
Divided Caribbean Faces Chaos in Event of Military Intervention in Venezuela

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When imagining the 28 island nations which form the Caribbean, pictures of long white sand beaches, warm temperatures, and calm waters are all that captures the mind. And while the region may fight this stereotypical view, it has primarily earned this reputation from being one of the few zones of peace in the world and tourism marketing campaigns, where it has positioned itself as a destination for one and all.

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The region, however, would have hardly been a consideration when Juan Guaidó proclaimed himself interim president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The unelected United States-backed opposition politician and head of the opposition-controlled National Assembly was an unknown quantity in Venezuelan politics and the region. The act of swearing himself in as president using Article 233 of the country's constitution and his coronation as the only legitimate leader of the South American country by the United States, Canada, the European Union and several

right-wing governments across the region has poured gas on Venezuela's current sociopolitical woes as the United States and its allies continue moves to topple President Nicolas Maduro.

The move has, of course, sent shockwaves around Latin America and even the Caribbean, which has over the last 20 years developed closer relations with Venezuela than any other mainland Spanish-speaking country in the region. Venezuela's relationship with the island nations and CARICOM, the region's fifteen-nation regional integration and cooperation body, along with the likely fallout are unconsidered factors when the threats of a military intervention were discussed following U.S. President Donald Trump's declaration that "all options are on the table" to achieve his desired goals in the Latin American nation.

However, if one were to take into context the landscape of the Caribbean and Latin America and the over 70 U.S. military bases and its history of intervention in conflicts real or manufactured around the world and in the region. It would be shortsighted for any realistic observers in those island nations to believe a successful military intervention of any scale would be executed without the active or passive participation of several of the Caribbean countries closer to Venezuela or without the region succumbing to immediate fallout.

The Caribbean has already felt the impact of the United States' and its allies economic war on Venezuela, which was ramped up following President Barack Obama claim that Venezuela was a unique national security threat in 2015.

In the last year alone several countries, especially in the Eastern Caribbean, have documented complaints about the detrimental impact these sanctions have had on normal trade relations with Venezuela especially in the area of oil and gas products, which Venezuela supplied them with under concessions linked to the 2005 PetroCaribe Initiative.

In late 2018, Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines acknowledged the issue as a crisis in the making because of their inability to make [foreign exchange payments through regular channels](#) with Venezuela.

"It has an indirect effect on us in respect of the trade in fuel," he explained while detailing the difficulty his country has experienced with fuel imports.

"These are not tankers which have been contracted for and paid for in a number of different ways. They have to get small vessels to transport the fuel, specially designed to transport the fuel. The problem is that these vessels are not owned by Venezuela and you have to pay for them, as I have been advised, through a United States account. We have a small sum of money for Venezuela under the PetroCaribe agreement, but we can't get it to them," he added.

[Jamaica could also experience similar issues](#), with Venezuelan state-owned oil and natural gas company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) owning 49 percent of the Jamaican oil refinery Petrojam, through the subsidiary PDV Caribe.

Trinidad and Tobago, the region's largest economy, positioned just seven miles from Venezuela with its western coast with the eyesight of South America has faced its challenges in this realm. Although Trinidad and Tobago has its own oil and gas riches, its recent agreement to develop petrochemical products from Venezuela's Dragon Fields, which could produce 50 million standard cubic feet per day (mmscf/d), with the possibility of it increasing to 300 mmscf/d, has faced threats from the most recent round of U.S. sanctions and from opposition legislators, who have threatened to blacklist the country for working with the [current Venezuelan administration](#).

Haiti also has a considerable vulnerable due to the PetroCaribe programme. Haiti due to various political crises and the devastating earthquake in February 2010, successive governments have seen Venezuela as a stable partner and source of support. Venezuela's current circumstances have seen a steady decline in PetroCaribe funding. This decline coupled with claims of the misuse of those funds leads to thousands of Haitians protesting for weeks in October and November. Citizens have called for trails for those responsible for the alleged abuse of funds along with the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse, who had proposed the use of some of these funds to embark on an ambitious infrastructure investment plan

Protesters march to demand an investigation into what they say is the alleged

misuse of a Venezuela-sponsored oil programme. Photo: Andres Martinez Casares/Reuters

More recently and with the ongoing human impacts these sanctions have had on the South American country's economy, the Caribbean has also been inundated with an inflow of Venezuelan migrants many of whom have journeyed to take advantage of the more favorable Visa requirements offered to Venezuelan citizens.

With the United Nations projecting 3.6 million persons leaving Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago which has a population of 1.3 million people, has taken in over 40,000 Venezuelans according to its government's estimates. While the Dutch islands of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao along with the mainland territories of Guyana and Suriname have also faced similar challenges, although the numbers haven't been as well documented.

Venezuela, which has a population of 32 million, could see many more citizens leave if a military intervention did take place. Syria's ongoing civil war, for example, forced over 10 million persons from their homes with almost six million taking refuge in neighboring countries. Syria has a population of some 22 million persons.

While these countries may be united in their inability to manage the inflows of Venezuelan migrants, significant divisions have emerged in the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) response to the most recent developments.

Those divisions in CARICOM were laid bare when Jamaica, Saint Lucia, the Bahamas, Haiti, and Guyana voted along with the United States and several right-wing Latin American governments at the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States to declare Maduro's second term illegitimate. While Saint Vincent and the Grenadines led a group, consisting of Suriname and Dominica, which voted against the resolution.

The representatives from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines asserted in voting against the resolution: "The presidential election was assessed by many objective observers, including the Caribbean Observer Mission, to be free and fair. The results reflected the will of the people. A government has been truly elected by the people and for the people. We must respect the sovereign will of the people of Venezuela, nothing more, nothing less."

Five members of CARICOM, Saint Kitts, Trinidad & Tobago, Barbados, Belize, and Grenada abstained from the vote.

The measure at the OAS, in the end, proved ineffectual, with 18 countries opposing the interventionist move.

After the vote and the move internationally to recognize Guaidó, several Caribbean leaders decried the Trump administration's declarations with Saint Vincent's Gonsalves branding it a "Coup d' Etat" while speaking to the Miami Herald and Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne calling it "brazen regime change."

"The majority of countries that are in Caricom do not accept Juan Guaidó as the interim president," Browne said. "In fact, we believe that it is an extremely dangerous precedent... which has absolutely no basis in law, it has no constitutional backing, it has no support of international law, and it's really an affront to democracy within the hemisphere."

Browne also warned the Caribbean should be careful not to be drawn into the ideological war unfolding in Venezuela with the goal of merely removing Maduro from office.

"These people are fighting an ideological war. They believe that socialism in Venezuela would plunge the people into poverty and so on. They want to get rid of these socialist regimes. Okay fine, they can fight their ideological wars, but we have to deal with the practicality and the effects (on the region)," Browne said.

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley has also had similarly strong words for U.S. officials, who have attempted to force CARICOM members into changing their position on the conflict. Rowley sent a clear message to the U.S. Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago Joseph Mondello, who had said he was "deeply concerning" with Trinidad and Tobago's continued recognition of the Maduro administration.

"I take umbrage at the United States' ambassador in Trinidad and Tobago making a public statement criticizing the actions of the government of Trinidad and Tobago while we take action in protection of the interests of the people of Trinidad and Tobago," Rowley said in the country's Parliament last Friday.

"We in Trinidad and Tobago under all of our governments, we have preserved the sovereign position of the people of Trinidad and Tobago," he added. "Until there is a change of government in Venezuela, as Mr. Patrick Manning said when you pick up the phone, is who answer the phone (is) in charge of Venezuela. What they are asking us to do is to take sides largely contrived by external forces. If you are going to have a change of regime in today's world post-World War 2 and you want to do it properly, you're required to go through the UN and sanction it. Trinidad and Tobago will not be invited to take any interest that would damage our relations with neighbors."

Prime Minister Mia Mottley, left, Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, second from left, CARICOM Chair and Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis Dr. Timothy Harris, third from right, and CARICOM General Secretary Irwin LaRocque, second from right. [Twitter/@OPM_TT](https://twitter.com/OPM_TT)

Some of these strongly worded and divided positions lead to an emergency of CARICOM member states were 12 out of the 15 signed on to a collective statement reaffirming the CARICOM guiding principle of “non-intervention and non-interference” in the affairs of sovereign nations on January 24. The signatories include Jamaica and St. Lucia, who reversed the positions they had taken in favor of the OAS resolution on January 10. CARICOM chairman and St Kitts-Nevis Prime Minister Dr. Timothy Harris, Trinidad and Tobago's Rowley, as well as Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley, also met with United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, on Monday in New York to outline their position and discuss the ongoing sociopolitical situation in Venezuela.

A statement issued after the talks clearly outlined their fear over the fallout from of external military intervention in the Venezuelan crisis.

"The CARICOM delegation emphasized its commitment to the tenets of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter which calls on states to refrain from the threat or the use of force. CARICOM has been consistent in the critical importance it accords to the key principles of non-interference and non-intervention. CARICOM reaffirmed the view that there was an urgent need for meaningful dialogue leading to a peaceful internal solution for the Venezuelan people. The Caribbean Community is resolute in its belief that it is never too late for dialogue since the consequences of no dialogue will be dire," a joint statement issued by the body said.

The statement also emphasized “the importance of the Caribbean remaining a Zone of Peace,” an idea first coin by Maurice Bishop, who came to power in Grenada in a revolution that toppled the government of Eric Gairy in 1979.

“We join with our sister Caribbean nations in re-emphasizing our determination to preserve the Caribbean as a zone of peace, free from military intimidation. We demand the right to build our own processes in our own way, free from outside interference, free from bullying and free from the use or threat of force,” Bishop, who was later killed in a bloody invasion of the country by the United States, said.

The position was reaffirmed in 2014 at the Second Summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in Havana, Cuba, hoping to avoid a repeat of its bloody history of colonialism and in the even more bloody political conflicts experienced by several countries in Latin America over the last sixty years.

The Caribbean's long-held position of “non-intervention and non-interference” has often been reiterated by many of its leaders over the last few decades. If its governments intend to stand by those principles, avoiding the overtures of the world's declining superpower to support their position, it can play an important role in charting a way forward for the hemisphere. Since the continued destabilization of Venezuela would create chaos and economic, military and social problems many territories are ill-equipped to manage.
