

Attempted Coup in Venezuela with Abby Martin, Greg Wilpert, Paul Jay. (Video & Text)



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Story Transcript

SHARMINI PERIES: It's The Real News Network. I'm Sharmini Peries, coming to you from Baltimore.

President Nicolas Maduro held an international press conference from Miraflores, Caracas, fighting back against the opposition and the U.S. endorsement of Juan Guaido, who swore himself in as the president of the republic on Tuesday. He took several questions from the international press, and here's some of what he had to say.

NICOLAS MADURO: There is simultaneously the intent to make a coup d'etat against Venezuela. There is even an intervention directed possibly from Washington. We see it, they see it, everybody sees it. I am not against the United States of America, I'm against imperialism. Colonialism must not be

defended. No country has the right to colonialize other continents or other countries. If Donald Trump ended the Obama strategy with my country, Venezuela, I might be able to forgive and enter into dialogue with him, but I see that very improbable.

SHARMINI PERIES: Until yesterday, the big question was where the Venezuelan military stood on the question of Juan Guaido swearing himself in as the president of the republic. Then yesterday, we had the Defense Minister, Padrino Lopez, who came out and endorsed Maduro as the legitimate president of the republic. Here is what he had to say.

PADRINO LOPEZ: I warned the people of Venezuela of this very dangerous claim. It's dangerous for our integrity and our social peace. I warned the people of Venezuela that a coup d'etat is coming against our institutions, against our democracy, against our Constitution and against President Nicolas Maduro, the legitimate president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

SHARMINI PERIES: To talk about the unfolding coup, or the crisis in Venezuela, we have three guests. One, we have Abby Martin coming to us from Los Angeles. She's the host of Empire Files. Thanks for joining us, Abby.

ABBY MARTIN: Thanks so much.

SHARMINI PERIES: And in our studio, we have Gregory Wilpert, he's the Managing Editor of The Real News Network and he's also the author of Changing Venezuela by Taking Power. We also have our Senior Editor Paul Jay joining us. Thanks for joining us, Paul.

PAUL JAY: Thank you.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right, let me go to you Abby. First of all, the crisis unfolding in Venezuela is something that is familiar to you, since you've been to Venezuela several times to have done several episodes off The Empire Files. What do you make of the unfolding crisis and the events that led up to Juan Guaido swearing himself in?

ABBY MARTIN: Well, Sharmini, thank you very much for doing this, because the corporate media has essentially been covering Venezuela with wall to wall pro-coup, pro-regime change propaganda. And this is nothing new, of course,

we know that there's another side of the story that's been completely obfuscated from the elitist media circles, and that essentially even includes some left media circles, unfortunately, as well. Look, we know that this has been coming ever since, of course, 1999 when Hugo Chavez was democratically elected in Venezuela. We know that the U.S. empire and its cronies and its regime change proxy fronts, the Organization of American States, the Lima Group, all of these entities have been pushing for undemocratic regime change efforts in Venezuela.

So you can go to the 2002 coup, where they ousted Hugo Chavez at the barrel of a gun, tried to privatize the national resources. So they really revealed their hand then and they haven't stopped since. I mean, we're talking about a leadership here that has a mass base of support. We're talking about 6.2 million people, Chavistas in the country that went out last year to vote for Maduro. So yeah, I mean, there are millions of people in the street, of course, protesting that's, asking for the ouster of Maduro. But you cannot ignore the millions of people also who are pro-Maduro, who are Chavista, who are building this base of the Bolivarian Revolution. And they do not want to discard the gains, the widespread social gains that have been in place.

Look, we're talking about a guy, Juan Guaido, 80 percent of the country doesn't know who this guy is. He just appointed himself president. That would be akin to Nancy Pelosi appointing herself president and then China and Russia imposing their rules to basically say, "No, this is the new president of the United States." I mean, it's so absolutely absurd, what is going on. We're talking about a country that has elections every year. The opposition is too fragmented to win elections, so they choose to boycott elections, and then they use the elections to say they're illegitimate because they decide not to run. It's quite fascinating to call something a dictatorship that has free and fair elections, and the opposition actually told the UN to not come and observe.

So it is just unbelievable. I mean, last year when the elections were held, Maduro asked the opposition, "Please, we want a dialogue, we want you to run." They were begging opposition members to run in the elections. The polling places were attacked, socialist enclaves were attacked, people were assassinated and lynched. Just yesterday, someone was burned alive again. So we cannot forget that there is an entire other side of this story and that

this is no doubt an undemocratic, illegal coup perpetrated by the US government and its regime change proxies.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right. Greg, let me go to you. The main point that we heard Maduro in that clip we played is that he knows, he says, that this is being directed by the United States. And it's clear when you actually map the events that unfolded, with Pence speaking to the Venezuelan people just the day before Juan Guaido swears himself in. And now, of course, this has a certain history. And I was wondering if you could map that history for us.

GREG WILPERT: Well, Abby already referred to the 2002 coup attempt, so we don't need to go back to all of that. But throughout the Chavez period and also during the Maduro period, first of all, the United States has been spending tens of millions of dollars on the opposition to fund it. And then, of course, we have the sanctions that already started with the Obama administration that really intensified very importantly in mid-2017, which basically cut off Venezuela from opening up bank accounts abroad and made it very difficult to engage in any kind of financial transactions, and which has made it very difficult to import food and medicine to the country. So those are several different layers of intervention that have been happening.

And then, most recently, and this has been coming out actually just only, interestingly enough, in the past day or so. Associated Press, for example, had an article that just came out today talking about how the Trump administration has been meeting with governments all over the country, all over the Latin American region, basically trying to get them to be on the same page. Juan Guaido himself snuck out of Venezuela and traveled throughout Latin America to make sure that everybody's on the same page. This was an agreement, I mean, to do this. And actually it's kind of surprising in a way that they managed to get away with it, because the Maduro government seemed to have been taken by surprise by all of this. But this was really planned in the long term.

And the most interesting development that I just saw coming over the newswire, so to speak, is that Trump just announced that Elliott Abrams, who was one of the most radical, most violent, most brutal architects of U.S. foreign policy towards Central America, who favored the death squads in El Salvador, is being appointed as being the point person for Venezuela right

now. So you just get an idea of just how far right all of this is moving and what they're doing in order to make sure that the government of Venezuela is removed from office as quickly as possible.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right. Now, the context to some of this, which is that a lot of the U.S. media is covering the crisis in Venezuela as if Venezuela was a gem and a beacon of democracy and equity, and that somehow the Chavez administration and now the Maduro administration has driven it to the state it is in now, and somehow it needs to be saved. Let's take a look at some of the clips from mainstream media in describing what is going on today.

SPEAKER 1: This was once this prosperous democracy, a jewel of Latin America 20 years ago before Chavez, who was then succeeded by Maduro, who was in his regime, in his administration. And it has been a disaster on all counts, both democratically and certainly economically.

SPEAKER 2: New tonight: the socialist dictatorship in Venezuela is potentially less than 24 hours from ceasing to exist. And in a desperate, last-minute scramble, is blaming the peoples' discontent not on their own economic failures, not on their own socialist policies, not on their own corruption, but on the United States.

SPEAKER 3: Hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans taking to the streets, demanding freedom as police use rubber bullets and tear gas to drive the protesters back, the crowds calling for the ouster of their authoritarian President, Nicolas Maduro.

SPEAKER 4: Venezuela has been hit by massive protests. With its economy cratering, millions have tried to leave.

SPEAKER 5: Maduro still has powerful supporters, including China and Russia, and for now, Jeff, his own military.

SPEAKER 6: A story we will keep watching for sure.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right Paul, you and I, we've lived through two of these coups that have taken place now in Venezuela. This one isn't complete and let's hope it's not going to end up—

PAUL JAY: It's not yet a coup, it's an attempted coup.

SHARMINI PERIES: Exactly, an attempted coup. Give us a sense of what's wrong with that coverage we just saw.

PAUL JAY: Well, I think you've got to divide this into two parts. The most important part right now is are we, Americans, people of the world, going to accept absolute violation of any kind of norm of international law? Are we going to go back to the days of the United States picking who gets to govern in Latin America and many other countries of the world? Trump has just taken this another step. At the very least, it was the Nuremberg trials after World War II that helped establish the concept that wars of aggression is the highest form of crime against humanity. An extension of that is interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Now, of course, the United States violated this over and over again since World War II. The Vietnam War was illegal. But there was always a fig leaf of excuse that somehow you could hang this on international law and pretend it was.

What Trump's doing now with Venezuela is not even a fig leaf of pretending there's a legal justification for this. And it's to take Latin America back to the worst of the old days, where the United States gets to put into power what becomes military dictatorships that serve these tiny oligarchies, and the vicious repression that took place in Latin America that led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people who fought for basic democratic rights. So the violation of international law, the supporting of this coup in the most naked, aggressive form from the Trump administration; number one, this needs to be denounced and not accepted. Some of the countries of Latin America are dripping with hypocrisy. Canada endorses this. I mean, no one should be surprised.

Because I was in Venezuela in 2005, I guess it was, and I visited—I used to be kind of a known filmmaker in Canada—and I visited the Canadian embassy just to say hi because I was interested in what they were doing down there. And I go to visit, and lo and behold, they've actually got about seven members of the opposition, anti-Chavez opposition to me with me, to brief me on how horrible the Chavez government is. Like, how is that a role for the Canadian government? Well, now they actually endorse a coup. The hypocrisy of the Canadian government here, I mean, it's worse in some ways than the other Latin American countries because the far right has taken over, like in Brazil and some of the other places. Canada still pretends to believe in the norms

of international law. And for Canada to become this, I don't know, I can't think of the curse word that's strong enough to talk about Canadian foreign policy, kissing the ass of Trump and playing ball here. For what? For trade concessions, to get on Trump's good side and for their own despicable agenda in Latin America. So number one, this needs to be just denounced.

Number two, one has to recognize the economic model that starts with Chavez and then Maduro, Maduro gets handed a pretty bad hand of cards by Chavez. There are some real problems in the Venezuelan economy. And we who denounce this interference in Venezuelan affairs should not also be quiet about the mistakes that were made by the Bolivarian Revolution, what went wrong in the economy and the fact that there are such horrible problems. You can't blame it all on us sanctions. This economic model, economic plan wasn't working, and one needs to dissect that. And it's not all the Americans fault. But why was there a Chavez if life was so wonderful before Chavez? If this was the jewel of Latin America, why the hell did people vote for Chavez.

The period they're talking about, where in fact there is a point—Greg can correct me on this—I think it's maybe in the late 1950s, standard of living was almost the same as West Germany's, but not pre-Chavez. When the oil price dumped in the 1980s and inflation went to 100 percent in Venezuela before Chavez. And the great inequality gap existed, but it far widened, and poverty, the grand scale of poverty in the country increased. That's why people voted for Chavez, because there was a mass movement in 1989. One of the first large demonstrations against the IMF and these policies people call neoliberal, of hyper-capitalism, getting Latin American countries into super debt and then pillaging, plundering the countries in debt repayments and trying to transform the economy so that all they do is wind up sending money up to American banks. That's what gave rise to Chavez, not some wonderful, "la la" Venezuela.

So number one, the aggression is absolutely unacceptable, the support for a coup. Two, it wasn't "la la land" when Chavez got elected, it was inequality land, it was disaster land. And people were fighting against these policies, and Chavez rose as the leader of this movement. Number three, lots of mistakes made. Lots of things. I can never say lots of mistakes made without also saying, "easy for us to say, sitting up here not surrounded by enemies with guns."

SHARMINI PERIES: And let me turn to you. Paul here was talking about the Caracazo in 1989, when the conditions and the neoliberal policies of the World Bank and the IMF had driven the Venezuelan economy to the ground in spite of the fact that it was an oil-producing country, and people were out protesting. And Hugo Chavez openly talks about how this was such a turning point in terms of his own politics and him coming to consciousness about having to do something about it. Now, I'm going to go to you here, Abby, and then I'm going to allow Greg to contextualize that history in Venezuela.

But Abby, when you were in Venezuela and you found yourself in the midst of some of the protests that were obviously not from the Chavista side, but the opposition demonstrations, who were also demonstrating the crises, not only the political but the economic crises that they were facing. Now, from what you know and what you observed, these demonstrations that you found yourself in the midst of and tear gassed and so on, were they discontent, on the part of the people, and how did you read the situation there?

ABBY MARTIN: Sure. Well, I think of course we can't characterize all the protests in the way that I experienced the fascistic kind of violent wing of the protests that are given a wink and a nod from the opposition leaders, and that's an important thing to understand. So even though they're not openly calling for that violence, they allow it, they codify it and they encourage it. And so, these opposition protests turned violent, even though there's millions of people in the streets that are peacefully protesting without any sort of interference from the military, right. You had these wings that I was in the middle of that are commandeering 18 wheeler trucks, they're burning people alive that are Black Chavistas, this is on camera, this has happened several times. They're blockading freeways, setting up huge flaming barricades, and on top of that, committing acts of violence and assassinations, again targeting socialist enclaves.

I actually spoke to one protester holding a pin grenade, shirtless, kind of methed out. And I said, "What are you doing? Why do you have a pin grenade in your hand?" And he said, "I can't be an entrepreneur." And I said, "Wait, what do you mean? I thought this was a starving nation and desperate times call for desperate measures, that's what the corporate media is saying." So it really, really gave me some stark insight in what this is really about, Sharmini. And let's just be honest, the media is complicit in this attempted

coup. I just heard them call Venezuela the “jewel of Latin America” before Chavez. Really? Because it had the highest inflation in Latin America. You had increasing unemployment. More than 40 percent of the population was in extreme poverty. That was under U.S. ally, Rafael Caldera.

So this started, obviously, in 1989. It’s gone all the way to Trump, but we can’t forget that Obama declared Venezuela that unique national security threat 2015, slapped sanctions on Venezuela. Trump escalated those, added 63 more, the troika of tyranny talk, and all of this has been fomented. But the media, it’s quite shocking what they’re doing. You have the Washington Post today basically admitting, at the same time gaslighting us, saying this is not a coup. It’s all dressed in constitutional garb. The same opposition that just tried to blow up Maduro on television just weeks ago is now a strict constitutionalist, just a law-abiding constitutionalist. So that’s an interesting kind of talking point.

But the media is fascinating, because the Washington Post editorial board, not only did they immediately endorse this guy, this random guy as the new president of Venezuela, they also just published an article yesterday that was quite fascinating. They said, according to White House officials, that U.S. strategy has been to try to convince Venezuelans that Maduro cannot lead and try to build up Guaido as the legitimate leader. This is actually quoted in The Washington Post. So on one hand, they’re gaslighting us, saying no, it’s not a coup. The New York Times called that actually a “Russian talking point.” And at the same time, they’re just blatantly explaining how the coup has been in effect and potentially carried out by the Trump administrations. It’s quite fascinating.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right. Greg, now offline before we got to onto this panel, we were talking about this is somewhat consistent with the other kinds of legislative coups that have been orchestrated also by the U.S. in conjunction with oppositions. I’m particularly talking about what happened in Brazil, for example, with the governments there and putting Bolsonaro in power now, and several other countries that have also undergone these kinds of legislative coups where they’re making an effort to make sure that the progressive or left governments don’t come into power in Latin America. Tell us a little bit about these other coups that are taking place. And also, I want to remind people that the people that are now in power in terms of U.S.

foreign policy are the same people that were there when the coup against Chavez took place. And here I'm talking about John Boltons and Elliott Abrams' of the world that we were talking about earlier.

GREG WILPERT: Yeah. I mean, I think it's interesting that the legislatures are being used in this way. I mean, it's not just Brazil. The same thing happened in Paraguay, where they deposed Fernando Lugo a couple of years ago, who was a progressive leftist priest who had run on a progressive platform. And within a very short amount of time, because he didn't control the legislature, they basically threw him out through a legislative coup. And actually, what happened in Honduras in some ways, in some sense was that pattern as well. Because there too, the legislature actually was being used as an excuse to remove Manuel Zelaya from office. So you see this happening over and over again. But I think that's just a matter of strategy. I mean, depending on the country, different strategies are being used.

And of course, behind that, now I don't think that the U.S. is always the puppet master per se, but we do know, for example, that the U.S. government has been very instrumentally involved in Brazil, for example, in terms of trying to move forward the corruption investigations and providing select information for the corruption investigation in order to tar the Workers Party in Brazil, even though everybody knows that far more people from the other parties are actually involved in corruption. And actually there's evidence, I mean, it's not a number that was just taken out of thin air. It's there, but the ones that are being prosecuted are the ones from the Workers Party in Brazil.

So in other words, there is a strategy at work that's being worked out in various ways depending on what the opportunities are. And of course, in the Venezuelan case, the main opportunity was of course the economic crisis. I think that's important to always go back to, because the economic crisis on the one hand was provoked by the United States through sanctions. But it was preceded by mistakes, I think, from the Maduro government that opened it up to that opportunity for the U.S. government, through its misguided exchange rate policy errors and how to manage the oil industry. It put itself in a very, very vulnerable situation, and that was, of course, the opportunity that the U.S. is exploiting now, together with, of course, the help of the legislature in Venezuela.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right. Now, the objective in some of the conversations we're having here is also to look at a way forward now. The fact that Venezuela is in crisis, there has to be a solution that is peaceful. And as Trump has threatened a military option is not off the table, we don't want it to get to that, where we see violence and people killed and bloodshed. But in terms of a way out of the current situation, Greg, I know you have some ideas. I'll give you an opportunity, but let me go to you first.

PAUL JAY: Well, I think two things. I'm not a Venezuelan, but I know Venezuelans are asking for this. Maduro needs to propose an economic model that has a way out of the crisis in terms of the hyperinflation, the exchange rate issues. There has to be some economic vision or I don't think this government is going to last. I don't think there's very many Venezuelans that want the United States to decide who's going to govern Venezuela. This is widely unpopular, I would guess. There's tremendous disdain, anger for the role the United States played in Latin America in Venezuela. I mean, why did Chavez and Maduro keep denouncing the U.S.? Well, not only because it deserved to get denounced, because it was so popular, in some ways too much. Sometimes I used to be quite critical of Chavez and Maduro, like "solve some of your problems and yell at the Americans a little less." But it would work in Venezuela because people are so opposed to U.S. interference in Venezuela.

So the need to push back on the Americans deciding who's going to govern is very important. But in the long run, if there isn't a vision on how this economy is going to recover, I don't know how that Maduro lasts. But Venezuelans need to get the oligarchy that was in power before Chavez. They were the problem, that system was the problem. And to think there's a solution by going back to that oligarchy and going back to that power, and somehow that's supposedly—the people that killed hundreds of people in that demonstration and maybe thousands in 1989, those are the forces that are behind this attempted coup. To think that's going to bring democracy to Venezuela, it's a delusion. But when people are desperate, you buy into delusions. So that's the first thing.

The need for an open, honest debate in Venezuela. Maduro needs to open this up. There has to be a place for the progressive forces who don't want the Americans to interfere and decide who rules, but there has to be a space for an honest conversation about the way out of the mess. And so far, we're not

seeing that. So everyone needs to defend Venezuela from outside interference, but friends of Venezuela should also say, "Listen, an honest conversation," not just more propaganda blaming everything on the U.S., even though the Americans deserve lots of blame.

SHARMINI PERIES: All right. Abby, let me go to you. Given the polarized political situation in Venezuela, is an honest conversation and a way forward possible?

ABBY MARTIN: Well, Paul, how can we have an honest conversation? I mean, that's what he's been proposing to the opposition this whole time. I mean, that's what the Constituent Assembly was about, it was trying to open dialogue, trying to open the democratic process. I mean, that's all they've called for. The opposition accepts nothing but Maduro stepping down. The opposition needs to denounce violence. Sharmini, you asked me about the opposition protest before. I think it's very important to note that the opposition protesters were responsible for well more than half of the deaths in the streets. And this number is just parroted by corporate media, acting as if Maduro's forces are gunning down peaceful protesters. That couldn't be farther from the truth. So they encourage violence, they use violence as a tactic to get this international solidarity from people who don't know what the hell is actually going on. So they need to denounce the violence.

And also, I think it's very important to stand unified, shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters here that are anti-imperialist, standing shoulder to shoulder in solidarity with the Bolivarian Revolution. Because we need to trust them to figure out their own problems. I mean, I don't want to impose what I think Venezuela should do with their economy right now. I want to stand in unified opposition to my own government implementing debilitating sanctions that have already cost Venezuela six billion dollars. They are preventing Venezuela from recovering their economy. So I think it's very fair to say, yes, well we can't blame all the problems on America, right now the sanctions are preventing an economic recovery. They can't take out international loans, they have no allies in the international field. And the opposition is sabotaging that with their power in the National Assembly.

So right now, they need to work within the democratic bounds of the Constitution. The Constitution is very clear. They're dressing up this

attempted coup in constitutional garb. Tens of millions of lives are at stake. We know that Trump is putting the military option on the table and we know that he will potentially do that. This would not have happened without a green light from Trump. I don't think Obama would have done this. So right now, we need to stand in opposition to what Trump is planning to do to get that oil, because we know that's what this is about.

PAUL JAY: Yeah. I don't disagree with 85 percent of what Abby just said. But when I say an open, honest conversation, I don't think the leading elements of the opposition are capable of an open, honest conversation. They want to reimpose the dictatorship of the Venezuelan oligarchy. I'm talking about an open, honest conversation amongst the progressive forces, the people's forces. Because right now, and even during the time of Chavez, although my understanding is worse now, but there were times where critique of the policy was considered disloyalty and that people that had honest proposals and honest suggestions and wanted honest debate, especially on economic policy, were closed down. You could be called a CIA agent for just raising a question to such and such policies wrong. In no way am I saying that the fascist opposition needs to be drawn into this open discourse, because there's nothing honest about the leaders of this opposition. But in the people's forces, there needs to be more space.

GREG WILPERT: I just want to add something. The problem, of course, is that right now, the government feels itself being under siege, basically. And so, that makes it very difficult to have that openness that you're talking about. I mean, I agree with you, that would be great to have it. But it's extremely difficult when it's under attack of calling for a coup basically every day, telling the military to rise up. And then every criticism is perceived as a possible next step towards a real coup. And so, in that sense I'm not sure if—I think that part of that opening will have to go through the opposition. Right now, Venezuela has had negotiations with the more moderate opposition for a long time, and there's been progress and they're trying to make an advance. But they've been totally marginalized by the radical opposition.

And so, the key is to find a way either to actually, in a way, unite the opposition so that they can actually negotiate some kind of opening so that the government can itself then also open up more because it's less under siege. Now, that's the real trick, I think. Because at the moment, it doesn't

look like that opening is going to be possible under these conditions. And those conditions, in other words, need to be changed, which of course involves the United States as well, which is very unfortunate and is making a bad situation much worse.

PAUL JAY: Well, the United States wants regime change, they have no other agenda.

GREG WILPERT: Right. We have to be completely clear on it. And not just regime change, they want to completely wipe Chavismo and the Bolivarian Revolution from the face of the earth. That's the objective and that's the reason that the radical opposition doesn't want to make any concessions. Because any concession could imply some remnants of Chavismo remaining in power, and they just want to make sure everybody is removed from office and the complete memory, actually, of Chavez and the project is forgotten.

PAUL JAY: Again, it's easy to say for me, sitting here. But there needs to be a vision that feels like there's going to be some new way out of this economic morass. The millions of people that voted for Maduro and the millions of people that maybe not had voted for Maduro and also didn't vote for the opposition, who just didn't vote at all, and didn't vote for the opposition because they know the opposition is B.S., but they've lost their faith in Maduro, those people need to be excited, rallied. And I don't see how that happens without Maduro opening up to other progressive voices, other anti-imperialist voices, widening the conversation about how to deal with the economic problems and political issues.

But whatever, that's up to the Venezuelans. In the final analysis, this is why I agreed with what Abby said 85 percent. Living in this country, there's in the end really one important thing to say. The United States should stay the hell out of Venezuela and they're the ones that backed the Venezuelan oligarchy in first place. They've been trying to undermine the Bolivarian Revolution from day one. And everyone knows the intent of the United States, and it's even more overt and more nakedly aggressive with the Trump administration, is just to reap a profit from the Venezuelan oil fields for American interests. They don't give a damn about democracy and all the other rhetoric they use.

SHARMINI PERIES: Let me give you the final word, Greg, in terms of speaking of oil. We also have to recognize that Venezuela is endowed with a lot more than oil. It has gold, it has nickel, it's a very resource rich country, which is why the United States has a particular eye on it. So just quickly outline the interests of the United States in Venezuela. And then, finally, you do have a solution for Nicolas Maduro in terms of what he could do next to resolve the current crisis, so also speak about that.

GREG WILPERT: Well, I mean, first of all, I think most people do not realize that Venezuela has the largest, the largest oil reserves in the world, larger than Saudi Arabia, larger than Iran, Iraq, than Canada, Russia, whatever, the United States. And that's still the key. I mean, of course it also has all these other resources. Hopefully they can stay in the ground, actually, because it would be very environmentally damaging to take them all out of the ground. But still, that's definitely one of the main interests of the United States and the corporate interests that are behind this. And so, that's what makes the situation, of course, extremely difficult for Venezuela. Because unlike some other countries, it cannot just putter on doing its own thing, because it's going to attract attention because of those resources.

As far as the way out, now I don't have the solution, I wouldn't even say that. I totally agree with what Paul is saying, that the first step is to fix the economy, and of course, that under the given, these current circumstances, it's extremely difficult, of course, especially if Venezuela can't continue to sell its oil to the United States for which it depends. Almost a third to half of its oil production goes to the United States, I think it's about a third now. That's still a huge chunk. And 95 percent of its foreign earnings come from oil exports. And a huge chunk—it used to be 40 percent of what's being consumed, I don't know what the numbers are now. But it used to be 40 percent of what Venezuelans consumed was imported. So I mean, that's just a huge chunk of money that would go missing and that they wouldn't be able to import.

So anyway, the economic situation is so fundamental. And it's going to be almost impossible, as we've said on other programs here at The Real News, it's going to be almost impossible to fix with these sanctions or with worsening sanctions in place. But the one thing that they can do is try to fix the exchange rate problem and stop the hyperinflation. I do think they

can do that. That's going to be difficult, but it's not impossible. Mark Weisbrot here has outlined the possible strategy for that. The other thing is, and that's also something we already talked about, which is the political crisis. They have to overcome the political crisis to move forward.

And as I said before, it would go through some form of—Maduro has said that he is open to negotiations even with Guaido. And that's what needs to be amplified throughout the world, that Maduro is open to negotiations and has been willing to make concessions. Matter of fact, the early elections that they had last year was actually a demand of the opposition. It was only in the last minute that the opposition decided to boycott these elections, the presidential election. If they had participated, there's a very good chance, actually I think, that the opposition might have won. But for strategic reasons, they decided not to, partly also because they couldn't agree on a unitary candidate, in which case they would have lost probably. But a political agreement is the other thing that has to precede a solution to this crisis, and certainly not what the United States is doing.

PAUL JAY: Can I add just one little thing?

SHARMINI PERIES: Yes.

PAUL JAY: Just as an important thing to keep our eye on, Mexico did not recognize this illegal president. Other than Brazil, Mexico is the next big giant in North America/Latin America, it's got a foot in both, really. AMLO and this new progressive government in Mexico, we need to keep an eye on how much might they be able to help Venezuela. And I don't know what their capability is, but it's a very big economy and politically very important in the region. And the fact that Mexico is in a position now to stand up to U.S. policy in Latin America, this is a very important and perhaps very positive feature of this whole issue.

SHARMINI PERIES: And the next development in terms of the crisis in Venezuela is that the Security Council of the United Nations is expected to meet tomorrow, Saturday, to deliberate over what is going on. There's a lot the Security Council can do. Lifting up the sanctions might be a possibility, among other things, in terms of helping Venezuela. In fact, Venezuelan government itself had sent its foreign minister last week to the United

Nations, asking for assistance in resolving the crises, because obviously they saw this coming.

So I thank you, the panel, for joining us. Abby Martin in Los Angeles, host of Empire Files. And Greg Wilpert here, the Managing Editor of The Real News Network. And our Senior Editor, Paul Jay. Thank you all for joining us.

ABBY MARTIN: Thank you.

SHARMINI PERIES: And thank you for joining us here on The Real News Network.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Real News Network is a public-supported independent information channel. **Abby Martin, Paul Jay, and Sharmini Peries** are anti-imperialist social justice citizen journalists.



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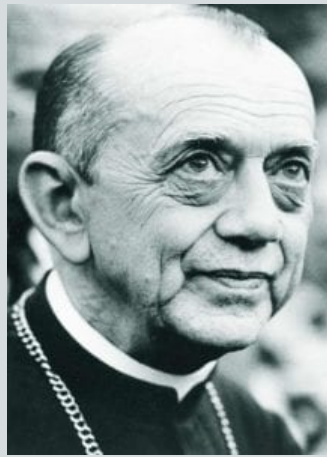
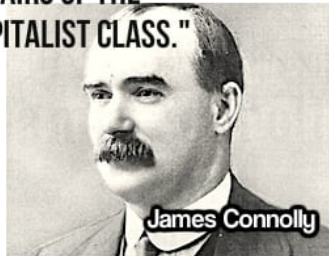
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Revolutionary wisdom

Words from an Irish patriot—

"GOVERNMENTS IN CAPITALIST SOCIETY ARE BUT COMMITTEES OF THE RICH TO MANAGE THE AFFAIRS OF THE CAPITALIST CLASS."



"There are three kinds of violence. The first, the mother of all the others, is the institutional violence, the one that legalizes and perpetuates the dominations, the oppressions and the exploitations, the one that crushes and flattens millions of men in its silent and well oiled wheels. The second is revolutionary violence, which arises from the desire to abolish the first. The third is repressive violence, the object of which is to stifle the second by making itself the auxiliary and the accomplice of the first violence, the one that engenders all the others. There is no worse hypocrisy to call violence only the second, by pretending to forget the first, which gives birth to it, and the third which kills it. "

—**Dom Helder Camara**, Brazilian Archbishop and liberation theologian