



Members of the Bolivarian National Police stand guard near “Dr. J. M. de los Rios” Children’s Hospital 30 January 2019 during a protest against the government of President Nicolás Maduro and in demand of humanitarian aid, called by opposition leader and self-proclaimed interim president Juan Guaidó in Caracas, Venezuela. Maduro hit out at military “mercenaries” he says are conspiring to divide the armed forces and plot a coup as the opposition planned a new protest to force the socialist leader from power. (Photo by Federico Parra, Agence France-Presse)

Contours of the New “Cold War”?

Editor’s note: The ongoing popular uprising in Venezuela may prove a unique touchstone for discerning the contours of the emerging world order competition in which the United States must operate into the foreseeable future.

Figure 1 (on page 145) depicts a recent alignment of opposing blocs of nation-states on the issue of Venezuela. Of note, those today aligned with Nicolás Maduro’s claim to governance are uniformly authoritarian regimes in contrast to those opposing his claim, which, for the most part, can be characterized as generally

legitimate and stable democracies. This alignment in some respects mirrors the adversarial blocs that once faced each other during the Cold War of the last century.

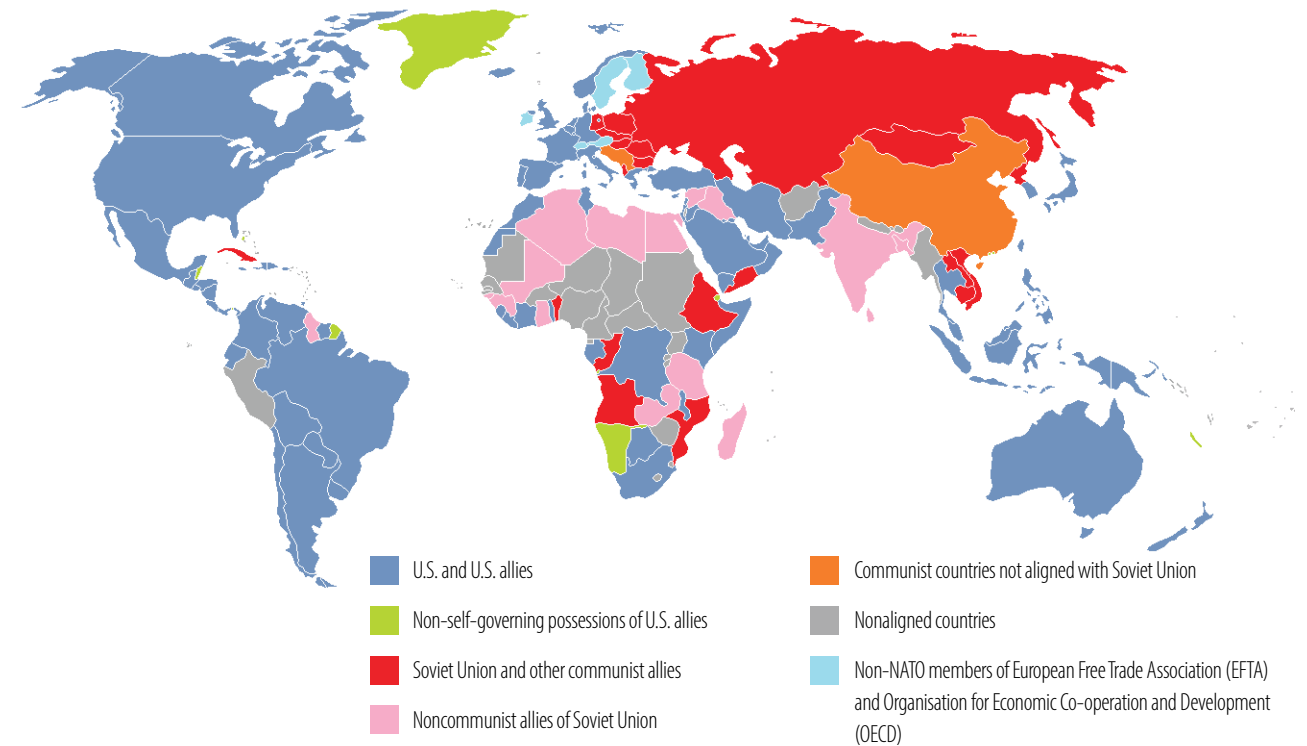
For comparison’s sake, figure 2 (on page 145) depicts Cold War relationships among blocs of nation-states circa 1975. Diverging in other respects, the modern alignments reflect notable changes as some states have switched Cold War-era allegiances, while others that have emerged from so-called “third world” status with a greater sense of self-identity and independence seem disinclined to take a side one way or the other with regard to Venezuela.



Over the past three years, the Venezuelan economy has collapsed due to falling oil prices, mismanagement of the economy, and deeply ingrained corruption among its leaders. The direct consequence is mass suffering on a scale not seen in Latin America for centuries that has resulted in a widespread popular revolt against the Socialist regime of Maduro. One collateral consequence of this collapse has been a mass migration of Venezuelans to countries throughout Latin America, numbering in February 2019 at more than three million people—about the same number of refugees who fled Syria in 2016—and projected by some experts to reach eight million by the end of 2019. The effects of this collapse have produced serious regional instability, overwhelming the ability of neighboring countries such as Colombia and Brazil to provide sufficient resources to deal with the problem of a mass influx of economic refugees.

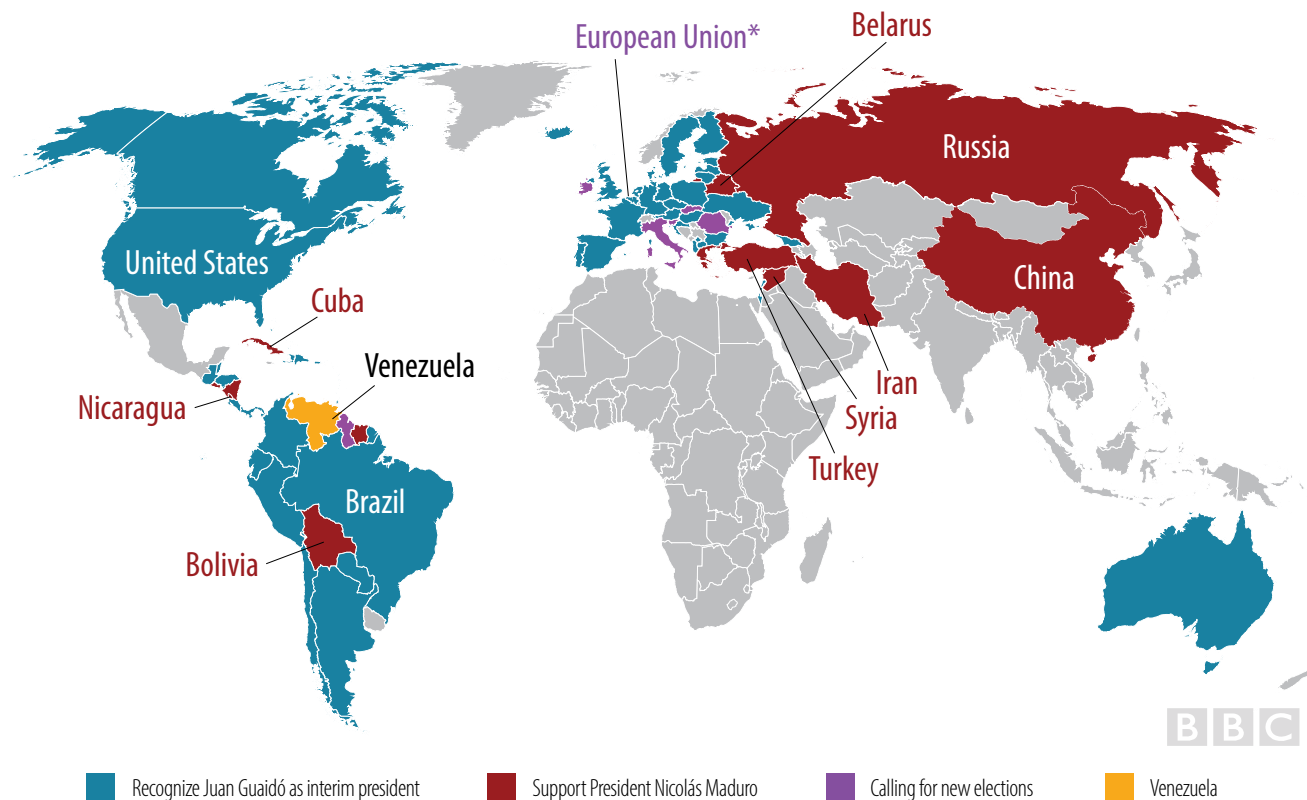
For students of global national security, there have been two especially alarming features of Venezuela's slide into failed-state status. First, Venezuelan leaders have displayed an astonishingly callous indifference toward the suffering of the majority of their own people, eschewing international or other relief remedies readily at hand while seemingly pursuing as their sole objective staying in power. The callousness of the regime has been glaringly evident in the propensity of both civilian and military leaders to divert resources to line their own pockets in the face of the collapse of the state and the public misery this is producing. The other striking feature has been the jaded response by a variety of nations seemingly inured to the unfolding humanitarian disaster. These have stepped forward to provide support to Maduro's efforts to remain in power, seemingly heedless of the suffering of the Venezuelan people that Maduro's inept governance has caused. Interestingly, the alignment of states that has emerged to support the Venezuelan leadership's effort to hold on illicitly to power correlates closely with nation-states that themselves display a similar indifference to the suffering of large segments of their own individual populations. The case of Venezuela suggests that the degree of callousness that national leaders display toward suffering populations may be the most prominent bellwether of the new operational environment as nation-states wrestle with defining their security interests and relationships within the evolving world order. ■

Antigovernment protesters take part in a demonstration 2 February 2019 demanding the resignation of President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas, Venezuela. Momentum is growing for Venezuela's opposition movement led by self-declared interim president Juan Guaidó, who called supporters back into the streets for nationwide protests, escalating pressure on Maduro to step down. (Photo by Rodrigo Abd, Associated Press)



(Figure by Jintela via Wikimedia Commons)

Figure 1. Cold War Alliances in 1975



(Figure courtesy of BBC; data as of 12:00 GMT on 5 February 2019. *The European Union has called for new elections, but some individual member countries have expressed their preferences)

Figure 2. Where Do Countries Stand on Venezuela?