Monroe Doctrine Reloaded

written by Simón Rodríguez, Stanley Heller | January 8, 2026

Stanley Heller: It's January 5th, 2026. I'll be speaking to Simón Rodríguez, a Venezuelan socialist and journalist who edits *VenezuelanVoices.org*. He's presently in the Dominican Republic. We're speaking just a couple of days after the US aggression against Venezuela in the kidnapping of Nicolas Maduro and his wife and the killing of scores of Venezuelans and Cubans. Good evening.

Simón Rodríguez: Thank you for having me.

SH: So, what do you hear about what's happening in the streets of the Venezuelan cities? Have crowds turned out to support the Chavista government? Are supporters of the far right taking over? Are things quiet? What's the situation as far as you know?

SR: The reports one can have and also speaking from people inside Venezuela is that basically the streets are very quiet. There very little activity. In fact on the 3rd most commerce activity was paralyzed. There have been a couple of demonstrations mainly in Caracas and basically from very hardcore activists and members of the government. So this is in stark contrast to what happened 23 years ago when Chavez was subjected to a coup and kidnapped by the coup plotters when there was a massive response to that. But in this case in fact there have been neither celebrations nor important protests just governmental marches. Even in the official discourse the minister of defense has in fact called people to go back to work to go back to normal activities to be calm. This call to calm is very different from a call for mobilization or for any sort of resistance. So that's mainly what has been happening and of course increased police and military presence in the streets.

SH: What about the ultra-right? Are there signs that they're going to try to take over?

SR: No, there is no indication of of any far-right activity. One has to be clear. In fact, far-right as such, you know, paramilitary or armed groups, this is is almost non-existent. So calls for for public manifestations have not occurred. So it's mostly a tense calm what we are seeing in the in the country.

SH: So surprisingly, to me anyway, was that Trump says he will run Venezuela. Were are you surprised about him dismissing the stature of his far-right Venezuelan political ally Maria Machado?

SR: This has happened before. Remember when she received the Nobel Peace Prize, Trump was very dismissive. He said, “Oh, I don’t know this person.” Although it’s obvious he knew who she was. But regarding this idea that the US will run the country directly as has happened often with Trump’s remarks afterwards Marco Rubio the Secretary of State has to come and do a translation of what this actually means and what he said which bears resemblance to what Trump had previously said is that they expect the interim president Rodriguez to comply with US expectations especially regarding oil exploitation by US companies. so it they would not be directly running the country but rather indirectly doing so by the continued military pressure. For example, the fact that there is still this sort of naval blockade against oil exports from Venezuela. so the idea is that through continued pressure the interim government would comply with any demands from the US. We have to be very clear in in condemning the attack that happened on January 3rd. The images were very shocking for most Venezuelans. , regardless of what most Venezuelans think about the regime, the fact that Caracas was bombed, other cities , were also bombed, civilian infrastructure such as the port of La Guaira, which serves the city of Caracas, is about 45 minutes drive away from Caracas. also electric the electrical grid was bombed taking out power from from the capital. this these images were really really shocking. The death toll up to what we know is around 80 people, but the government has not issued a detailed list of injured or dead people. So the number could be actually higher.

Just to to give an idea of the brutal and imperialist nature of this attack which has nothing to do with restoring democracy or democratic rights of the Venezuelan people. Trump was very recently asked if he would put pressure on Delcy Rodriguez to release political prisoners. We have to remember that some of these political prisoners are from left or center left political affiliations, union leaders and so on. For example, the presidential candidate that was endorsed by the [Venezuelan] Communist party in the 2024 elections who has been for 10 months illegally detained. And the answer Trump gave was, well no, we are concerned with the oil now after the situation is controlled and we get what we want we’ll speak about other things.

So really the rights of Venezuelans are nowhere in in the radar of Trump’s concerns or interests. And this of course by can be illustrated very easily by seeing the treatment he is giving Venezuelan migrants in the US where Venezuelan migrants are being massively targeted, deported, stigmatized. Trump has said that Venezuelan migrants have been sent by the Maduro regime, taken from jails and asylums, mental asylums and sent to the US as a sort of weaponized migration. And this is something that has been backed by Maria Karina Machado. She has legitimized this, therefore legitimizing the persecution of Venezuelan migrants. So the rights of Venezuelans don’t matter to this far-right government either in the US or or in Venezuela itself. They have made very clear that they want to control natural resources. There have been many layers of the official US discourse. They have said it’s about drugs. it’s very clear it’s not about drugs. they said it’s about oil and also about what they call narco-terrorism and this fusion of the discourse of war on terror and war on drugs. I think when when one looks at the strategic document of the US government which is this national security document they issued in in November. It becomes clear they want to concentrate the efforts of US imperialism in dominating the region do dominating the hemisphere. this was said at the beginning of Trump’s off term in second term in office by Marco Rubio when he said the US after the cold war ended seemingly wanted to control all of the world but it can’t it cannot do so because there are other competing world global powers so it should concentrate its efforts and this pointed to what is then in in the text of this national security document which reinforces this idea of sort of a strategic retreat into the region and it it’s one of the reasons why we can see a strengthened pressure on not only on Venezuela. Venezuela is perhaps the most dramatic case but it’s against all of Latin America and the Caribbean.

SH: I have a couple questions about the acting Venezuelan President Delcy Rodriguez. Yesterday, she struck a defiant tone, but today she said, "We invite the US government to collaborate with us on an agenda of cooperation oriented towards shared development within the framework of international law." kind of a curious statement towards a country that just mounted an aggression. So, who is she and what do you think of this recent statement?

SR: Well, Delcy Rodriguez is the sister of Jorge Rodriguez who's also a high ranking government official in the Venezuelan government. She has served in several different posts. She was minister of communication, and minister of foreign relations. She was a president of this sham Constituting Assembly in 2017. So she has been in the in the high ranks of Venezuelan power for quite a long time. basically with Maduro, not so much with Chavez. This is something to to take into account. and she was participating in the secret talks with the US government that had been ongoing throughout all of this military campaign that started late last year. This has led to speculation about the possibility that there was some kind of understanding between Rodriguez and other sectors of the Venezuelan government with the US to sacrifice Maduro in order to maintain power and to maintain the structure of the government. Up to now, we can't be certain about any of this. Of course, a lot of it is speculation, but up until now, it seems well the Minister of Defense and all of the military has shown a cohesive face around Delcy Rodriguez, the maximum court in Venezuela created an interpretation of the of the current situation whereas she's in in an interim presidency but in in a way that is not what is explicitly contemplated by the constitution. The constitution says if there is an absolute absence of the president, the acting president, the interim presidency should have the role of organizing elections. But the wording that the court has used leaves room for a "state of exception" whereas she doesn't have to comply with any of these limits and simply is in indefinite interim presidency.

The statement you mentioned is worth reflecting upon it because at first she said well they consider Maduro to be the president and they demand that the US hand them back to to the Venezuelan authorities, to to send him back to Venezuela and even showed an accounting where they say one day kidnapped. So the idea was they would they would be counting every day that Maduro remains kidnapped by the US. But then she issues this statement basically saying she is willing to cooperate with the US. Of course, if they were serious about considering Maduro to be to be kidnapped and to do anything that was within their power to get him back, then this statement doesn't make too much sense.

So also this statement fits into the interpretations which say perhaps this was agreed upon. And looking back also, you can see that for example, the New York Times wrote a piece about Delcy Rodriguez where they portrayed her as a moderate, as someone who would be legally entitled to succeed Maduro if Maduro was no longer in in power. So we can see that there have been movements around this and also because many of these bits of information come through leaks from the US government. One can have skepticism because it can be part of psychological warfare. But it was leaked at different points in in these last months that the Venezuelan government was offering to the US a transition which would lead to Maduro stepping out of the presidency. So these are all elements that we will still have to be, you know, waiting for more clues and for more information as the days go by.

SH: She [Delcy Rodriguez] also said something curious that the abduction of Maduro had Zionist overtones. What do you make of that?

SR: In Latin America, I'll make my own interpretation, I'm not sure what she meant, but from my own experience and background I can say that there is the perception that Israel is a very powerful military superpower which they can do very spectacular things. They can infiltrate any government. Their spies are are the most powerful ones and they can do daring stuff and can be almost unstoppable. So, it would seem that she's suggesting that maybe Israel had something to do with the planning or execution of this operation. That's what it suggests to me, but it's very ambiguous to say the least.

SH: So, a $64,000 question. Why was it so easy for the US to capture Maduro? I saw a Facebook post of yours in which you speculated, as you've said just a little while ago, that some in the Chavistas collaborated with the attackers. Have you learned more since you made that post?

SR: Well, again, some of the information comes from US sources. The Reuters Agency reported that the US relied on CIA informants from the Venezuelan government. So that's what's publicly at least up to now been said. The problem with the way that events happened is that it seems there was resistance in in the last ring of Maduro security and it seems many of his bodyguards and the people that were closest to him were actually killed. So at that point it seems there there was exchange of fire. The problem is where were sophisticated military equipment such as air defenses bought from China and Russia.

The fact that this attack was something that was announced months ago. The Venezuelan government was expecting an attack to happen since very long ago. So the surprise factor would have been at least minimal. And yet the US says it had zero casualties. Of course this this could also be later turn out to be false because the US government lies a lot. But from the information that we have that it was in in such a short time the operation was so successful and the capacity of the of the military to resist was so low. Even the fact that Maduro was relying on Cuban security because perhaps he did not trust the Venezuelan military enough. These Cuban security personnel endured some 32 casualties in in this operation and yet the defenses seem to seem to fail spectacularly. This leads many commentators, not only myself, to question if there was besides what has been said about CIA collaborators in in the government, other forms of collaboration aiding the US effort. If we see it from the perspective of the US government, would they have been willing to launch an attack risking perhaps having dozens of US military deaths and some high percentage of of the possibility of a failure. I think that when they sent the attack, they were pretty certain that it would be successful because a failure would have been very very costly politically. it remains to be seen if even the success can have a political cost because obviously it's an illegal, aggressive action by the US government but to have failed would have been much much more costly. So this leads me to to speculate but as the time goes by we will have more information but at least from first appearances it seems very strange that this could have been carried out without internal collaboration. Also some sources which claim to have some affinity or closeness to the US government have said that in fact the Venezuela government collaborated with Maduro's capture but I think if it was, you know a negotiated clearcut deal it would have been much easier to have Maduro exiled and to not have the risk of a military intervention.

Then this leads to to the hypothesis that that it wasn't the government as a whole but really a sector of the military or a sector of the government.

SH: So what was Maduro's strategy for warding off a US attack? I mean from here it looks like his only idea was to offer more and more concessions to Trump. Did he try to unify the country and put it on a war footing, unite the entire left or what was his strategy other than to offer concessions?

SR: There was no attempt to expand the social base of the government. For example, there are dozens of hundreds of of political prisoners, many of which oppose US intervention in Venezuela. Something that many leftist organizations said, well, release all of the political prisoners who are against a US invasion. This would be seen as a gesture towards the Venezuelan people. in fact creating a broader social base to to resist imperialist pressure and attack. But this was never done in in fact the the strategy in terms of of internal policy is still very much repressive and this is one of the reasons why the government has very very little support and is very weak.

SH: In fact, is there even now a idea from the government to try to liberate the left prisoners? Do they even mention it now?

SR: Well, this has not been mentioned. This idea has not been floated by anyone in the government. Regarding the strategy, you know, , there was a debate during the Chavista years with , this general, retired general whose last name was Müller Rojas. , he was debating the then minister of defense Raul Badwell who then years later became a political prisoner ironically. But Badwell represented the official stance of the military doctrine of the Venezuelan government which was to increase conventional spending in in a conventional strategy of arming the country having a big budget, a lot of equipment like jets, fighter jets, tanks and so on. and the idea that Müller Rojas has put into this debate was that conventional warfare is useless against the external attack of an imperialist power which is much more powerful. Defense should rely on a doctrine of military popular defense. taking knowledge from other experiences such as the warfare in Vietnam and so on where it has been possible to resist and even to defeat imperialist aggression not by having more and more tanks, more and more jets because obviously you cannot compete at that level with the most powerful military entity in the world. but the the government sided with Badwell and this was the model that was developed in later years. They incorporated this idea of the militias and so on but it was always for internal repression and for internal control, never as a popular defense strategy such as the one that Mueller Roja said was necessary to develop. So this is part of the failure and the the defeat of the Venezuelan government. The fact that because it had so such a big rejection of the working class and popular sectors because of the austerity it had applied for years against the Venezuelan people the corruption, the huge social inequalities and the fact that it never really relied on the idea of arming the people because it knew if it armed the people then it would be the end of the government itself. These are all elements that fed onto this failure and the morale of the of the military itself probably is not high. This is a military that is more accustomed to internal repression fighting against people who cannot defend themselves than fighting against a very powerful enemy. So all of these elements I think also fed into the situation the country now is in.

SH: Final question. Can you give us some suggestions for the protests in the US and other countries? What kind of slogans what kind of themes should we be doing that would be supporting

the Venezuelan people?

SR: I think the focus needs to be in rejecting the Trumpist project for Latin America and for Venezuela which is one of oppression, subordination, control, extracting wealth. this has been very clear on on the part of the of the US government and it it's it's a part of a of a world perspective where they would not mind if other imperialist powers such as Russia exert the same arbitrariness, the same violence and the same brutality in their own spheres of influence as this is seen by the strategists of the US imperialist regime.

SH: So you have suggested that protest should center on objecting to this project of the US empire swallowing up the hemisphere. What do we say about Maduro himself?

SR: Yes, this I say because evidently the US government is threatening to expand military operations to Colombia, Mexico and other countries. So it's evidently a regional project. The problem that arises sometimes when commenting the US aggression against Venezuela is that there are political currents that embellish or romanticize or present the Venezuelan government as a revolutionary anti-imperialist government and even deny the fact that it's a dictatorship. And I think this is wrong for two reasons. For one thing, the US does not have the right to invade any country or to intervene militarily regardless of what kind of regime it is. To invade Iraq was wrong regardless of the fact that Hussein was a dictator,

To invade Panama was wrong, even if Noriega was an drug trafficking dictator, regardless of what those regimes were, because the content of these actions was undemocratic and had nothing to do with upholding rights or any of sort of thing. similarly in the case of Venezuela, it's a capitalist dictatorship that has undermined working class rights and democratic rights of the people. So there's no need to lie about that. Of course, the US government does lie a lot about the government in Venezuela when it says it represents a narco-terrorist threat to the US. This is false. It's like the weapons of mass destruction of Iraq. There were many things to criticize about Hussein, but evidently those weapons did not exist. In the case of Venezuela, it has been said that it's all sort of things, even that it stole oil from the US. This is all patently false. The nationalization of oil took place in the 1970s and it was an agreed, nationalization where US companies were paid handsomely. So to debunk the lies of of the US government regarding Venezuela to justify this aggression is important but reality has to be taken into account. What socialists in Venezuela left oppositionist and the workers organizations denounce and say has have to also be be taken into account. So I think this would inform a better and more internationalist policy that does not throw under the bus the rights of of Venezuelan people when they are violated by the US imperialist regime or by the Venezuelan regime.

The destiny of the Venezuelan people and of the country should be in the hands of Venezuelans. It should be Venezuelan people who decide who runs the who is in government and what do we want to do with the natural resources and so on. This is something that Venezuelans should decide. Not the US regime, not the Venezuelan military, not any local oligarchy, but the Venezuelan people. That would be my central message.

SH: Thank you so much for this interview.