

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

Washington, DC 20515-0517

March 7, 2019

The Honorable Michael Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the Trump Administration's handling of relations with Venezuela, particularly its suggestions of military intervention, imposition of broad unilateral sanctions, and recent recognition of an opposition leader as interim president without a clear plan in place to hold democratic elections and avoid an escalation of violence. President Donald Trump and other senior United States (U.S.) officials have generated alarm in Venezuela and throughout the region with actions and statements – such as the recent threat that "all options are on the table" – which indicate a pursuit of American military-led regime change. Furthermore, the President's recent economic sanctions threaten to exacerbate the country's grave economic crisis, causing immense suffering for the most vulnerable in society who bear no responsibility for the situation in the country.

We strongly condemn the Maduro government's actions, including repression of Venezuelan civil society, failed economic policy, the killing of unarmed protestors, disregard for the rule of law, the holding of unfair elections, and blocking humanitarian aid from entering the country. However, threats of military intervention against a failed autocrat who poses no threat to our national security are simply unacceptable. U.S. military action in Venezuela would be unconstitutional without congressional authorization and illegal internationally without approval from the United Nations. We were deeply troubled to learn that President Trump, after having spoken publicly about a "military option" for Venezuela, reportedly pushed for military intervention in Venezuela in meetings with other senior officials in the White House.

Broad unilateral sanctions and threats of military action are making life worse for ordinary Venezuelans. According to the United Nations, at least 3 million Venezuelans have fled the country because of the ongoing economic crisis. Rather than pursuing misguided policies which run counter to our own national interests, the U.S. should instead join other countries in promoting Venezuelan efforts to achieve constructive dialogue and democratic solutions to the current political crisis. Uruguay has already proposed a "new process of inclusive and credible negotiations" to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and Mexican President Lopez Obrador has declared his support for, and potential participation in, dialogue. Latin American nations undoubtedly still remember how the Bush Administration supported a short-lived military coup in Venezuela in 2002, an event that cost dozens of human lives and deeply polarized the country.

The U.S. stands alone in its decision to impose economic sanctions against the Venezuelan government, that as currently implemented, are hurting the civilian population. An August 2017 executive order, based on the questionable determination that Venezuela represents "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security [...] of the United States," prohibits U.S.-based financial entities from purchasing new Venezuelan government debt. A May 2018 executive order prohibits U.S. persons and entities from buying debt owed to the Venezuelan government.

The Venezuelan government's own economic mismanagement and misguided economic policies are in large part to blame for the horrific economic crisis that has unfolded in the country. Yet today Venezuelan government officials can claim that the U.S. is waging an economic war and laying groundwork for direct confrontation, which threatens chaos and mass migration from Venezuela that will be felt throughout the region. The sanctions are already hurting ordinary people and contributing to the ongoing outbound migration of hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans, which could also result in a dramatic increase in refugees to the U.S.

An active and strong opponent of Venezuela's government, Francisco Rodriguez – Chief Economist at the New York investment bank Torino Capital – has opposed the current U.S. sanctions regime on economic and humanitarian grounds. Rodriguez, widely seen as the leading expert on Venezuela's economy, has shown that the sanctions have seriously worsened the country's economic crisis and made it very difficult to improve the situation. As a result, many Venezuelans have died due to lack of access to life-saving medicines, and in some cases food. Rodriguez has detailed how the sanctions have had these lethal effects on innocent people for several reasons: credit from foreign entities is often denied for vital imports because financial institutions are afraid of punishment for running afoul of U.S. sanctions (even for credit that would technically not be prohibited); the sanctions' crippling effects cut off money for essential imports; and most importantly, the economic destruction that is caused by the sanctions deprives millions of Venezuelans of income. Furthermore, polls have shown that most Venezuelans strongly oppose these sanctions.

Further, threats and involvement in Venezuela's domestic affairs by the U.S. are counterproductive as they play into the Venezuelan government's narrative that the opposition is a proxy for the U.S. These actions help shore up Maduro's support base and take attention away from urgent domestic issues. Respected Venezuelan pollster Datanálisis has carried out a survey showing that the vast majority of Venezuelans are opposed to foreign intervention as a means of removing Maduro.

Our government should change course in its policy toward Venezuela. Unilateral measures and violent threats only threaten to stoke chaos and instability. Instead, the U.S. must abide by its obligation under the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter to abstain from using armed force or "any other form of interference or attempted threat" against another state. We urge you to support efforts by Uruguay, Mexico, and the Vatican to promote dialogue and help Venezuelans resolve their own problems.

We appreciate your attention and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

  
Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress

  
Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



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Member of Congress



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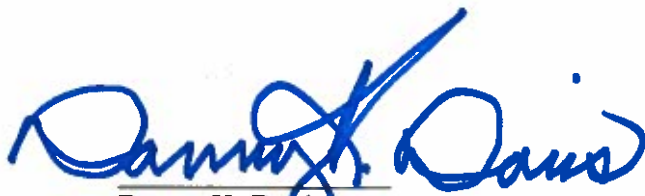
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