good information, so much rich information. But Helena, why don't you kick this off?

**[Helena Cobban]**

Oh, okay. So we do have some really great questions here. And the first one is actually crucial from Greg Corning, who says, spell out the best way to push back against the out-of-control U.S. military attacks on other nations. So there you go, panelists.

**[Leonardo Flores]**

Sure, I'll start that one. You know, I think this has been a task that the peace movement has been undertaking since before the Vietnam War. So I don't know if there's a best way.

I can tell you what we're doing. So at the Venezuela Solidarity Network and the many coalitions I've been part of, there are several kind of tacks that we're taking, right? So one, support the War Powers Resolution in Congress.

I can't recall if it was Maria or Marjorie who had mentioned it, but there's going to be a vote coming up on War Powers this week. So call your member of Congress, call your senators, tell them to support this War Powers Resolution. To talk to your local representatives, either state or city level.

I was just in City Hall in Washington, D.C. on Monday morning, going around with other activists, talking, gauging to see what sense there was or how much interest there was in having the D.C. Council pass a resolution condemning these attacks. And I think we are heartened because I think they can be pushed to do so. So that's something that we're going to be working on at a local level.

And while the local level might not seem significant, if we get enough cities behind this, that provides cover for the Democrats to really push back on Trump on this attack. Not that we think that the Democrats wouldn't have done it, but because of the political dynamics at play here, I think that that's a possibility. Three, engage in political education.

Share these webinars, write letters to the editor, talk to people about Venezuela. If you hear disinformation, correct people. And fourth, I would say just organize.

I think the best way to help people overseas, whether it's Venezuela, whether it's Gaza, wherever, is to organize and ensure that we have people's power here at home. Ensure that we're the ones who decide what to do with our military and how much to fund it and where it should go. It shouldn't go anywhere.

It should just stay home. But until we take control of our own democracy here, it's really hard to do anything for people abroad, in my opinion.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you, Leonardo. Maria or Marjorie, do you want to add anything to that?

**[María Paéz Victor]**

I would like to add. Can you hear me? Yes.

**[Roger Harris]**

Very well.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Thank you so much, Leonardo. You gave us so much information there. And Marjorie, you really explained the American legal situation there so clearly.



Thank you. I really appreciate that. Well, I just want to say something.

I was in the area where Fuertecuna is, in Valle, a couple of years ago. And I was walking there in the barrio with people, and something was happening internationally. And I'm sitting on the floor there of a street, talking to this elderly gentleman.

And all of a sudden, I realized, holy cow, here I am, a university professor, and I am having a fantastic dialogue with this man on the street about foreign policy, about international policy. And I was so humbled. Also, I was so elated, I was so happy.

This wasn't a student or anything like that. And of course, that to me was the prime example of one of the things that the Bolivarian Revolution has done throughout all of these years. One of the most important things that the Bolivarian Revolution has done is to create a thinking people.

There is no mass society in Venezuela. There's no mass society. What you have is a process that Paulo Freire talked about, the conscientización.

One of the things that the Bolivarian Revolution has always wanted is for people to think and to understand their circumstance and why they have been oppressed, and what are the sources of that oppression, how can they confront that, not just external, but also internal. And so what you have in Venezuela is a population that is highly sophisticated. I am amazed as I listen to the national radio, to Telesur, or even when I'm down there, I talk to the, you know, just taxi drivers, people in the supermarkets or whatever, and how sophisticated their understanding of what Venezuela is, their role in the world, and what is happening in the world.

So I think that Venezuela is going to overcome because of that incredible, and I'm talking perhaps sociologically and sociologically, but this is the backbone of the people, because they aren't just carrying out something because someone told them to do this. The communal councils are amazing. I have been at a communal council meeting, and the person who was running it, well, he could have been running a session of Congress.

He knew all Robert's rules of how you run that. And he was the son of the woman who sold empanadas in the corner of that town. So I am just amazed and sort of filled with hope because I know of that spirit that the Venezuelans have.

And let me tell you, they're not going to give in. They have, the Americans have better technology and better bombs and whatever, but the Venezuelans will not give in. They are, as they say, the people of Bolívar, of liberators.

And I think that they, I have to tell you this story because it's very funny. I have a 91-year-old sister who can barely walk because she's so feeble. She says to me with her kitchen knife, if they come, I've got my kitchen knife, which is ridiculous, but it just shows you that there is this willingness that if we go down, we will go down.

But I want to reiterate that I hope that there won't be a second strike because the international backlog, or I should say back, not backlog, backlash against what has happened to Venezuela has been very profound. One of the good things is the unity of the left. The left

has always been divided and you're Marxist and you're not and you're socialist and you're this or the other.

And many of them have not fully backed the Bolivarian revolution. What I see now is, you know, leftist people in France, you know, in the middle of Paris, you know, protesting and the same thing in London and all over the place. So I think that the left now understands, look, we were telling you all the time that this was about oil, that this was about imperialism, that they were going to come for us and finally they have united it.

And one thing I want to warn everyone about, that already they have started to demonize Delcy Rodríguez and it's all over the internet. Oh no, she must have been behind this. She must have, you know, told the Americans where, you know, Maduro was sleeping.

This is a terrible, I would say, libelous thing to say about Delcy Rodríguez, whose own father, her father and Jorge's father, was beaten to death, beaten to death by the civic police of the terrible governments that we had before Chávez. I just warn you this because you will see this in the website. So sorry, I will stop there.

But again, I want to thank Leonardo so much, and I want to thank Marjorie so much for the wonderful things you have taught us today.

#### **[Roger Harris]**

Thank you so much, Maria, for bringing that out, because a lot of well-meaning people on the US left are feeling that they need to alert the Venezuelans about the dangers ahead. And the truth is the Venezuelans don't need any reminder that they're in the target of US imperialism. What they do need is solidarity.

They do need people on the streets.

#### **[Helena Cobban]**

I also just want to come in response to what Maria said about her sister and her kitchen knife. That is so much like the story of my friend, Dr. Refaat Alareer, who, you know, he was killed by the Israelis in December of 2023. Before that, he was on the Electronic Intifada live stream, and he said, I'm completely unarmed.

If the Israelis come for me, all I have is my Expo marker. And they did come for him, and they killed him. So, you know, my love to your sister, Maria.

So we do actually have a number of questions that kind of build on this important point you made. Questions, I'm just going to pull a few together from Henry Lowendorf, and Nancy Galloway, Barbara Larkham, and one from somebody called MP. And basically, they are addressing this question of, like, so many people in the mainstream media and elsewhere talk about, well, Maduro was a brutal dictator.

I mean, it's like, you know, it's like you have to condemn Hamas before you can say anything about Palestine. It's very similar to that. But in international law, I'm sending this to you first, Marjorie.

Is there anything to say that because somebody may or may not be a brutal dictator, that should make it okay to overthrow them? That's one thing. And then the other is a question back to Maria about what you said, they want more information about the hacking of the 2024 election.

Maybe you could put some information into the chat box for people about that. But maybe Marjorie, you first.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Yes, it's regardless of whether people think that Maduro is a good guy or a bad guy, that's totally irrelevant to the illegality of this aggression by Trump and his minions. There is a right to self-determination. The world court has said that the people have the right to choose their own government without interference.

That's basic. And let me give you a hypothetical. Let's say that a foreign government decided that the American people needed democracy, because we don't have a democratic government, because we have an autocracy, because the government doesn't represent the people, because they don't have healthcare, because they don't have guaranteed healthcare, because they don't have a good education system, because there are violations of their civil rights, and on and on and on. And so they militarily invade the United States and take Trump and remove him to another country.

Now, aside from the fact whether people would support that action or not, that would be as illegal as the Trump administration going in with guns blazing and 150 aircraft and killing at least 80 people and decimating the Caracas and terrorizing the people and creating total chaos. Absolutely illegal. Regardless of whether you think Maduro is a good guy or a bad guy, that's irrelevant.

And I think we need to call that out whenever we see that in the corporate media. And even some people on the left have mentioned that as well. That is irrelevant to the highly illegal nature of what they did on January 3rd.

**[Roger Harris]**

Very, very good. Does anybody want to add to that, going beyond just the legal? But would Venezuela be better off without Maduro?

We're hearing that a lot. That's probably the biggest talking point right now. We're hearing that a lot from Congress.

People are saying, well, we don't like the illegality, but it's been done. So it's just as well because this guy was a bad guy, and then we'll be on the path to democracy.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Well, I just want to say one other thing, and that is it's none of our business. But this is not new with Trump, although he's taken it to a new level. The CIA has engineered coups

throughout our history and overthrown democratically elected leaders and installed vicious dictators.

They did it in Iran. They did it in Chile. They did it in Guatemala, and the list goes on and on and on.

This is not new with Trump, although Trump is much more blatant about it. The CIA used to do it quietly. Now, he says the CIA is in there, and he says exactly what's happening, but doesn't make it any more legal than it ever was to engineer forcible regime change.

Iraq is another example going in and taking out Saddam Hussein.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

I just want to say one thing. When people say these things, it's good to remind them that at least 40 to 50 people were killed in this attack. So was it all right to kill?

Some of them were soldiers, and of course, they died in their doing their duty, but that's still a human being that had been killed. And so this attack wasn't just, oh, they went in, they got the president out, and ha ha, look how great we are. They also killed an 80-year-old woman.

They destroyed buildings where these people were living around the coast. We've seen the pictures of them. And so this was not a clean, easy thing that they went in and got these people out.

There were deaths, and there were people injured.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

But Trump was bragging that we didn't lose any Americans, didn't mention anything to Venezuelans or Cubans, because American lives are the most important lives, according to Trump, and unfortunately many of his supporters.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Actually, I have heard from Venezuelans who say that there are Americans in the military hospital who were injured, and they are American soldiers in there. Of course, everything is very harsh. They don't want to say very much, but this is what I've heard from the military hospital in Caracas.

**[Leonardo Flores]**

So let me add to this discussion by talking. I mean, I think really there's no kind of magic talking point that is going to convince these people who talk to you and say, oh, but Maduro's a dictator, so shouldn't we get rid of an enemy? I mean, there's no magic talking point, right?

What we can say is, first of all, the people who are telling you that there was fraud in Venezuela's elections, the mainstream media, politicians, they're the same exact people that have spent two years and four months, five months denying a genocide in Gaza.

They're the same people who lied to us about what is best destruction in Iraq. So why are we going to fall in once again to this trap of believing this propaganda to lead us to war?

So I think that's one thing to say. A second thing to say might be something like, look, in 2020, Trump challenged the results of the election. At least he had the decency to challenge it in court.

The Venezuelan opposition never challenged it in court. But in 2020, Trump challenges this election, and to this day, he maintains there was fraud. Does that mean that in 2021, it would have been okay for a country to bomb Washington and kidnap Biden?

No, of course not. I mean, it's ludicrous on its face, right? And this is the exact same dynamic we're seeing in Venezuela.

I mean, Venezuelan elections have been among the cleanest in the world for the past 26 years. And yet, every single time the United States comes back with this, I mean, every single time that Trump once, when the opposition won parliamentary elections in 2015. So there's been something, I don't know, I think it's 29 or 30 elections now, Maria.

Every time the United States says there was fraud. Every time the extremist fascist Venezuelan opposition, and there's many oppositions in Venezuela, but I'm specifically speaking of the fascist movement led by Maria Corina Machado at the moment, they say there was fraud. We cannot believe that, and we cannot fall into that trap of having to defend Venezuela's democracy when it's Venezuelan people who are being killed by bombs and sanctions.

That's not what this should be about.

**[Helena Cobban]**

That's great. Really helpful from all of you. How about the Cuba dimension?

That's been mentioned a couple of times, and we got a question here from Daniel Vrooman asking about the Cuba dimension.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Well, 30 Cuban soldiers who were guards of Maduro died. This is information from Vir Canela, the president of Cuba, and they made a sort of a ritual in Cuba to honor them. They gave their lives for President Maduro.

Venezuela and Cuba are very, very close, real friendship, and it isn't just the presidents who were friends or the governments who were friends. One of the reasons why Venezuelans really love the Cubans is because of the doctors. You're a mother, and your child wakes up in the middle of the night with a fever, and before Chavez, you have to come down from the hills, wrap your child in a blanket, try to get a bus, try to get to the center of town, try to get to a crowded hospital, and then when the doctor saw your child, they would write a prescription that says, here, go to the pharmacy and get this medicine.

All that's gone. Now, every village, almost every neighborhood has a barrio adentro. The doctor is a few steps away from you, and every mother who's ever had a sick child in the middle of the night blesses those Cuban doctors.

Believe me, they didn't have it easy. When they arrived, the opposition was going on saying, they're going to brainwash your brain, and they're going to turn you into communists. I mean, all these kind of crazy things that they really suffered, but now they are there, and they have educated a whole generation of Venezuelan doctors who now also understand what community health is and are out there.

So, Venezuela, too, honors those fallen Cuban soldiers that gave their life for Venezuela a couple of days ago.

**[Roger Harris]**

Yes, absolutely. And then I want to remind everybody that next Thursday, just two days, we're going to talk about some of the more geopolitical aspects of this. And then on next Tuesday, we will also have the concluding webinar, which will kind of talk about the large picture implications of this latest imperialist offensive.

But let me ask the panelists, the title of this webinar, it was Why the US is Attacking Venezuela? Multi-faceted question. I'll throw it out to Professor Cohen and then ask the other two panelists to respond.

But what would you say? How would you answer that question? Why is the US attacking?

And what are they trying to destroy? What are they afraid of?

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Well, Roger, I think that Leonardo beautifully answered that question when he went through all of the reasons why it's not drugs. It's oil, it's anti-communism, it's geopolitical, and oil, of course, basically, and the rare earth minerals, etc. But the drugs, it's just an excuse.

It's a spurious one. And I think that Trump tried during his first term to engineer this coup. Rubio has been gunning for Cuba for a long time.

And I think that he is largely behind this Venezuela operation as well. But I think he really wants to replicate it in Cuba. And I think that if I were in Cuba, I would be worried about that and prepared.

But I think that Leonardo beautifully laid out all of the reasons why Trump went in with that illegal aggression at this point.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Can I add something to that? I think you're right and Leonardo was right. But there's something that we also say, and that is that Venezuela is a very bad example.

Venezuela is an example of, if you like, a successful socialist sort of project. It's not completely socialist. It really is a mixed sort of situation that is there.

But it is a society that did not thrive under the capitalist trickle-down idea of progress. This is a society that organizes campesinos, that all of a sudden grows its own food. It is amazing that with those terrible sanctions that Leonardo was giving the information, the terrible sanctions, there has been no famine in Venezuela.

The economy did not collapse. The society did not collapse. The miracle is that Venezuela did not cave in.

And what was the reason? Well, I go back. I go back to the people and how savvy they are, how they have learned to think and analyze and to understand how they were being attacked and oppressed, and how they did not give in, and how these socialist structures, especially communal councils and consejos comunales, not just the rural ones, also the ones in the city, really gave people the backbone to face all this terrible scarcity that occurred. Another sister of mine says to me, what else are they going to throw at us? She says, they've thrown everything at us, and we overcame.

We will overcome everything again. And it's a sense that they are together. It is a sense that we're together in this, and that we will go forward.

Because that is the miracle. The miracle is that Venezuela now is exporting food. The miracle is that Venezuela's GDP has grown by 6% this year.

And this is about talking, not the government saying. And President Maduro is the one who has steered the country through these terrible dark times. He's had it much worse than Chávez, much worse.

He's had to confront a terrible hybrid war of all sorts. And so I, again, believe very much in the strength of the backbone of the Bolivarian revolution and of the people. Sorry, I'll stop there.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Could I just say one thing, please? Leonardo referred to the illegality of the sanctions. They're called unilateral coercive measures, as he said.

That's because the United States is unilaterally imposing them on Venezuela instead of getting approval from the Security Council. And the UN Charter says that only the Security Council has the power and the authority to impose these economic coercive measures. And one thing that hasn't been mentioned is, of course, the illegality of the murders on the small fishing boats that supposedly contain drug traffickers, although there was no evidence of that.

So that was extrajudicial killings, which violates international law, and murder, which violates domestic law. But also the seizure of these oil tankers and the imposition of this complete blockade, both highly illegal, because the stated rationale by the United States

was, well, they're under sanctions because we imposed these sanctions, and so these are sanctioned tankers. Absolutely incorrect.

They were unilateral coercive measures that were imposed by the United States. They were not legal. Only the Security Council, again, has the right to impose them.

So first of all, the sanctions are illegal. And second of all, the seizure of these tankers, based upon the fact that the U.S. has sanctioned them, is again the tail wagging the dog. And I have to be really clear that there was a lot of illegality by the U.S. government leading up to the incredible illegality on January 3rd, and that aggression that the Trump administration committed against the people of Venezuela.

**[Helena Cobban]**

Yeah, I think we should call what happened on the high seas, taking the tankers, piracy. It was outright piracy. And I know in some circles, pirates are viewed as kind of cute and adorable, but if you're a mariner out there on the high seas, if anybody trying to run a trading system cannot put up with this kind of piracy.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Actually, this was not piracy because piracy is done by private actors. I thought that too, before I started researching it. Piracy is not done by governments.

It was illegal for a host of other reasons. And of course, Trump sounded like a pirate when he talked about taking the oil and we're going to sell the oil, like a pirate and their plunder. But technically, under international law, convention on the law of the sea, it's not technically piracy.

**[Roger Harris]**

Good point.

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Thank you.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Well, in the past, especially in Britain, would give these patents to people like Sir Walter Raleigh. And that's right. Would allow him to become a pirate.

And he would then take the gold from Spanish boats, you know, and wave this thing about and say, oh, no, I'm not really a pirate. You know, the Queen has said that I can do this. It was state, it was state done.

Now, this is the interesting thing. So many people died. They say that 100,000 people died in Venezuela because of the illegal sanctions.



Amongst them, may I say, one of my dearest cousins died because she had cancer and they couldn't get the, they couldn't buy, nobody could buy the medicines that the doctors needed. So, but, you know, this did not make any inroads in the world. So the Venezuelans were dying and they couldn't buy food and they couldn't buy, well, nothing happened.

But one tanker was taken by the United States and the very next day, Wall Street prices went up. Why? Because it was a huge blow to international transportation of oil.

And this really freaked people out and they are still freaking out because of this. I think this was a tremendous mistake by, I mean, amongst all the other mistakes, but it was a tremendous mistake by the Trump administration because now he has a lot of very important people out there that are against him taking these ships and then saying, oh, we're going to keep it and we'll keep the oil. He is in trouble very much, not because of the 103 people that he killed in little canoes, practically with missiles.

The people at Wall Street didn't care about those deaths, but it did care about that tanker.

### **[Helena Cobban]**

So I'm afraid we're coming towards the end now. We're going to give each of the panelists a two minute wrap up, but before Roger wrangles the wrapping up, I just want to come in with a couple of housekeeping matters. So I just want everybody to recall that we're going to be presenting two further webinars in the near future.

If you, all the details are here. I had to show that up. We have fabulous speakers lined up for both those sessions.

One of them is my colleague on the Just World Educational Board, Professor Richard Falk, who's going to be with us at Thursday's session, along with two other great Venezuelan speakers. Our board at Just World Ed has been really supportive of this project and particularly our board member, Rick Sterling, who helped make all the connections with the task force on the Americas and has pushed this project forward. So we are going to be preserving and sharing the multimedia records of all the webinars in this series on our website, [www.justworldeducational.org](http://www.justworldeducational.org).

Expect to see the records of today's session there within one or two days, and then you can share them with your friends. Those will be videos, audios, and transcribed versions of this amazing discussion. Finally, as you leave today's webinar, we hope you'll be directed to an online evaluation tool in which you can provide us feedback on today's session.

I urge all the attendees to fill this out, as it really helps us in our planning. So now, back to you, Roger. And Roger, I just want to say what a big pleasure it's been working with you on this.

### **[Roger Harris]**

Absolutely, and I'll try to wrangle the end rather than mangle it. But yes, please, let's go in the order of the presentations and let's hear a final two words from each of you. I know there's so much to say, and a big apology to those who put questions in the Q&A.

We had so many questions. Hopefully, we've answered some. We invite you to come to the future sessions to hear some more answers, but we weren't able to get to everybody's questions.

So let's kick that off with Maria.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Well, I thank you very much for this opportunity. I beg you to please speak to as many people as you can. I am always astounded when I am in company of people who are very educated, very savvy, and yet they say to me, well, how come I don't know this?

How come I haven't read this in the newspapers? Because especially here in Canada, people are really, really far away from things and just don't know very much of what's happening in Latin America. But we have to speak.

We have to talk. And here in Canada, we have to pressure Ottawa, because Ottawa is daydreaming. And so it is important for us to talk, and if we can, to talk to the politicians.

And I beg all of you who are listening for your solidarity for the people of Venezuela, who at this moment are in very great danger and need all the international solidarity that they can get. And it would be greatly appreciated. And thank you very much, Helena and Roger, for organizing this wonderful panel.

Thank you.

**[Leonardo Flores]**

Yes, I want to echo those comments by Maria. Thank you, Roger. Thank you, Helena.

Thank you, all the co-sponsors. And also, thank you, Marjorie and Maria. It's really a pleasure to be a panelist on a webinar and also learn something at the same time.

My final words, you know, I've been debating over the last few minutes what to say, but I think I'm going to echo what Roger started with, which is that this attack on Venezuela is just part of a larger pattern, part of a larger threat against Latin America and the Caribbean. We barely mentioned the boat strikes. I know Marjorie did at the end.

But there's been 32 of these boat strikes in international waters. And what really catches my eye is that 20 of those 32, including the last 12, have all been on the Pacific Ocean. Venezuela doesn't have a Pacific coastline.

So although Trump always invokes Venezuela during these boat attacks and talks about Venezuela, more than half of these attacks have not occurred, have not involved Venezuelans in any way whatsoever. And so while Trump is openly threatening Cuba, is openly threatening Mexico, openly threatening Colombia, he's seeking to destabilize the entire hemisphere. And that's dangerous, not just for Latin Americans and Caribbean, it's dangerous for the United States as well, because that is going to severely destabilize the southern border of the United States.

On top of that, there are two big elections coming up in Latin America this year, Colombia and Brazil. And if history informs us, what we saw in Honduras, when the Trump administration interfered in ways that I'd never really seen before, going so far as to have robocalls to possible progressive voters, threatening them with sanctions if their candidate wins, then we're going to see massive interference in the Colombian and Brazilian elections. In fact, it's already started because Trump decertified Colombia in the war on drugs, he sanctioned the President Petro, and he's basically saying that Petro is next.

In terms of Brazil, Trump imposed tariffs on Brazil, because Brazil imprisons their own ex-corrupt President Jair Bolsonaro. So it's not just about Venezuela. And I'm on the streets almost every day saying, hands off Venezuela, but it's also hands off Latin America and the Caribbean.

Haiti, they're preparing an invasion force, and they have been for several years. Let's not forget that. And let's unite around all of these issues, because I understand that Venezuela can be a little controversial, to say the least.

But we have to move beyond this idea that it's just Venezuela. The United States is targeting all of the entire hemisphere.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you. Professor Cohn?

**[Prof. Marjorie Cohn]**

Yes. Thank you to everyone involved in the organizing and my fellow panelists. Brilliant presentations.

I want to echo what Leonardo said about writing letters to the editor. It's really critical. Write op-eds or letters to the editor.

It's not hard to get them published. You just keep it under 150 words, peg it to a news story or an opinion piece. And if your letter doesn't get published, other letters from the same point of view will, because they add up the number of letters that they get from that particular point of view.

Congress members do respond to pressure from their constituents, and that's letters, emails, sitting in their offices, mass action. And finally, I think a lot of people are still in shock about what happened on the 3rd. But as Joe Hill once said so beautifully, don't mourn, organize.

Yes.

**[Roger Harris]**

Thank you so much. We've talked a lot about Mr. Maduro and Mr. Trump, but in a way it goes way beyond those two individuals. Mr. Trump will be gone, but the U.S. imperial thrust

will continue. And this is a long struggle. It goes beyond Mr. Maduro as well. It goes to all the people, progressive peoples.

So see you in the streets, see you next Thursday. And thank you very much to the panelists and to all the participants.

**[María Paéz Victor]**

Thank you.

**[Roger Harris]**

And thank you to my co-moderator, Helena Cobban.