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## ***Have the Russian Military Aircrafts in Venezuela Breached the Door to “America’s Backyard”?***

At an international media conference last December 12 in Caracas Venezuela’s President Nicolas Maduro referred emphatically to knowledge, that his government had acquired through its intelligence services, of preparations to destabilize Venezuela.

That in itself is major news but it is noticeable that his denunciation only two days after the well-publicized landing of Russian military aircrafts at Venezuela’s international Simon Bolivar airport of Maiquetía as part of Russia-Venezuela joint military exercises and training. This is not the first occurrence of military cooperation between Russia and Venezuela but this seems to be the first time such news has had enough impact on Washington to prompt a strong and undiplomatic reaction from the U.S. Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo who referred to the two countries as “two corrupt governments squandering public fund” in a tweet.

Is Russia putting a major gaping hole into “America’s backyard” with the help of Venezuela? It appears to be so, and certainly Venezuela is quite a wide door in geopolitical terms capable of countering the political reversals of some countries in the region surrendering to neoliberal ideology.

Russia’s display of support for Venezuela is not totally surprising for two reasons. First, the U.S. government has had a very aggressive policy against Russia by pushing the NATO military coalition to the doorsteps of Russia’s front yard despite the “iron clad guarantee” given by the U.S. administration in February 1990 to the then Soviet president Gorbachev that “NATO will not expand one inch.” The aggression continues today with the possibility of including Ukraine and Belarus in the NATO military alliance. Moscow

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indicates that it has the willingness and the capability to match Washington's military threat in its own turf.

Second, in addition to military threats to both countries, the Trump administration has slapped sanctions against Russia and Venezuela, which also brings them closer as victims of economic warfare. The military threats against Venezuela are much more menacing therefore a balancing assistance from a more powerful friend is welcome.

But the timing of the assistance is also important to consider. Maduro will be sworn in as president of Venezuela for the next six years on January 10 following his re-election last May 20. This is a widely anticipated event not least because there have been "rumors" of major disruptions being organized in order to prevent it from happening. Russia is sending a clear signal that it fully endorses and supports the next Maduro presidency.

However, the official position is that these are not just rumors and the disruptions may include violent and terrorist tactics. To that effect president Maduro stated at the media conference: "Today I come again to denounce the plot that from the White House is being prepared to violate Venezuelan democracy, to assassinate me and to impose a dictatorial government in Venezuela." Then he added more pointedly, "Mr. John Bolton has been appointed again, as head of the plot to turn Venezuela to violence and to seek a foreign military intervention, a coup, to assassinate President Maduro and impose what they call a 'transitional government council'. I'm saying this to you to unveil their plans."

John Bolton is the National Security Advisor of the United States with the reputation of coining the term "troika of tyranny" in reference to the democratically elected, progressive governments of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela.

Maduro's statements are perfectly credible mainly based on specific details he provided. He revealed that a paramilitary group, called the G-8, is being trained in the municipality of Tona, in North Santander, Colombia. The group of 734 mercenaries, including Colombians and Venezuelans, are being prepared to undertake false flag actions.

Another group of mercenaries is being trained to attack Venezuela at the U.S. military base of Tolemaida in Colombia, one of the 7 bases that the U.S. maintains in that country.

Maduro also revealed that yet another commando group is located at the Eglin base of the U.S. Air Force in Florida. This "group of special forces is being trained for a surgical aggression against Venezuelan air and military bases. Its objective is to disembark, take and neutralize the Libertador air base at Palo Negro, the Puerto Cabello naval base and the Barcelona air base."

For the historical record on these facts, Maduro's statements and revelations were followed up with a formal diplomatic note of protest delivered by Venezuelan Minister of foreign affairs Jorge Arreaza to the U.S. chargé d'affaires, James Story in Caracas.

The deployment of the Russian warplanes in Venezuela – just one week after President Nicolas Maduro's visit to Moscow – consists of two TU-160 long-range bombers with nuclear capability, an An-124 heavy military transport plane and an Il-62 long-haul plane of the Russian aerospace forces. These are technologically advanced aircrafts whose force is still modest when compared to the 22 U.S. military bases in Latin America and the more than 800 in the world. However, the message that the action sends must be seen as a strong deterrent to any military intervention in Venezuela especially coming from Colombia.

Venezuela Minister of defense, Vladimir Padrino explained, "We must tell the people of Venezuela and the entire world that ... we are also preparing to defend Venezuela to the last extent when necessary."

### **Concluding thoughts**

It has been about 115 years since the practice of the Monroe doctrine established the U.S. unilateral right to dominance in the countries of Latin America. The first time that the attribution was unsuccessfully challenged was in 1962 during the so-called Cuban missile crisis when the Soviet Union attempted to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba. The recent deployment of Russian military aircrafts in Venezuela may not be as spectacular but it is certainly of considerable importance for the reasons and the timing mentioned above.

The U.S. response must be more measured today because Washington does not have the full political hegemony in Latin America that it had in the 1960s therefore Venezuela retains a tactical advantage. At present the so-called "America's backyard" may not appear to be as inviolable providing a new opening to the Bolivarian vision of the Patria Grande (Great homeland).

U.S. sanctions and military threats have certainly been contributing factors to the strategic alliance between Russia and Venezuela. Another possible member of this alliance of resistance is Iran, also subject to U.S. sanctions and threats. In fact, the Islamic Republic of Iran has announced that will soon send warships to Venezuela as a sign of strategic partnership.

What makes Russia's presence in the region not only relevant but also valuable is its outstanding record in the combination of defense diplomacy and balancing role successfully used in the Middle East to allow Syria to defeat terrorism, to a great extent,

while simultaneously deterring the U.S. from militarily achieving a regime change against the legitimate government of Bashar al-Assad.

Russia practices a remarkable two-prong approach in its foreign policy that combines a responsible non-hegemonic military strength with careful maintenance of balance of forces in particularly conflictive areas. This is precisely what is needed in Latin America in order to preserve peace, as opposed to the divide-and-rule approach used by U.S. foreign policy.

More broadly, Russia and Venezuela share a common view of a multipolar world cooperating in social, military and economic areas of interest that replaces the hegemonic unipolar strangling financial world dominated by the U.S.

Finally, the U.S. response to the deployment of Russian aircrafts is not yet clear. Past track record may suggest a diplomatic reaction like a formal denunciations at the UN or through the OAS, or the use of any warfare tools ranging from more sanctions to infowar, to hybrid war including false flag actions as announced by Maduro. But any U.S. supported attempt to prevent the swearing in ceremony on January 10, or any subsequent attempts to destabilize Venezuela will have grave consequences in human lives to which the perpetrators will have to respond towards the international community.

Nevertheless, Venezuela is not letting its guards down and is quite aware that Russia is not there to put troops on the ground but only to provide assistance and training to the Venezuelan military to modernize its weapons systems.

Should there be a military intervention or hybrid war in Venezuela, Maduro has already given the basic instructions: "I order all our National Bolivarian Armed Forces, to be alert and maintain maximum deployment, discipline, leadership and preparation, in order to defeat imperial conspiracies and maintain peace. Venezuela counts on you!" And progressive Latin America counts on Venezuela in turn.