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14. ABSTRACT

The populist government in Venezuela that started with Hugo Chavez in 1998 and continues with his successor Nicolas Maduro has led the country into an unprecedented crisis in its history. Food shortage, lack of medicine, and increasing unemployment have provoked massive demonstrations, and millions of Venezuelan citizens have left their homeland towards neighboring countries and overseas seeking for survival. The compromising of military leaders, the formation of militias, and the support of China and Russia to Maduro increase the complexity of the situation. In 2018, the rebuttal of presidential reelection of Maduro due to lack of transparency and accountability within the international community resulted in the current clash for the office between Maduro and Juan Guaidó. The support from more than fifty countries to Guaidó has not been sufficient to oust Maduro and open the ways to a peaceful solution. Moreover, the linkage between Maduro's administration with narcotraffickers and other criminal activities spread instability throughout the region and jeopardizes Brazilian interests. This research analyzes the Venezuelan Crisis from a systemic perspective, and the intent is to confirm that Clausewitz's Trinity provides a holistic understanding to assess risks of military intervention, as well as identify opportunities for Brazilian leaders to approach the problem.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**ROAD TO VENEZUELAN CRISIS: A SYSTEMIC ANALYSIS FROM
CLAUSEWITZ'S TRINITY PERSPECTIVE**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Executive Summary

Title: Road to Venezuelan Crisis: A Systemic Analysis from Clausewitz's Trinity Perspective

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Thesis: Clausewitz's Trinity provides a holistic approach to the Venezuelan Crisis to assess the risks of military intervention and opportunities for Brazil to address the problem.

Discussion: The populist government in Venezuela that started with Hugo Chavez in 1998 and continues with his successor Nicolas Maduro has led the country into an unprecedented crisis in its history. Food shortage, lack of medicine, and increasing unemployment have provoked massive demonstrations, and millions of Venezuelan citizens have left their homeland towards neighboring countries and overseas seeking survival. The compromising of military leaders, the formation of militias, and the support of China and Russia to Maduro increase the complexity of the situation. In 2018, the presidential reelection of Maduro, due to lack of transparency and accountability, resulted in the current clash for the office between Maduro and Juan Guaidó, and earned the rebuttal of much of the international community. The support from more than fifty countries to Guaidó has not been sufficient to oust Maduro and open the way to a peaceful solution. Moreover, the linkage connecting Maduro's administration to narcotraffickers and other criminal activities spreads instability throughout the region and jeopardizes Brazilian interests. This research analyzes the Venezuelan Crisis from a systemic perspective, and the intent is to confirm that Clausewitz's Trinity provides a holistic understanding to assess risks of military intervention, as well as identify opportunities for Brazilian leaders to approach the problem.

Conclusion: The risks of a military intervention to overthrow Maduro's administration are not worth the losses of the Brazilian political and security interests. The situation requires a systemic and indirect approach that entails an aggressive information campaign, increasing diplomatic isolation, coordinated combat of criminal activities that sustain the regime, and continuous humanitarian assistance to the Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Meanwhile, it also demands permanent monitoring of tendencies, trends, and adaptation of the system that indicates the outlook "the day after" regime change.

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Preface and Acknowledgement

This research represents a fascinating deep-learning opportunity to study the nature of war and its visualization in the current crisis in Venezuela. Additional motivation stems from my hunger to explore the dynamic aspects of this present issue that has a direct impact in my home country, Brazil. My expectation is to deliver a broader perspective of the Venezuelan Crisis that might contribute to a systemic understanding of the problem.

I want to express my sincere appreciation for those who supported me along this challenging journey to achieve my goal. Initially, I surrender my gratitude to God for being my endless source of love, inspiration, and strength. To my lovely wife, Monique, I would like to thank you for keeping the harmony of our family and also for providing valuable aid in her reviews of this work. There are no words that express the level of gratitude and love I have for you. My special thanks to my children Arthur, Nicole, and Natália, for their patience and understanding for all moments they could not enjoy my presence. Hopefully, I shall be an example of commitment and hardworking for you. To my mentor, Dr. Christopher Stowe, I have no words to describe how much I enjoyed his friendly and professional guidance throughout the entire period of this endeavor. Likewise, I thank my military faculty, LtCol Anil Hariharan, for his timely advice on my labor. To the Leadership Communication Skills Center team, I highlight the relentless enthusiasm, dedication, and sharp eyes of Mrs. Stase Wells and Andrea Hamlen-Ridgely. You both always offered valuable feedback along with countless revisions of my paper. I extend my thanks to all librarians of the Gray Research Center and friends who helped me throughout this dissertation.

Introduction

Since 2012, Venezuela has been through a profound and unprecedented crisis in its history. The country faces economic collapse, political instability, and a humanitarian crisis, even as it remains potentially one of the wealthiest countries in South America. Lack of food and medicine, as well as high unemployment rates, have provoked street demonstrations and the departure of millions of citizens towards neighboring countries and places overseas. Brazil shares a common border with Venezuela, and it has been one of the destinations for thousands of Venezuelan migrants. In spite of these numerous crises, current President Nicolas Maduro insists upon refusing foreign humanitarian aid and rejecting interference in his dictatorship. Although external politicians have been dealing with the situation diplomatically, some rumors have arisen calling for military intervention by the United States and regional allies as a solution.¹

In this setting, Brazil plays a significant role. Brazil is the ninth-largest economy in the world – the largest in South America – and its territory comprises approximately 47% of the entire continent.² As a regional leader, Brazil's foreign policy should assess the complexity of the Venezuelan crisis and understand that it goes beyond a migration issue or border security. It is crucial to comprehend such a crisis and its peculiarities properly, as well as how these aspects affect Brazilian national security interests and underlying concerns regarding regional stability.

On this matter, Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz explains the nature of war as a social phenomenon full of uncertainties. What can be the relationship between a Prussian strategist of the nineteenth century and a 2019 crisis in a remote Latin American country? Given his background and unique critical-thinking ability, his teachings have echoed among generations of military scholars. In his last three years of life, Clausewitz reached the maturity of his thought about the nature of war by establishing its “Paradoxical Trinity,” comprised of

violence, chance, and reason.³ Thus, one of his legacies for military scholars was to lay down tenets to a systemic perspective of war.⁴ Clausewitz's Trinity provides a holistic approach to the Venezuelan Crisis to assess the risks of military intervention and opportunities for Brazil to address the problem.

This paper is structured into six sections. Following this introduction, the second section examines Clausewitzian theoretical discussion and its foundation for the application of system thinking in military affairs through operational design. The third section analyzes Venezuela's path towards the current crisis through Clausewitz's Trinity lens. The fourth section addresses the crisis's outbreak and the emergence of two opposing trinities struggling for power in Venezuela. The regional impacts of the Venezuelan Crisis and corresponding relations with Brazilian national interests, as well as how Brazil should find a way forward, are the subject of the fifth section. Finally, the sixth section presents the concluding thoughts and findings.

Clausewitz's Theory of War: The Paradoxical Trinity as a summary of the nature of warfare

Clausewitz experienced the violent period of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars that swept through Europe with unforeseen magnitude. He lived as a Prussian officer from 1804 until his death in 1831 and dedicated a significant part of his career to study and reflect upon the phenomenon of war.⁵ He combined his personal experience with historical analysis to comprehend war beyond the battlefield.⁶ In the nineteenth century, Enlightenment ideas were flourishing and had influenced Clausewitz to think critically regarding existing theories that had proposed partial solutions for the complex problem of war. For instance, he argued against the Prussian theorist Heinrich von Bulow, questioning how the latter

rationalized warfare in terms of geographic characteristics and movements, turning war into a science and neglecting psychological aspects that bring uncertainty.⁷ Likewise, he rebutted the Swiss-French strategist Antoine Jomini who grounded his theory basically on military solutions.⁸ For Clausewitz, war is a complex phenomenon that goes beyond the linearity of mathematics or something predictable by the simple application of principles.

The purpose of this paper fits with the systemic approach that Clausewitz's Theory postulates. Therefore, the present analysis focuses on the aspects related to the nature of war from his principal work – *On War* – of which the Paradoxical Trinity represents the core. Yet, it is paramount to address essential concepts beforehand. Clausewitz defines war as “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,”⁹ and the use of force may vary from deterrence to an application of violence to defeat the enemy. Once the opposing living forces interact with each other, the outcomes are uncertain. He also points out that warfare is not merely about the attainment of military objectives, but it is an instrument of policy to achieve political ends; therefore, war is not an isolated act.¹⁰

Similarly, he adds that “the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn into, something that is alien to its nature.”¹¹ Therefore, instead of breaking down the situation into isolated parts to understand the whole, Clausewitz suggests intense scrutiny of a given environment or problem from the inside out. Only a better, holistic understanding of the problem can provide a starting point to define political and strategic aims as the situation evolves.

At this point, it is worth noting that Clausewitz lived in a *Zeitgeist*ⁱ that compelled him to frame his theory under a dialectical perspective in which territorial disputes were statecrafts' primary concern. For this reason, States frequently went to war to gain access to resources and expand their domination and influence. Today's reality is not that of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The surge of non-state actors such as terrorist groups and criminal organizations has increased the complexity of war; however, it has not changed its essence. As Clausewitz argues, "war is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case."¹² According to him, three main elements or tendencies constitute the Paradoxical Trinity that explains the nature of war: violence, hatred, and enmity; the play of chance; and reason that subordinates warfare as an instrument of policy.¹³ These components interact with one another like magnets, and Clausewitz's Theory intends to establish a balance among those relationships. He associates these three elements with corresponding agents: people, armed forces, and the government.¹⁴ Christopher Bassford calls examples such as this evidence of Clausewitz's use of a "Secondary Trinity."¹⁵

The first element comprises violence, hatred, and enmity and relates to subjective circumstances that lead to irrationality and affect the conduct of war. Its association with the people is relevant because it addresses human aspects that react within a context of violence. Such an environment might produce effects that range from general uprisings against the government to positive responses that align with a state's political goals. In the last instance, social changes that initially resulted in the French Revolution to subvert the *Ancien Regime* also became an opportunity to mobilizeⁱⁱ a national army with patriot soldiers.¹⁶ Particular features of a given society, such as ethnicity, background, diversity, necessity, and

ⁱ Historians use this term to describe the spirit of a given Age.

ⁱⁱ *Levée en Masse* was the nationwide mobilization that characterized the French Revolution.

expectations intensify ambiguity; yet, disregarding the respective impacts on specific people inevitably leads to failure.

The Armed Forces symbolize the second element – chance and probability. In a combat military engagement, the personality of the commander and the character of his forces play a crucial role.¹⁷ The concept of friction is useful for a better understanding of this chaotic environment. Clausewitz defines friction as “the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult.”¹⁸ A combination of minor issues might decrease the general performance and jeopardize the achievement of an intended goal. Reducing such friction is not an easy job because danger and incomplete information are permanently present. Although friction will always exist on the battlefield, leadership builds cohesiveness within troops and lessens that friction. Moreover, difficulties tend to increase insofar as the task moves from tactical engagement to intellectual strategic decision-making. In that sense, a theory is useful to educate the mind of the commander. It improves the commander’s comprehension of the problem and trains his judgment.¹⁹

Policy, or in a secondary sense, the government represents the third element – reason – that is supposed to decide why a nation should go to war in order to obtain reasonable goals. Clausewitz argues that in cases in which there are small political aims, minor motivations, and low tensions, the statesman should avoid any escalation of conflict but exploit weaknesses in the adversary’s political and military strategy to achieve a peaceful settlement.²⁰ He further augments that the planning should include multiple points of view, such as the administrative eye, military perspectives, and political objectives, but the latter binds and is above everything else.²¹ Another crucial aspect is that a policy should reflect the interests of a given society, not private ambitions and vanity of who is in power.²² Therefore, the government plays mainly

the representative and intellectual role that precedes all decision-making processes before going to war and during the whole continuum of conflict. It is up to politics to determine the role of evaluating the scenario holistically and establishing a proper integration of national instruments of power instead of relying exclusively on military options.

However, it does not mean that other agents cannot represent the elements, as seen in irregular conflicts. For instance, one insurgent group may use violence to subvert part of the populace against a government to reach a political interest, such as taking over the power, and it may succeed or not. The fact that Clausewitz had exemplified the people, armed forces, and the government as a materialization of his Trinitarian framework may cause misinterpretation of its authentic elements.²³ Violence, chance, and reason are present in all types of wars regardless of whoever exemplifies each one of them. While types and methods of warfare may vary, the nature of war remains unchanging.

The challenge of finding patterns that are constant over time distinguishes Clausewitz's theory, which provides relevant contributions to understand and analyze today's crises and conflicts. His theoretical construct has been a reference for the military application of systems-theory concepts, which privilege nonlinearity of interactions that characterize *complex adaptive systems*ⁱⁱⁱ (CAS).²⁴ John Schmitt developed "A Systemic Concept for Operational Design" – based on thought processes of the Israeli retired general Shimon Naveh – to inform the United States Marine Corps doctrine.²⁵ According to Schmitt, "design can be thought of as problem setting [...] in such a way that an approach to solving the problem emerges."²⁶ The design process comprises seven activities: gaining context of the situation, identifying the problem, defining the systems, building a mental model of the systems,

ⁱⁱⁱ The United States Marine Corps, *MCDP 1-1 Strategy*, (Washington, DC), 1997, defines complex adaptive system as the result of interactions among its various members that compete or cooperate, adapt or fail, and so on. CAS are inherently dynamic and unpredictable.

recognizing possible interventions, identifying emerging solutions, and defining information requirements.²⁷ Although Clausewitz's trinitarian construct underpins the focus of analysis, this paper also takes advantage of the design method to complement and structure the present assessment with the following caveat: the evaluation will be an individual endeavor instead of a designer's teamwork.

Analyzing the path towards the Venezuelan Crisis through the lens of Clausewitz's Trinity

Although Clausewitz describes his theory from an interstate conflict perspective, this paper applies his trinitarian concept to understand the internal environment of Venezuela that might lead to an intrastate conflict with regional repercussions. Venezuela possesses a strategic location in the northern portion of South America^{iv} and became internationally more relevant in 1920 after the discovery, in its territory, of the largest oil reserve in the world. In 1928, the country was the second-largest oil producer worldwide. It reached the remarkable fourth-highest GDP per capita in 1950 and was one of the most prosperous countries in South America.²⁸ Venezuela had a stable democracy from 1958 until 1989, but economic and political turmoil plagued the state during the 1990s that set the stage for the rise of Hugo Chávez's leftist populist proposal of the government.²⁹ Chávez articulated the elements of reason, violence, and chance by setting political conditions, both domestically and externally, to achieve his goals of instituting an authoritarian regime in Venezuela and spreading *chavism* ideology throughout Latin America.

^{iv} Venezuela shares ground border with Colombia in the East, Brazil in the South, and Guiana in the West. The country has 1,740 miles length littoral coast in the North that faces the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean.

After a failed coup attempt in 1992, Chávez won presidential election in 1998 and started making profound changes in the Venezuelan political framework. During his tenure, he enjoyed the support of most of the Venezuelan people and established a dictatorship in the country. Chávez promulgated a new constitution – ratified in 1999 in the national plebiscite – created a new unicameral legislative system, and changed the country’s name to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.³⁰ In 2009, he articulated an amendment to the constitution that established five governmental branches – a president, a unicameral National Assembly, a National Electoral Council (CNE), a Supreme Court, and a “Citizen Power” branch – instead of the “traditional” three democratic branches. Nevertheless, he centralized power in the President’s hands; as Clare Seelke et al. deliberate, “Chávez exerted control over all government branches, particularly after an outgoing legislature dominated by *Chavistas* appointed pro-Chávez justices to control the Supreme Court in 2004.”³¹ That alteration in the constitution also defined the President’s term for six years with unlimited reelection possibility. He sailed expertly on an anti-elitist platform and replaced democratic institutions with new ones committed to him and his plans.

Chávez promoted a strong narrative against the United States’ foreign policy, and his charisma attracted regional attention as he spread the *Bolivarianism*^v blueprint throughout Latin America during the 2000s.³² Unsurprisingly, that narrative drew the attention of Russia and China, which became Venezuela’s main strategic allies. In 2006, Caracas and Moscow established technical-military cooperation that lasts until the present day, with Venezuela being the destination of 4.92% of Russia’s arms market.³³ As a payoff, Chávez opened his

^v Carlos A. Romero and Víctor M. Mijares, “From Chávez to Maduro: Continuity and Change in Venezuelan Foreign Policy,” *Contexto Internacional*, 38, no 1 (2016), 178-188. Hugo Chávez saw himself as a leader to integrate Latin America against the influence of the United States’ “imperialism.” He coined the term *Bolivarianism* in allusion to Simón Bolívar who fought for liberation of American colonies from Spanish Kingdom in the 19th century.

country for Russian oil companies' investments and relied on political support from Moscow within the international arena. China's interests in Venezuela are also geopolitical and economical, but more focused on the latter. Beijing provided around 62.2 billion US dollars to fund infrastructure and development projects from 2007 to 2016, but it has stopped renewing loans due to Venezuela's delays in its oil deliveries to the former.³⁴

Cuba became the most important regional ally of Venezuela since Chávez's first mandate. The two countries signed an agreement of cooperation, in which Venezuela provides oil to Cuba and receives technical assistance and services, including intelligence advisors and health-care workers.³⁵ The Brazilian investigative journalist and writer Leonardo Coutinho describes in his book *Hugo Chávez: The Spectrum*^{vi} how the President established connections with narcotraffickers and terrorist groups that built a legacy of instability. Cuba played a crucial role in that sense. According to Coutinho, Fidel Castro persuaded Chávez that narcotrafficking was an instrument against "imperialism"; therefore, the benefits were worth any moral inconvenience.³⁶ Under *chavism*, drug trafficking groups from Colombia have gained access to as well as logistical support from Venezuela, and 90% of their cocaine has flowed through the latter's territory.³⁷

Coutinho argues that Chávez subverted moral values in the military to achieve his intention of having unrestricted support from the Venezuelan Armed Forces.³⁸ Likewise, a report by the US Government Accountability Office to the US Congress registered connections between the Venezuelan military and drug-trafficking groups in Colombia, known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).³⁹ These links appeared after analysis of contents found in laptops seized during operations against FARC's leaders. Such a transformation in the military *ethos* has compromised a democratic system and

^{vi} Original title in Portuguese: *Hugo Chávez: O Espectro*.

damaged the credibility of the Venezuelan Armed Forces as well as criminalized the statecraft apparatus. By committing the military to supporting the regime, Chávez created a strong connection between the Clausewitzian elements of “reason” and “chance,” which improved his freedom to strengthen control over opposing parties.

In the economic realm, oil trade has been responsible for approximately 90% of Venezuelan exports, and it has composed a significant portion of government revenues.⁴⁰ According to Clare Seelke et al., “Venezuela benefited from the boom in oil prices during the 2000s.”⁴¹ However, Chávez did not take advantage of those benefits wisely, while he led a discouraging foreign-investment policy through price and currency controls.⁴² Likewise, his administration conducted a widespread nationalization of private companies, including multinationals such as ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips, under the guise of reducing poverty and inequality.⁴³ According to Gustavo Coronel, at the beginning of 2003, Chávez fired thousands of managers and technicians of Petroleos de Venezuela (PdVSA),^{vii} “who had gone on strike to protest the politicization of the management of the company.”⁴⁴ He also delivered subsidized oil to Cuba as well as the other Caribbean and Central American countries. The government debt grew more than twofold from 2000 to 2012, and corruption flourished across the nation.⁴⁵ Thus, such a policy led to catastrophic outcomes while keeping dependence on oil instead of developing the domestic market and enhancing productivity through economic diversification. Chávez utilized the oil dividend to fund social programs based on a monthly payment to poor people, but without solving the root of poverty. However, such a populist policy enhanced his legitimacy among the majority of Venezuelan people and helped balance the element of “violence” in the domestic realm.

^{vii} PdVSA is the national petroleum company.

Chávez had set up a political framework and management style that, on the one hand, created a strong linkage and support from military institutions, but on the other, it yielded economic vulnerabilities that made him susceptible to widespread dissatisfaction. As Clausewitz argues, the agents that represent the trinity are continually interacting, and any breaking between two elements might cause conflict. The current crisis stems from the political and economic mismanagement of both Chávez and his successor Nicolas Maduro as they led their people.

The rise of Nicolas Maduro and the drastic drop in oil prices: the crisis' outbreak and the emergence of opposing trinities

The fragile balance among the trinity's elements that Chávez was able to maintain has eroded under Maduro's administration. After Chávez passed away in 2013, Vice-President Nicolas Maduro took interim power and won the presidential elections later, with a tight margin of two percent of the vote over his adversary. Nonetheless, Maduro inherited an inefficient and ill-equipped government structure unable to soften a drastic drop in oil prices in 2014 of nearly 50%.⁴⁶ Instead of adopting an austere fiscal policy to reduce costs and enhance effectiveness, Maduro accelerated the process of economic chaos by printing more money to address the budget deficit, as well as exerting price controls to deal with the hyperinflation rate that reached 200,000% in 2019.⁴⁷ The economist Alejandro Werner highlights that this scenario is one of the worst cases of hyperinflation in history, similar to Germany after World War II.⁴⁸ According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Venezuela's GDP has shrunk approximately 60% since 2013, and the data for 2019 was a fall to near 35% (see Figure 1).⁴⁹



Figure 1: Venezuela's GDP Growth

Source: International Monetary Fund, *Real GDP growth Annual percent change*, January 24, 2020, https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/VEN?year=2020.

Lacking a diverse domestic economy and relying basically on oil revenues, Venezuela became heavily dependent on imported goods. The economic collapse dried up essential services and supplies, led transactions to the black market, and placed the Venezuelan people into an unprecedented humanitarian calamity.⁵⁰ Power outages and lack of medicine have deteriorated health conditions, and household surveys assessed the dramatic surge of Venezuelans living under poverty conditions that reached 94% in 2018.⁵¹ The Venezuelan population has lost about eighteen pounds of weight on average due to malnourishment and famine. Reports from the United Nations have estimated that more than 4.5 million people – 14% of the population – left the country by October 2019.⁵² The flow of people leaving Venezuela is comparable with 5.6 million refugees fleeing from Syria.⁵³ The government's inability to solve such a chaotic situation fostered popular demonstrations and political upheaval. Once Venezuelan people have lost access to basic needs and welfare, violence and hatred emerge.

However, Maduro has sought to ensure his authority by employing violent suppression of protests and strengthening his dictatorship. In 2014, clashes between security forces and

protesters resulted in forty-three people dead and almost a thousand injured.⁵⁴ After losing the majority in the National Assembly in 2015, President Maduro has also enhanced the use of militia groups known as *colectivos*^{viii} to buoy his regime. For instance, the group named Francisco de Miranda Front (FFM) performs strategic activities such as spreading communist ideals and promoting election fraud by threatening the populace.⁵⁵ In August 2017, twelve countries from the Western Hemisphere – known as the Lime Group^{ix} – repudiated the wrecking of the Venezuelan democratic system and deliberate human rights violations; nonetheless, they opposed the idea of military intervention.⁵⁶

In July 2019, the UN official Michelle Bachelet reported several human rights violations, including “extrajudicial killings by security forces” that exceeded 6,800 people in 2018.⁵⁷ The report furthermore adds that “over the past years, the Government has attempted to impose a communicational hegemony by enforcing its own version of events and creating an environment that curtails independent media.”⁵⁸ Besides that, the Government has also arbitrarily arrested political leaders and people who are against the regime. The increase of authoritarian controls over media, menaces to freedom of speech, as well as deterioration of human rights conditions became evident and have attracted the world’s attention to the Venezuelan crisis.

The United States *National Security Strategy 2017* categorizes Venezuela and Cuba as “anachronistic leftist authoritarian models that continue to fail their people.”⁵⁹ President Donald Trump has applied the “maximum pressure” strategy by increasing economic sanctions, but he has also highlighted that all “options are on the table,” which presumes a

^{viii} *Colectivos* are militia groups that receive unofficial support from the Venezuelan Government.

^{ix} Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, and Chile are the countries that signed the Lime Accord initially. Later on, Guyana and St. Lucia joined the Group, and Mexico is no longer an integrant.

military action.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, Maduro has used both US sanctions and the threatening of foreign intervention as fuel for his “anti-imperialist” rhetoric by blaming the United States for the suffering of the Venezuelan population.

The last election process declared Maduro’s victory in 2018, but the outcome was under suspicion, and many countries refused to recognize his legitimacy. This was due to no presence of internationally accredited election monitors, and the government forced people to vote by distributing food assistance cards near the polling stations.⁶¹ In January 2019, Maduro started his second term; notwithstanding, many countries do not acknowledge his illegitimate inauguration but instead recognize the National Assembly as the only remaining democratic institution in Venezuela.⁶² As such, on 23 January 2019, the President of the National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, took the oath as the interim President of Venezuela and started a political struggle against Maduro until new elections take place. Promptly, fifty-five countries – including the United States, Brazil, the majority of Western Hemisphere states, European Union members, and others – have declared their support to Guaidó.

In such a scenario, it is feasible to identify a system with two opposing trinities that are claiming legitimacy within Venezuela: Maduro *versus* Guaidó. On one side, Maduro struggles to suppress prevalent turmoil in order to regain control over the populace, keep his support from Armed Forces and militia groups, and assure his political power as president. Violence, chance, and reason are uneven due to people’s grievances and suffering that breeds upheavals against the government. The Venezuelan Armed Forces, militia groups, and alliances with Cuba and Russia are backing up Maduro and have become his primary sources of power. Since Maduro counts on military forces and militia groups to enforce his authority, the Venezuelan people remain hostage of his regime. On the other hand, Guaidó enjoys the

majority of popular encouragement as well as diplomatic recognition from the United States, Brazil, Colombia, and the vast bulk of Western countries, but he is failing to revert military loyalty to his favor. Although international isolation and internal pressure have increased against Maduro, they have not been enough to make him step down so far. Guaidó's expectation that military leaders would quickly change their minds and withdraw their support from the current regime has not occurred yet, even though some defections have happened among the military.

The Regional Impacts of the Venezuelan Crisis and its relationship with Brazil's national interests: Finding a way out

The humanitarian calamity has spilled over into the entire region, affecting neighboring countries significantly with regional instability and a massive flow of migrants. Along with people, an outbreak of previously eradicated diseases, including measles, has surprised the health systems as well.⁶³ Undoubtedly, the most affected country is Colombia due to a myriad of aspects. According to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Colombia has welcomed the most significant number of migrants and refugees, which reaches 1.6 million Venezuelans (see Figure 2).⁶⁴



Figure 2: Venezuelan migrants in the region

Source: UNHCR, *Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region*, December 2019, <https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/72763>.

Another crucial facet is related to Colombian national security. Maduro’s regime provides safe haven and support for narcotrafficker groups from Colombia as well as fosters insurgent movement through the *National Liberation Army* (ELN) in order to disrupt the Colombian government.⁶⁵ The US Southern Command Commander, Admiral Craig Faller, says that “if you’re a cartel leader, you now see an easy pathway through Venezuela into commercial shipping and air to distribute your product, and Maduro and his illegitimate regime are getting a cut.”⁶⁶ These shreds of evidence show Maduro’s commitment to

strengthen ties with criminal activities in order to finance his permanence in power regardless of US sanctions and the decreasing official revenues of the Venezuelan government.

At the beginning of September 2019, Maduro ordered an extensive military exercise along the border with Colombia, which included mobilization of a missile weapon system.⁶⁷ That movement has increased tensions between the two countries and has risen the fear of military conflict. President of Colombia Ivan Duque reacted diplomatically, arguing that Maduro has fostered instability throughout the region by hosting drug cartels and terrorists. Afterward, twelve out of nineteen members of the Organization of American States (OAS) invoked the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR)^x to address the crisis in Venezuela.⁶⁸ Although the Treaty grants a legal bedrock for sanctions and military action, some country representatives have highlighted their concerns against the possible use of force.⁶⁹

Similar to other countries in South America, Brazil has been the destination for more than 480,000 Venezuelan migrants, of whom 212,441 have stayed in Brazil.⁷⁰ The Amazon forest covers most parts of the border between Brazil and Venezuela, and Pacaraima town is the only land access to Brazilian territory. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), Pacaraima has an estimated population of 17,400 people, and the abrupt increase of Venezuelan flow in 2017 has triggered several social impacts.⁷¹ Homeless people spread across public places, the health system is overloaded, and robberies, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and other criminal activities have occurred.⁷² Since February 2018, the Brazilian government established the *Operation Welcome*^{xi} as an interagency framework for a Joint Humanitarian Task Force to defuse the impacts that thousands of

^xOrganization of American States, https://www.oas.org/en/media_center/press_release.asp?sCodigo=E-065/19. OAS members signed the mutual defense treaty in 1947 in the context of the Cold War.

^{xi} In Portuguese: Operação Acolhida, <http://www.eb.mil.br/operacao-acolhida>.

migrants have caused in the small city of Pacaraima and reduce the general collateral damage within Brazilian territory. The Operation comprises both participation of UN agencies and activities such as frontier planning, medical screening, identification and documents dispatch, and interiorization.⁷³

Although the *Operation Welcome* has achieved successful outcomes, the Maduro administration's deep involvement of with criminal activities of drug cartels and insurgent groups is among Brazil's underlying concerns. Since Brazil has announced its support to Guaidó, the diplomatic relationship between Brasilia and Caracas has deteriorated. For instance, in August 2019, a massive oil leak reached an extensive area of the Brazilian coast that polluted more than 225 beaches, and investigations have claimed that it was Venezuelan crude oil.⁷⁴ Since December 2019, another skirmish has been ongoing in which Brazilian Army troops captured five Venezuelan soldiers clandestinely camping inside a Brazilian indigenous reserve near Pacaraima. Maduro claims that they are defectors and demands their repatriation from Brazil while the latter accepts their request for refuge.⁷⁵

Brazil's *National Defense Strategy* defines the strategic environment that surrounds South America, the Caribbean, and the Western African shore.⁷⁶ These areas are where Brazil intends to allot its effort. The document further describes Brazilian interests to maintain the South American continent as a peaceful and stable area by advancing mutual development and security cooperation.⁷⁷ Brazil is a continental country and shares a border with almost all countries in South America, except Chile and Ecuador.⁷⁸ Therefore, having control over more than 9.7 thousand miles represents a challenging task for Brazilian security forces. Moreover, the Brazilian Constitution prescribes that a quest for a peaceful solution of controversies should drive Brazil's foreign policy.⁷⁹ The crisis in Venezuela has spread instability

throughout the region and its surroundings in a pervasive manner, which defies Brazilian interests and national security.

Keeping in mind the Clausewitzian systemic approach, the present research shifts to the application of Schmitt's operational design to complement and structure the assessment. After expanding the analysis from a broader perspective – activity 1 of Schmitt's design method – it allows grasping a better context and understanding of the Venezuelan crisis. The activity 2 consists of portraying the problem at hand: The current situation in Venezuela stems from the authoritarian and inefficient “Bolivarian” style of administration that set conditions for nationwide corruption, economic collapse, popular grievances, political instability, and a humanitarian crisis. Internally, Maduro relies on support from military leaders and militia groups, while externally he counts on his ties with Russia, China, and Cuba on the international stage. Conversely, the apparent stagnation of Guaidó's influence to undermine military backing of the regime lengthens the calamity and decreases people's hope of change. Although the Brazilian Humanitarian Task Force has obtained control of Venezuelan migrants along its border and has restored normal conditions across previously affected areas, the ongoing crisis has even more catastrophic upcoming consequences, and jeopardizes Brazilian interests.

The existing tensions within the Venezuela “system” among its key actors encompass several relationships. Displaying those interactions through a diagram might be helpful to visualize causality loops that create a vicious cycle as well as identify tendencies, trends, and drivers of conflict. However, no mental model can completely capture what is going on in the real world due to the uncertainty inherent to any complex adaptive system.⁸⁰ The elements of Clausewitz's Trinity – violence, chance, and reason – work as a synthesis baseline that

nests different interactions across the spectrum of conflict. This paper attempts to visualize Venezuela’s system in a mental model of relations, which summarized the opposing triads within an expanded context, by developing both activity 3 (system named and defined) and activity 4 (system model constructed) of Schmitt’s design method (see Figure 3).

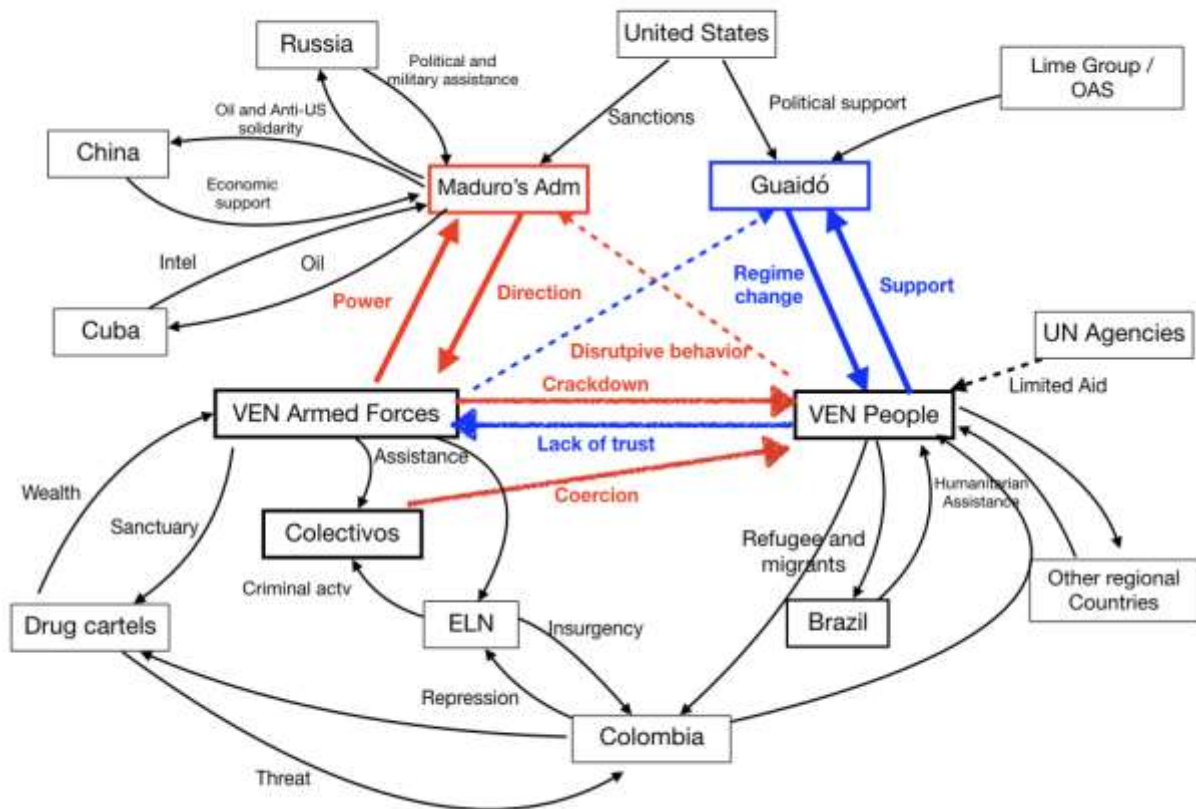


Figure 3: Venezuela System Networks Diagram

Understanding the strategic environment helps to evaluate the situation, define political aims, and establish a coordinating network to act synergistically. It becomes clear that there is no simple solution to solve such a wicked problem. Based upon the *Brazilian National Defense Strategy*, Brazil’s desired system would likely be that Venezuela has its democratic institutions restored and no longer threatens regional stability. The reorganized

Armed Forces serve society, are committed to promoting security cooperation, and no longer crack down upon the Venezuelan people or back up criminal and terrorist groups. Its economy can welcome foreign investments that generate employment, diversify the Venezuelan economic matrix, improve social welfare, and cease humanitarian calamity. Venezuela's new government has popular legitimacy, supports international law and human rights, and has friendly foreign relations with Brazil, the United States, and regional countries. The envisioned desired system should drive any strategy to address the problem characterizing the subordination of warfare to political purposes – reason. Moving to activity 5 (possible system intervention recognized) and activity 6 (the solution emerges), the present analysis evaluates possible interventions into the Venezuela system and emerging solutions.

Launching a coalition military operation to defuse Maduro has been under debate since 2017. Those who advocate for an intervention argue that there is no other option to cope with such a rogue regime but to use force. Moreover, the attempt to oust Maduro by denying his legitimacy and supporting his opponent Guaidó has not thrived thus far. Meanwhile, Maduro has been strengthening ties with his allies and expanding criminal networks. A hypothetical intervention might start with conventional combat, but the existence of paramilitary groups that prop up Maduro's regime will probably lead the struggle to a protracted counterinsurgency/counterterrorist campaign. Indeed, even in a scenario that envisions the regime's collapse without external military action, the outbreak of an insurgency against the new government is likely. Therefore, dealing with militia groups appears to be a tendency as the situation evolves. However, the former scenario exposes an eventual coalition force directly, while the latter might offer an indirect option through a military assistance

mission to train and support reorganized Venezuelan security forces. In both cases, the play of chance and probability demands an integrated, flexible, and creative deployment.

Noticeably, another obstacle to the use of force resides in the political arena but also in the people's perception. Some OAS members are wary that a US-led military intervention may open the door for further actions in the region. Mexico withdrew from TIAR in 2004, and its leftist President Andre Manuel Lopez Obrador has criticized the invocation of the treaty by emphasizing that it represents a threat to all Latin American countries.⁸¹ Likewise, Russia supports Maduro's anti-US rhetoric and plays a crucial role among permanent members of the UN Security Council alongside China. Although intervention in Venezuela may cause the indirect involvement of Russia, there is no evidence to affirm that it would escalate into a confrontation with the United States. Admiral Faller mentions Russian information propaganda, saying that "It's pumping a lot of information out in those spaces, and then misinformation."⁸² The Russian historical behavior indicates that its forces are focused on containing NATO expansion eastwards while deploying military assistance missions in allied countries overseas to undermine US influence in strategic areas. Venezuela seems to be the latter case.

Winning the clash of narratives is paramount to legitimize any action and gain popular support. The information campaign is an uninterrupted enterprise that ranges political, economic, or even military kinetic action, which requires effective integration of instruments of power. Violence, hatred, and enmity amongst the Venezuela populace under such a calamity might lead to unpredictable outcomes. The psychological aspect in the given case of Venezuela tends to favor Maduro over time, as far as he maintains illegal activities to enable his regime despite the current economic collapse. Hence, violent internal turmoil may

increase, but once the humanitarian crisis worsens and people's expectation for change declines, the tendency is the growth of migrants and refugees (see Figure 4), while paramilitary groups tend to increase power. From one side, neighboring countries should enhance cooperation with allies, UN agencies, and NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance to Venezuelan migrants. On the other side, those efforts should convey a stronger message condemning the illegitimacy of Maduro's administration and its human rights violations to increase international support against the regime.

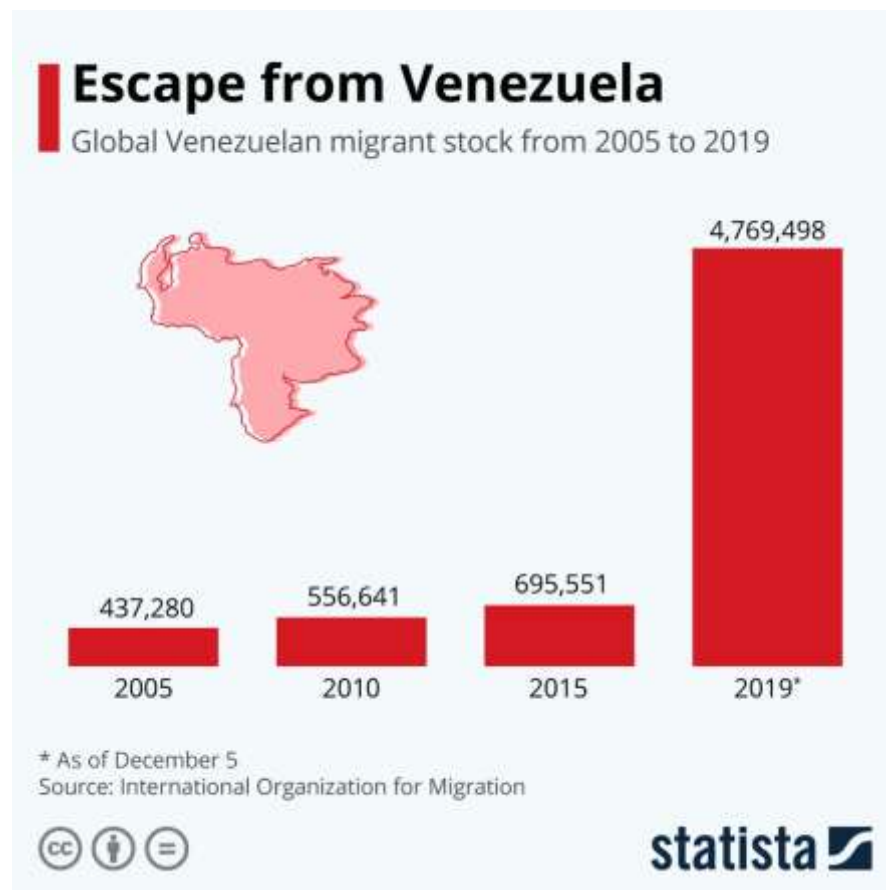


Figure 4: Migration Trends in the Americas – Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
Source: Statista, December 5, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/chart/16766/venezuela-migration/>

Thus, the aftermath of such a comprehensive endeavor encompasses a range of opportunities that align with Brazilian interests. A large number of those “chances” compel non-military efforts, some of which address structural problems within the Venezuela system, while others merely treat symptoms of the ongoing problem. For instance, the ongoing Humanitarian Task Force that assists Venezuelan migrants and refugees along the border should maintain its capability. Meanwhile, it is paramount to strengthen partnerships with Colombia, the United States, and other regional countries to improve intelligence sharing and repression of criminal activities that sustain drug trafficking and militia groups. The use of force to oust Maduro from power does not match with Brazilian foreign policy that should promote a peaceful resolution to the crisis. However, continuous evaluation of the evolving situation may require doing so. Therefore, an information campaign should address the Brazilian population in such a manner that it shapes its support for the deployment of armed forces abroad. Moreover, given how the system may react to an insurgency that leads to chaos “the day after” an eventual Maduro’s eventual resignation, Brazil should likely integrate a possible peacekeeping mission to stabilize Venezuela and restore democratic institutions. Figure 5 summarizes possible injections of energy into the system at hand.

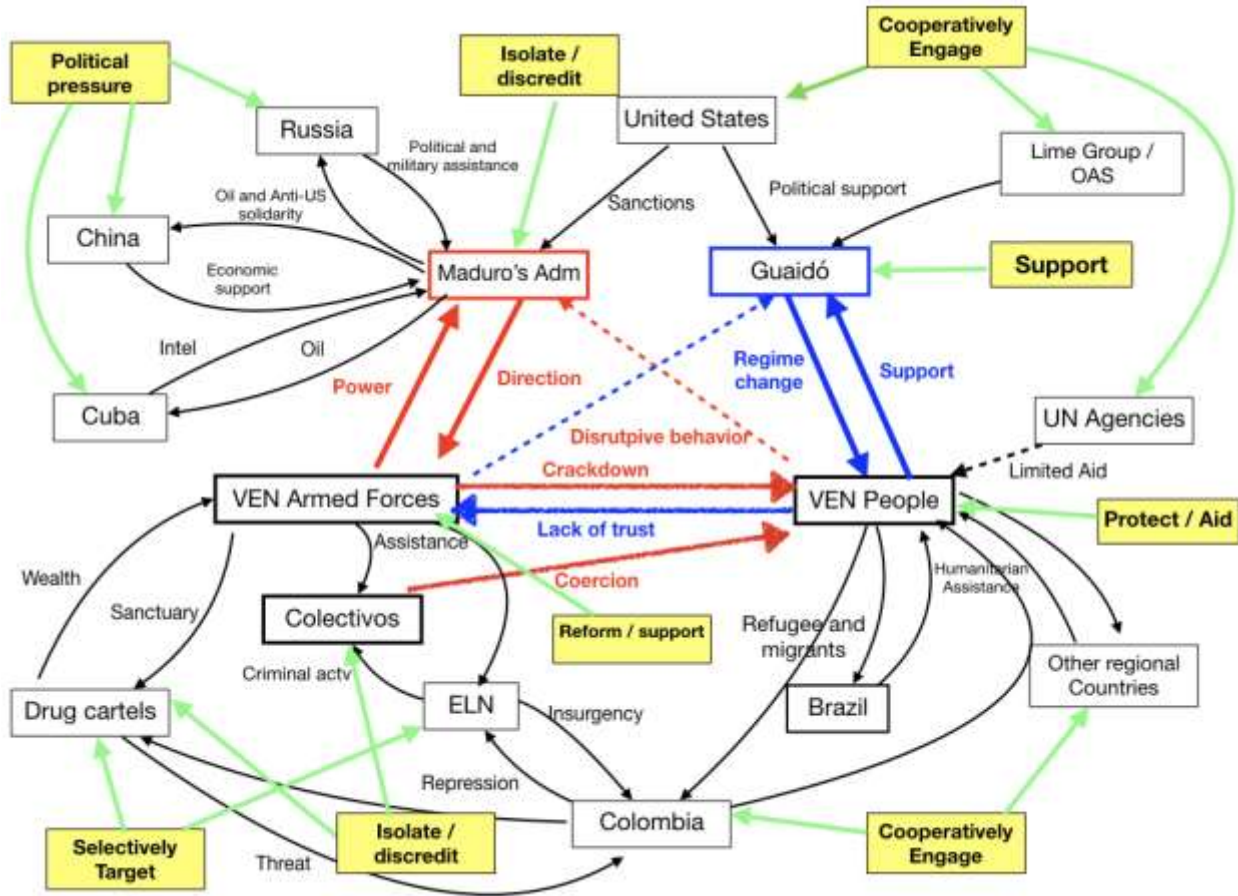


Figure 5: Feasible Interventions in the Venezuela System

Breaking Maduro’s support and restoring the balance among the three “suspending magnets” of the triad should drive the approach. The inherent change of interactions among actors of the system will dictate its dynamic as time progresses, which characterizes activity 7 – defining information requirements. It entails outlining indicators that provide feedback information from the system to refine and reassess the situation.

Conclusion

This paper presents a systemic analysis of the current crisis in Venezuela, considering the Clausewitzian Trinity as a baseline to approach it. His theory offers valuable tenets for Brazilian leaders to understand the problem, evaluate risks, and explore opportunities to

address such a complex situation. After understanding the broad range of issues that the Venezuela crisis nests, it is clear that Brazil should advance its national interests and take an active stance against Maduro's regime by using all instruments of power while paying close attention to how the tensions among key actors of the system evolve.

The assessment of continuous interactions among agents that represent the trinity composed of violence, chance, and reason in the given case helps to maintain a holistic perspective, as well as opens windows of opportunities to exploit vulnerable networks and disrupt Maduro's regime. For instance, by enhancing cooperation with the United States, Colombia, UN Agencies, NGOs, and other regional countries, it is possible to build a comprehensive evaluation of Venezuelan people and their expectations about their country. Likewise, the strengthening of alliances and intelligence sharing may drive combined actions to deviate military backing of the Venezuelan Armed Forces from Maduro to Guaidó. This military support might be the "center of gravity" that underpins the current *Bolivarian* rule. Whatever chosen strategy, it also should address external powers such as Russia and China and try to accommodate their legitimate interests in a tolerable zone.

Although warfare takes place in the realm of chance and uncertainty, careful analysis and proper understanding of each crisis and its potential outcomes contribute thoughtfully to mitigate darkness and avoid misuse of force. Therefore, the risks of a military intervention to overthrow Maduro's administration are not worth the losses of the Brazilian political and security interests. The situation requires a systemic indirect approach that entails an aggressive information campaign, increasing diplomatic isolation, coordinated combat of criminal activities that sustain the regime, and continuous humanitarian assistance to the Venezuelan migrants and refugees. Meanwhile, it also demands permanent monitoring of

tendencies, trends, and adaptation of the system that indicates the outlook “the day after” regime change. Peter Paret paraphrases Clausewitz, arguing that “the creative employment of intellectual and psychological strengths that alone overcome friction, exploit chance, and turn the imponderables into an asset.”⁸³ This systemic approach consists of learning, adapting, and self-organizing processes, which allow strategic thinkers to exploit ambiguity and unpredictability to defeat such a pervasive threat to regional security.

Given the vast aspects around the present subject that were beyond the scope of this paper, this author suggests the subsequent research questions:

- 1) Considering that China is currently the leading economic partner of Brazil, would China take direct measures against Brazil to deter any further initiative to overthrow Maduro from power?
- 2) How would a sea blockade of Venezuela by US forces affect the economy and interests of US allies that have commercial ties with Venezuela?
- 3) What are the connections between the recent turmoil that has happened in Chile in 2019 and possible support from Maduro’s regime?
- 4) If Maduro strengthens his resilience to remain in power, could Venezuela become a proxy conflict between the United States and Russia? If so, how could it impact Brazilian interests?

As long as this paper refers to an ongoing crisis, future researches may develop answers for the questions mentioned above and foresee prospective scenarios that might be helpful to evaluate further actions.

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