



José Gustavo Arocha, currently a Research Fellow for the Center for a Secure Free Society (SFS) leading the VRIC program. He is a retired Lieutenant Colonel from the Venezuelan Army and former political prisoner from 2014 to 2015. José Gustavo has a multidisciplinary background with specializations in civil-military relations, violent conflicts, cybersecurity, and terrorism threats in Latin America. He has provided advice and logistical services to high-profile Venezuelan dissidents and regime critics.



Mr. Arocha graduated with full honors in 1990 from Venezuela’s Military Academy and remained a rising star in the Army for many years, being the highest scoring officer in his promotion group when ascended to captain in 1998. During the tumultuous years of Hugo Chávez’s government, his outspoken and independent nature became a liability for the increasingly partisan Venezuelan Army. In 2007-2008, as student movements raged across the country in protest, Mr. Arocha focused on building bridges and attempting to find common ground between the groups demonstrating on the streets and local troop commanders to minimize the risk of military repression.

Prior to SFS and following his forced resignation from the Armed Forces in 2009, Mr. Arocha founded a political consultancy company, GeoFenix, that provided strategic advice and logistical services to high-profile Venezuelan dissidents and regime critics. In 2014, he was detained by Venezuelan regime security services under false charges of treason. He was imprisoned for eight months without trial, kept in solitary confinement and tortured in an underground prison known as “La Tumba” or “The Tomb.” Since escaping captivity in March 2015, he has resided in the United States.

Mr. Arocha received his Master’s in Public Administration from Harvard University in 2018, where he is an Edward S. Mason Fellow and a postgraduate degree in Organizational Development at Universidad Catolica Andres Bello (UCAB) in Venezuela in 2003.

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