
Venezuela and Digital Networks

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For a century, Venezuela was forced to produce all the fuel that the European powers and the United States needed with the complicity of the submissive oligarchy of that country. A great battle is being fought today on the physical and virtual stage. The domestic and foreign enemies of the Bolivarian revolution seek to create confusion and disarray among the people and prevent order and development in the country.

As Fidel said, “promoting a deep Revolution was not an easy task in Venezuela, a country with a glorious history, but immensely rich in resources of vital need for the imperialist powers that have drawn and still draw guidelines in the world”¹

The land of Hugo Chávez rescued its abundant natural resources from the clutches of foreign transnationals and has unleashed multiple political and social forces, capable of fighting battles in a hybrid war that combines economic aggression, blockade, elements of psychological warfare, financing of an internal opposition, sabotage, cyberattacks, terrorism and the use of digital networks to create chaos in the country. It’s about the use of a variety of methods to destroy the Venezuelan revolutionary project.

Thus, the Venezuelan far right, which has called for a blockade against its country, foreign intervention, promoted violence, assassinated Chavistas, and attempted to assassinate President Maduro with drones, has used digital networks more intensively in recent months to achieve its purposes.

It’s not possible to analyze what’s happening in the cyberspace of that country without taking these realities into account. We will be talking about these issues with Daniel Ramos Fernández, director of digital business at the Cuban Telecommunications Company (ETECSA) and an expert in computer systems and cybersecurity.

OPS: As is known, the United States government and its allies have developed an entire system of ideological and cultural influence against the Bolivarian Revolution, using digital networks. What are the antecedents and how did it manifest itself during the election process of July 28?

DRF: That system of influence you are referring to has a built-in war on the economic order, with more than 900 measures imposed in recent years and the use of digital networks such as X, Tik Tok, WhatsApp and Facebook that fabricate facts and testimonies so that the major media outlets, such as CNN, AP, The New York Times, El País, El Clarín, The Guardian, among others, provide them to their audiences, no matter if it involves directly calling for opposition demonstrations against the government of Nicolás Maduro or lying, going so far as to publish images of events in other countries as if they were happening in Venezuela. Making it credible is done by the algorithms of these networks, the use of robots and accounts created for the occasion, which determine what a person wants and should hear and see.

These mechanisms have already been used before in Venezuela, during the coup d'état in Bolivia in 2019 or on July 11, 2021 in Cuba. In the case of Bolivia, investigations into the Twitter accounts of several of the characters who led the coup d'état confirmed that a cyberwar operation was launched, with the aim of flooding the networks with propaganda against Evo Morales. In this campaign, they created more than 70,000 bots or fake accounts on Twitter to follow the coup leader Luis Fernando Camacho, who used the hashtags #EvoEsFraude, #BoliviaNoHayGolpe, #EvoDictador, among others.

Now in Venezuela there was direct participation by the owners of the companies that operate the digital networks, including with interventionist and fascist statements. President Nicolás Maduro himself denounced that WhatsApp gave the database of Venezuelan users to the extreme right for the execution of vandalism and terrorist acts. They have tried to clean up the image of that extreme right, building an alleged leadership of its main leaders.

OPS: In the midst of these operations, the Bolivarian government decided to take the X network out of service for ten days and announced that it would study the possibilities of using the digital networks of friendly countries such as China and Russia or its own networks. This would create a new precedent and would begin to change the rules of the game in a continent where both connectivity and Internet content are managed by North American companies.

DRF: That's right. Almost all telecommunications traffic generated in Latin America goes through the so-called NAP of the Americas, based in Miami and is the main traffic exchange point for our countries. It doesn't matter if you are going to communicate with someone who is in Europe, Asia or Africa, everything goes through there. The use of American digital network platforms is dominant, which is why the actions undertaken in Venezuela following its use to create a crisis after the elections on July 28 are very important.

On August 12, the National Cybersecurity Council was created by presidential decree, which will have an advisory role for the generation of security policies and a permanent surveillance network for telematic incidents. This norm establishes that cyberspace becomes a matter of public and strategic interest for the republic. The National Assembly of Venezuela is discussing and approving new legal norms related to these matters, Jorge Rodríguez, its president, considered it pertinent to regulate the use of digital networks in that nation.

Something relevant was the suspension of the digital network X for 10 days, executed by the National Telecommunications Commission (Conatel), with the purpose of regularizing its operation in Venezuela and enforcing the laws of the country.

OPS: The important thing is not only the decision, but that if the owners of X don't present the formal documentation on their operations, it's likely that it will no longer operate in Venezuela. Twenty days have passed since its suspension and nothing has happened, it seems that the population can live without X. President Maduro has already explained that there are platforms such as the Chinese WeChat that Venezuelans could use and others developed in the country itself.

There are several reasons that have allowed the Bolivarian Revolution to successfully confront the imperial lashing: economic recovery, the reconnection of the PSUV and its youth with the masses, the strengthening of citizen security, the confrontation with bureaucracy and corruption, the use of new methods in the teaching of history and the prestige achieved in the international arena. But also, as the prominent Cuban intellectual Iroel Sánchez said, "it has been the investments of the public company CANTV and the social policies of the Chavista government that have made it possible for Venezuela to be the country with the highest use of Internet in Latin America, which, together with the elimination of illiteracy and free access to all levels of education, allows the bases of the Bolivarian Revolution to dispute hegemony in Internet in circumstances such as the present ones"².

1-Reflections by Comrade Fidel: "THE GENIUS OF CHÁVEZ", www.cuba.cu, January 25, 2012.

2-Sanchez Espinosa, Iroel: "Venezuela, the battle on the networks", <http://lapupilainsomne.jovenclub.cu>, March 1, 2014.

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