

Colombia and Venezuela Border Crisis Continue



The Colombian Venezuelan relationship has developed since the early 16th century, when Spanish empire colonizers created the Province of Santa Marta now Colombia and the Province of New Andalucia now Venezuela. The countries share a history for achieving their independence under Simón Bolívar and becoming one nation —the Great Colombia— which dissolved in the 19th century. Following then, the overall relationship between the two countries has vacillated.

In mid-late August 2015 a new crisis developed after the government of president Nicolas Maduro closed the passage through the Simon Bolivar International Bridge, border crossing linking Colombia and Venezuela in Táchira state and deported Colombian citizens who were in this state. According to the Venezuelan government, Colombian militias are allegedly involved in an attack of Venezuelan soldiers in the area, as well as illegal activities such as smuggling of gasoline and basic goods. Venezuelan authorities warned that the closure could be extended to all the bilateral border with Colombia. The crisis resulted in tens of thousands of Colombians living in Venezuela being displaced.

Venezuela is maintaining its stand to seek through dialogue a solution to the insecurity reigning in its border with Colombia, where contraband and drug trafficking, along with the crimes committed by paramilitary irregulars, have turned violence into a daily fare in that area.

Last weekend, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Delcy Rodríguez, met in Quito, Ecuador, with her Colombian counterpart, María Ángela Holguín, in the presence of the Foreign Minister of Ecuador, Ricardo Patiño, representing the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, and of the Uruguayan Foreign Minister, Rodolfo Nin, representing the Union of South American Nations.

As agreed, that meeting should serve as basis for a future presidential meeting.

But, the dialogue between both nations is in danger of collapse due to recent Colombian statements on the alleged intrusion of Venezuelan military aircraft over Colombian territory.

In her twitter account, the Venezuelan Foreign Minister said the Colombian charges are just an excuse to avoid holding a meeting between Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his Colombian counterpart Juan Manuel Santos.

'We are much concerned about the systematic tendency to invent incidents that just never happened in order to affect our relations,' the Venezuelan minister wrote on her twitter account.

The truth is that Venezuela is right in being concerned about the insecurity along the common border and about the negative consequences on its national currency and economy posed by the widespread contraband of Venezuelan goods to Colombia.

The Colombians use contraband to siphon forty percent of the Venezuelan goods to their own country. Increased vigilance on the border areas is saving Venezuela at least one hundred thousands daily barrels of fuel that were illegally siphoned to Colombia through border crossings now closed.

The border areas have been occupied on the Colombian side by armed paramilitary groups, from where, in connivance with Venezuelan right wing groups, they conduct armed forays into Venezuelan territory, stealing goods, cattle and fuel and attacking unarmed Venezuelan citizens.

Increased Venezuelan military presence in the border areas in the Táchira, later extended to three other municipalities in Zulia, have been widely welcomed in Venezuela. According to surveys, more than sixty percent of the population support the measures implemented by the Caracas Government to face drug trafficking, the siphoning of cheap Venezuelan goods by organized Colombian gangster groups for reselling at much higher prices in their territory, reject paramilitary activities and call for a border of peace and security between both neighbouring countries.

The Venezuelans are also supporting the declaration of a state of exception in some municipalities in the state of Táchira. Venezuela's goals are quite clear: to establish, in full respect of human rights, an order of peace, without paramilitary activities, without contraband, so as to guarantee the security of the Venezuelan peoples and also that of their Colombian neighbors.

This effort by the Caracas authorities deserves widespread support since it seeks the solution of the problem with respect to both the Venezuelan and Colombian peoples.

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