

Venezuela and Exxon Mobil's Land Grab

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Image by Justin

Attacks on Venezuela by the U.S. and its allies include 930 illegal sanctions that shut the country out from international finance, blocking it from buying medicines, food, or producing or selling its oil. Also, there have been direct and indirect support for coup d'etat attempts, street violence leading to murders and injuries, cyberattacks on its electricity grid, sabotage of oil and infrastructure, financing criminal bands, corruption of officials, assassination attempt against the President and his cabinet, setting up a false presidency, appropriating CITGO oil company and billions of Venezuelan assets in banks, blocking the country from obtaining Covid-19 vaccines during a pandemic, and a brutal attack on the currency. It is estimated that at least 100,000 Venezuelans have lost their lives due to the illegal sanctions.

It seems it has not been enough.

Now, wrapping itself in old-fashioned colonialism, the U.S., through its creature Exxon Mobil, and hand in hand with its imperial ally Great Britain, is poised to pull the biggest land grab since the U.S. took a quarter of México by means of sleight-of-hand judicial theft.

Long Standing Issues - Land and gold

All the ancient maps of Venezuela, from the time it was first mapped under Spanish rule, show that its eastern border was the Esequibo River.

On the other side of the river was a territory later claimed by England that became British Guiana. It was a place where explorers thirsty for gold invaded seeking the myth of El Dorado, which they did not find but did find gold and the sweet gold of sugar cane. Using a deliberate misinformation campaign, involving the bogus cartography by R. Schomburgk, as far back as 1835, the British Empire made inroads into Venezuelan territory. After Britain gave independence to British Guiana and it became Guyana, these inroads did not cease. The territory to the west of the river thus claimed by Guyana and which is in dispute, measures 159.542 Km, a

territory bigger than Portugal and the Netherlands together.

The long-standing controversy reached a point when in 1899, an Arbitral Tribunal in Paris was convened to settle the matter – with not a single Venezuelan present! The judges were from Britain, the United States and one Russian. The U.S.A, claiming some sort of reason to be there because of their own Monroe Doctrine, presumed to represent Venezuela. The sentence, to no one's surprise, benefited Great Britain.

Venezuela continued to fight this astonishing judicial theft of the land that had always been part of Venezuela, and after long diplomatic struggles, the Accord of Geneva of 1966 was agreed upon by both parts. It emphatically declared null and void the actions of the Paris Tribunal of 1899, and stipulated that both parts – Venezuela and Guyana- are obligated to negotiate amicably together in good faith to resolve all matters concerning the Esequibo. Furthermore, considering this Accord, in 1980 both parties agreed to the United Nations mechanism of Good Offices, whereby a jointly appointed person would help implement negotiations.

Today's Issue: - Black Gold

In 2014/15, the most sinister and predatory oil corporation in the world, Exxon Mobil -an avowed enemy of Venezuela- discovered oil in land and sea of the disputed territory. That ended all the ongoing amicable negotiations between Venezuela and Guyana, as the wealth of Exxon Mobil obtained the upper hand of the government of Guyana. The present prime minister, for example, has been handed \$18 million in exchange for refusing to negotiate further, denouncing the Geneva Accord of 1966 and demanding that the decision of the 1899 Paris Tribunal be enforced through yet another biased team of judges at the International Court of Justice, that actually has no jurisdiction except its own self-enlarged mandate.

But most dangerous of all, the oil corporation urges Guyana to aggressively provoke Venezuela into attacking so that it can present itself to the world as a “victim” of

Venezuela. The aim is to provoke a frontier war so that the naval fleet of the U.S. Southern Command - now conveniently posted in the adjacent seas- can then intervene militarily and invade Venezuela. Since 2015 Guyana has been carrying out military manoeuvres with the Southern Command with Venezuela as a target.

There is nothing the U.S. would want more than "a cause", real or not, to invade Venezuela and get its hands on the rich oil, gas and precious minerals that are abundant there. It can no longer count on stooge right-wing governments in Colombia and Brazil, so now it is manipulating Guyana to be its surrogate war monger. The fleet of the U.S. Southern Command is already poised in waters off the Esequibo and, in fact, the U.S.A has army presence in Guyana itself.

However, Venezuela clearly understands this ruse. It has repeatedly stated that Venezuela has never gone to war - except when its armies marched to Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador to liberate them from the Spanish Empire. Venezuela seeks a peaceful outcome.

The people of the Esequibo

Guyana is one of the most unequal and poor countries in the region. Its resource extraction enterprises are in the hands of foreign corporations, and the income they grant the country has not had the corresponding impact on the health and welfare indicators of the population. The first attempt to measure poverty was in 1992-93, later repeated in 2006. An academic scholar has concluded: "The economic history of Guyana is one of slavery, indenture, colonialism and a social stratification based on skin colour." The first free elections occurred just as recently as June 1953, but were followed in October of the same year by a British invasion with troops and ships, abetted by the U.S.A, which overthrew the elected populist government of Cheddi Jagan y Forbes Burnham.

Its society suffers with accusations of corruption, inefficiency, and police brutality It

has about 78,500 indigenous peoples, 10% of the population, that have been sadly, and historically neglected by the Guyanese government but are now defending their rights through their own movements as since 1990 multinational resource exploitation has increased and highlighted the failure of the government to recognize and guarantee indigenous rights. Many indigenous people of the Esequibo consider themselves Venezuelans, or at least of dual nationality. Since the Chávez government, Venezuela has been proposing joint ventures that would benefit both countries, especially the population in the Esequibo, just as it has effective and amicable gas exploitation with Trinidad and Tobago on shared seas.

The Referendum

Venezuela's position on the Esequibo is based on the borders it has always had since it was a General Captaincy of the Spanish Empire as clearly stated in Article 10 of the Venezuelan Constitution. It also emphatically declares that the nation's sovereignty resides in the people, and that the Republic is democratic, participatory and protagonist, multiethnic and pluricultural. In Article 70, referenda are indicated as one of the ways in which the people can participate in the exercise of their sovereignty. Furthermore, Article 71 states that matters of special national transcendence can be submitted to a consultative referendum.

Therefore, on December 6, 2023 the Venezuelan people will be asked to answer "yes" or "no" to 5 questions: if they reject the 1899 Paris arbitration, approve of the 1966 Geneva Accord agreement as the only binding mechanism to resolve the issue, agree with not recognizing the International Court of Justice's jurisdiction, oppose Guyana's unilateral appropriation of the Esequibo's territorial waters. The 5th key question asks voters if they agree with establishing a new state, called Guayana Esequiba, in the disputed land, granting Venezuelan citizenship to its inhabitants and implementing accelerated social programs.

This last question is of critical political relevance because it, in effect, offers the

Esequibo people all the advantages, rights, equality, services and prosperity that today the Venezuelan government and institutions can provide to its citizens. It is so crucial that immediately Guyana and Exxon Mobil demanded of the International Court of Justice be brought into the dispute to do something impossible: to forbid the nation of Venezuela to carry out a referendum for its own citizens! That is, to directly intervene in the domestic affairs of a sovereign country and violate its Constitution. Thus is the fear that they have towards the voice of the people.

However, the ICJ does not actually have jurisdiction over this issue not only because for years it has creepingly and unilaterally expanded its own mandate, but also because any demands of this nature must be made by both parties, and Venezuela has not accepted that court's involvement or jurisdiction. Yet Exxon Mobil has paid for Guyana's substantial legal fees before this court.

Venezuela's electoral process -considered by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter as the best in the world- always carries out a trial vote just to make sure everything is in working order. This trial vote on November 19th had a surprising result: the turnout was three times larger than in any other election trial, more than 3 million voters turned up! This is a clear indication of the great interest that Venezuelans have in the Esequibo. In fact, the Esequibo is the most important unifying issue in Venezuela today. Government, artists, oppositions, NGOs, unions, private sector, educators, etc; it seems the entire country is standing up in defense of the Esequibo.

But there is one factor, apart from maps, judicial lawfare and referendum, that will impact on this issue: it is Exxon Mobil and the millions it is distributing among politicians, lawyers, and media to get this land grab.

Exxon Mobil is perhaps the most criminal oil company in the world. For decades its engineers knew well what fossil fuels were doing to the climate, but not only did they suppress this information, they paid writers, scientists, and media to deny climate change was happening. It has violated human rights of countless rural and

indigenous people; and in Indonesia its collaboration with a brutal government led to it being accused of genocide.

It seems wherever it operates it commits ecocide, crimes against nature. One of its worst crimes was the environmental disaster caused by its oil tanker the Exxon Valdez. In 1989 it spilled 10.8 million gallons of crude oil in Alaska, causing the death of between 100,000 and 250,000 marine birds, hundreds of otters, seals, eagles, orcas and innumerable fish. Exxon Mobil spent years fighting in courts, denying its culpability, and trying to squirm out of paying for damages caused. In the end, after 20 years of litigations, it paid the state of Alaska the pittance of \$507 million, that is one tenth of the cost of the damages caused by its oil spill. If it can do this to Alaska in its own home country, imagine what little environmental protection the people, and pristine flora and fauna of the Esequibo would get from this irresponsible corporation.

This is the monster that has bought Guyana and that is attacking the sovereignty of Venezuela.

What is at stake

This is not merely a territorial dispute between two countries, but more than that, what is at stake is the validity of international law, the integrity of the Geneva Accord of 1966, the integrity of the Good Offices of the United Nations, and the honesty of the International Court of Justice (if it has any).

In the end it is the struggle between democracy and the rapacious interests of a powerful oil corporation in the service of the United States empire.

However, Venezuela has defeated an empire before.

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