



## HUMIRE: As Venezuela Inches Toward Syria-Style War, U.S. Weapons Are Not the Answer

**For months the protests in Venezuela have been escalating and, last week, [The Miami Herald](#) revealed an audio recording suggesting that military snipers could be used against the Venezuelan protesters.**

The implications of such an action would undoubtedly be an escalation of force in an already violent situation. Such lethal force by the military on Venezuelans could provoke the opposition to seek weapons and other arms to defend themselves. Undoubtedly, they would turn to the U.S. for support. The Trump administration should not listen. Anyone certain that they know what to do about Venezuela should be ignored. The situation on the ground is much more complex than a simple civil war between the regime and opposition elements. Wars are never that clean. What is brewing in Venezuela is a [situation more like Syria](#), with various factions and extra-regional actors, far different than anything we've seen recently in Latin America. U.S. intervention without good intelligence would be counterproductive at best and could lead to a full-blown regional conflict. Moreover, such a move would fall right into the military plans of the Venezuelan regime and their external allies. An ongoing political-military buildup has been taking place in Venezuela over the last decade. While the country is short on food and medicine, there is an abundance of military armament courtesy of Iran, Russia, and China. This buildup culminated this January with a joint, multinational military exercise called [Zamora 200](#), in which over a half million military members and civilian militiamen rehearsed Venezuela's defense to invasion by a NATO force led by the United States and Colombia. [Colombia began talks with NATO](#) in late 2016 to potentially become a full member. The wargaming exercise conducted in Venezuela obviously had this in mind. The Zamora 200 military exercise had three distinct phases, the last of which culminated in the breakout of a civil war. The Venezuelan regime wants the world to believe that [Plan Zamora](#), which is the real-time execution of the military exercise, is a civil-military plan to quell the insecurity and instability in the country and prevent any so-called "coup d'état." In reality, Plan Zamora is likely designed to manufacture a coup, catalyze a civil war, and provoke the U.S. to intervene. This is a tactic taken from Cuba's counterintelligence playbook on disinformation and deception, planned and perfected for years throughout the Havana- and Caracas-led Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). In Bolivia, according to several [independent reports](#), President Evo Morales allegedly concocted an *autogolpe* (self-coup) in 2009 by framing a fake terrorist plot that drew out his political opposition in Santa Cruz. A year later, in 2010, a similar event took place in Ecuador when then-president [Rafael Correa](#) shouted from the police headquarters in Quito to apparently try and provoke the police to fire their weapons at him. The late Venezuelan *caudillo* and Maduro's mentor, Hugo Chávez, was also [accused of staging the 2002 coup d'état](#) to consolidate power and deflect blame to the U.S. for "intervening." Thus far, the Trump administration has been prudent, reverting to [sanctions](#) and strong rhetoric to stand



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up for human rights and protect U.S. national security interests. It seems [President Maduro](#) is not satisfied, telling President Trump to “get your pig hands out of here,” implying that U.S. intervention is already underway. In reality, it is the Venezuelan regime that has already brought foreign intervention into Venezuela by calling on Cuba, Iran, and Russia to circumvent its sovereignty and provide lethal aid to its violent suppression and intimidation of the Venezuelan people. Just last month, both the Russian and [Iranian defense ministers](#) met with Venezuela’s defense minister, Vladimir Padrino López, in Moscow to confirm they will send strong military and armed support to Venezuela. What the Venezuelan regime and its extra-regional allies are looking for is a way to blame the Trump administration for what their policies have created in the country. A civil war is the only way the current regime and its allies can maintain power; however, the regime cannot simply go to war against its own people. They need a clear enemy and, if the Trump administration changes its policy to anything that can be portrayed as interventionist, it will make itself into the enemy that the Venezuelan regime and its allies crave.