

The Washington Post Reaches New Low in Calls for Political Intervention in Venezuela

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The *Washington Post*, in an op-ed issued yesterday by its Editorial Board, suggests that the remedy for the “accelerating spiral toward an economic and political crash” that now awaits Venezuela is “political intervention by its neighbors.” It recommends intervention by the Organization of American States’ (OAS) Inter-American Democratic Charter, which, the *Post* claims, “provides for collective action when a regime violates constitutional norms.” Amongst these allegations of constitutional violations, the *Post* accuses the government of President Nicolás Maduro of waging “scorched-earth warfare with the National Assembly,” which since December of last year has been controlled by the opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), and of illegally packing the Supreme Court with government supporters in order to “strip the opposition majority of its constitutional powers and reject every measure it has passed.”

The *Post* could have added some balance to the discussion by mentioning, for instance, that upon winning their two-thirds majority the opposition’s first order of business was passing an amnesty law that, in addition to including a worryingly broad set of crimes, has unsettled victims of right-wing violence, some of whom view it as sanctioning impunity. In addition to open acts of provocation such as taking down all symbols of the Bolivarian cause from the walls of the legislature and immediately laying out a plan to ensure Maduro will be out of office within six months, the opposition have wasted no time in introducing legislation to privatize the public housing mission and roll back progressive labor law.

The *Post*’s proposal of this neighborly intervention does not appear all that credible given that Secretary General Luis Almagro, who is firmly in the Venezuelan opposition’s corner, will not find it easy to rally the OAS to invoke the Democratic Charter, even with a new right wing ally in Argentina to bolster his case. But more to the point, what the Editorial Board seems to forget is that the OAS’s political legitimacy has been severely eroded in favor of organizations such as the Community of Latin American Countries (CELAC), a trade association that does not include

the United States and Canada, and the Union of South American Nation (UNASUR). Unlike the OAS, these new regional institutions have served as a bulwark against interference into Venezuela's internal affairs. UNASUR, for instance, forcefully repudiated President Obama's executive order declaring Venezuela an extraordinary threat to the national security of the United States. Whereas the OAS represents the old "back yard" mentality of the past, they embody the decades-long push for deeper Latin American integration and, as Bolivian President Evo Morales puts it, "a weapon against imperialism."

Bypassing them in favor of the OAS's Inter-American Democratic Charter would likely advance a one-sided anti-government view of the problems facing the country. There is indeed an economic crisis in Venezuela that will require broad cooperation from all sectors and throughout the country. And, to be sure, Venezuelans are divided on how to solve the crisis. But the *Post* all too easily places the blame squarely on Maduro for failing to "accommodate and negotiate" with the opposition. It fails to mention, however, that he has in fact already set in motion the *Commission on Truth and Justice*, which invites participation by the opposition, to investigate the violence that took place during the guarimbas (the violent demonstrations that took place in the first quarter of 2014), and which it is hoped will serve as a vehicle for dialogue and reconciliation. Again, the new regional organizations are proving valuable in this regard, with UNASUR's Secretary General Ernesto Samper agreeing to accompany the commission in its work.

Whereas an intervention to resolve the country's economic problems based on this model would lead to a constructive dialogue between the opposition and the government, the *Post*'s OAS proposal would likely encourage intransigence on the part of the more militant sectors of the opposition and, furthermore, would inspire Bolivarians, both pro and anti-Maduro, to circle the wagons in defense of the homeland. The way to avoid the "explosion" referred to by the *Post* is to oppose any attempt at extra-constitutional regime change, condemn paramilitary attacks and assassinations, endorse the Truth and Justice commission, and encourage interventions mediated by Latin America's legitimate regional organizations, not the OAS.

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