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VENEZUELA IN MADURO'S GRASP: ASSESSING
THE DETERIORATING SECURITY AND
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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AUGUST 4, 2020
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VENEZUELA IN MADURO'S GRASP: ASSESSING THE DETERIORATING SECURITY AND HU- MANITARIAN SITUATION

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4, 2020

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:02 a.m. in room SR-325, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. James E. Risch, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Risch [presiding], Rubio, Romney, Young, Paul, Cruz, Menendez, Shaheen, Coons, Udall, Murphy, and Kaine.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES E. RISCH, U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO

The CHAIRMAN. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order, please.

I want to thank Special Representative Abrams and Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator Hodges for their service and for appearing here today to discuss the worsening crisis in Venezuela.

It is hard to imagine a more pressing national security concern in the Western Hemisphere than the political, humanitarian, and economic crisis provoked by Maduro and his cronies in Venezuela.

In the last 7 years, Nicolás Maduro has dramatically deepened relations with the most dangerous forces in the world, which were first established by his predecessor, Hugo Chavez.

On his watch, Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, transnational criminal organizations, and U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations have turned Venezuela into their playground.

Their activities are intolerable security threats to the United States and the hemisphere at large and prolong a humanitarian crisis provoked by the socialist policies of the regime.

Nearly 5.2 million Venezuelans have fled their homeland, placing a huge burden on the neighboring countries that have generously accepted these refugees from Maduro's regime.

Ninety-six percent of those who have stayed behind live in poverty, with 80 percent facing extreme poverty. Chronic food shortages and the dysfunctional public health care system have condemned an entire generation to hunger and stunted growth.

A series of unsuccessful attempts to restore freedom in the last year, compounded by Maduro's desire and ability to stay in power by perpetuating corruption and torture have emboldened the regime and left democratic forces facing daunting challenges.

President Trump's campaign of maximum pressure is a welcome improvement. We should leave no stone unturned in support of the Venezuelan people's efforts to rid themselves of this evil.

It is also appropriate to continue providing assistance to enable Venezuela's neighbors to help the millions of Venezuelan refugees that they are hosting.

The international community, especially the European Union and Spain, must increase economic pressure on Maduro if they are serious about the return of democracy to Venezuela and the end of the humanitarian nightmare there.

We must make clear to Maduro's mentors in Havana and Moscow that this game is over.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the steps the U.S. government is taking to counter the malign influences in Venezuela.

With that, I know our ranking member has strong feelings on this, and I will yield the floor to him.

[The prepared statement of Senator James E. Risch follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES E. RISCH

This hearing will come to order.

I would like to thank Special Representative Abrams and Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator Hodges for their service and for appearing today to discuss the worsening crisis in Venezuela.

It is hard to imagine a more pressing national security concern in the Western Hemisphere than the political, humanitarian, and economic crises provoked by Maduro and his cronies in Venezuela.

In the last 7 years, Nicolas Maduro has dramatically deepened relations with the most dangerous forces in the world, which were first established by his predecessor Hugo Chavez.

On his watch, Cuba, Russia, China, Iran, transnational criminal organizations and U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations have turned Venezuela into their playground.

Their activities are intolerable security threats to the United States and the hemisphere at-large; and prolong a humanitarian crisis provoked by the socialist policies of the regime.

Nearly 5.2 million Venezuelans have fled their homeland, placing a huge burden on the neighboring countries that have generously accepted these refugees from Maduro's regime.

Ninety 6 percent of those who have stayed behind live in poverty, with 80 percent facing extreme poverty. Chronic food shortages and a dysfunctional public healthcare system have condemned an entire generation to hunger and stunted growth.

A series of unsuccessful attempts to restore freedom in the last year, compounded by Maduro's desire and ability to stay in power by perpetrating corruption and torture, have emboldened the regime and left democratic forces facing daunting challenges.

President Trump's campaign of maximum pressure is a welcome improvement from 8 years of halfhearted measures by the last administration.

We should leave no stone un-turned in support of the Venezuelan people's efforts to rid themselves of this evil. We must also continue providing assistance to enable Venezuela's neighbors to help the millions of Venezuelan refugees that they are hosting.

The international community, especially the European Union and Spain, must increase economic pressure on Maduro if they are serious about the return of democracy to Venezuela and the end of the humanitarian nightmare there.

We must make clear to Maduro's mentors in Havana and Moscow that this game is over. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about the steps the U.S. Government is taking to counter their malign influence in Venezuela.

With that, I will ask Ranking Member Menendez if he wishes to make any opening remarks.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT MENENDEZ,
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for working with me on this hearing. I appreciate it.

Mr. Abrams, you come before the committee at an urgent moment for Venezuela, one with implications for the United States and our entire hemisphere.

We face a critical moment for Venezuela's interim government as the Maduro regime seeks to consolidate a criminal dictatorship with a helping hand from Havana.

This crisis directly affects U.S. national security interests and our geopolitical competitors. Russia and China and Iran seek to undermine American influence.

Moreover, the people of Venezuela continue suffering grave human rights abuses, a humanitarian catastrophe worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, and mass displacement across the hemisphere.

As Venezuelans struggle, I should say, to survive and restore their democracy, legislative elections are scheduled this year.

Not surprisingly, the Maduro regime has rigged every aspect of the electoral process, thereby ensuring increased instability and more widespread suffering. The evidence is already there.

After two decades of U.S. investment in Colombia's security, we now see Colombian guerrillas operating openly across Venezuela in large swaths of ungoverned territory.

They join a wide range of armed actors promoting and profiting from the drug trade, illegal gold mining, and human suffering.

Most tragically, of course, is the daily suffering that Venezuelans endure. Femicide, sexual violence, and trafficking of Venezuelan women and girls are, reportedly, on the rise.

Dramatic increases in maternal and infant mortality reflect the dire state of Venezuela's health system, and the World Food Program assessed in February that one-third of Venezuelans face moderate or severe food insecurity.

Additionally, Maduro's brutal regime has perpetrated more state-sponsored murders—state-sponsored murders—than any Latin American government since the dirty wars of the 1970s and '80s.

In the last 2 years, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported over 8,000 extrajudicial killings by Maduro's security forces as well as grotesque patterns of torture and rape.

These conditions have forced more than 5.2 million Venezuelans to flee their country in search of protection and assistance.

I traveled to Cúcuta, Colombia, a year ago, where I heard heart-wrenching stories from individuals fleeing the humanitarian tragedy in Venezuela.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn converging on the crisis of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the United States must mobilize international partners to further expand assistance and protection for the Venezuelan people.

If the current trajectory continues, more Venezuelans will be displaced from their homes than the number of Syrians displaced during that devastating nearly decade-long conflict.

Yet, while other countries are generously hosting millions of Venezuelans, the Trump administration has ignored my repeated re-

quests to grant Temporary Protected Status to some 200,000 Venezuelans in the United States.

It has turned away Venezuelan asylum seekers at our southern border, and that is absolutely unacceptable. The Administration must change course.

Through my VERDAD Act last year, Democrats and Republicans, in concert with the Administration, united in our recognition of interim President Juan Guaidó.

However, in June, President Trump stated that he did not think this decision to recognize President Guaidó was, “very meaningful,” sending the wrong signal to our allies and our adversaries.

We must be purposeful and lead the formidable coalition we helped build to support President Guaidó. So I expect to hear a strategy about how we will work with our partners to ensure that Maduro does not use fraudulent elections to strengthen his dictatorship.

Moreover, with Maduro and his cronies facing charges in the United States for drug trafficking and graft, there should be no doubt about their criminal credentials. We are dealing with a massive law enforcement challenge in Venezuela.

Never have so many in our hemisphere fallen victim to a cabal of criminals so willing to destroy their own country for the sole purpose of enriching themselves and avoiding justice.

We must coordinate an international campaign to confront the regime’s criminality, and I look forward to hearing from you, Special Representative, on what changes we will make to increase our chance of success in the next 6 months.

And yes, I said changes. There has been bipartisan support for most of our sanctions and the \$600 million in foreign assistance we have used for humanitarian aid.

But Maduro remains entrenched in power and humanitarian access into Venezuela is extremely limited. We cannot continue on the same course and expect to achieve different results.

I fear the Administration may very well have squandered a limited window of opportunity, crafted by valiant Venezuelans, and I hope it is not too late to open that window again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Robert Menendez follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for working with me on this hearing. Mr. Abrams, you come before this committee at an urgent moment for Venezuela—one with implications for the United States and our entire hemisphere.

We face a critical moment for Venezuela’s Interim Government, as the Maduro regime seeks to consolidate a criminal dictatorship, with a helping hand from Havana. This crisis directly affects U.S. national security interests, and our geopolitical competitors—Russia and China and Iran—seek to undermine American influence.

Moreover, the people of Venezuela continue suffering grave human rights abuses, a humanitarian catastrophe worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, and mass displacement across the hemisphere.

As Venezuelans struggle to survive and restore their democracy, legislative elections are scheduled for this year. Not surprisingly, the Maduro regime has rigged every aspect of the electoral process, thereby ensuring increased instability and more widespread suffering. The evidence is already there.

After two decades of U.S. investment in Colombia’s security, we now see Colombian guerillas operating openly across Venezuela in large swaths of ungoverned territory. They join a wide range of armed actors profiting from the drug trade, illegal gold mining, and human trafficking.

Most tragically, of course, is the daily suffering that Venezuelans endure. Femicide, sexual violence, and trafficking of Venezuelan women and girls are reportedly on the rise. Dramatic increases in maternal and infant mortality reflect the dire state of Venezuela's health system. And, the World Food Program assessed in February that one third of Venezuelans face moderate or severe food insecurity.

Additionally, Maduro's brutal regime has perpetrated more state-sponsored murders than any Latin American government since the dirty wars of the 1970s and 80s. In the last 2 years, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported over 8,000 extrajudicial killings by Maduro's security forces, as well as grotesque patterns of torture and rape.

These conditions have forced more than 5.2 million Venezuelans to flee their country in search of protection and assistance. I traveled to Cúcuta, Colombia a year ago, where I heard heart-wrenching stories from individuals fleeing the humanitarian tragedy in Venezuela.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and related economic downturn converging on the crisis of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, the United States must mobilize international partners to further expand assistance and protection for the Venezuelan people. If the current trajectory continues, more Venezuelans will be displaced from their homes than the number of Syrians displaced during that devastating, nearly decade-long conflict.

Yet, while other countries are generously hosting millions of Venezuelans, the Trump administration has ignored my repeated requests to grant Temporary Protected Status to some 200,000 Venezuelans in the United States. It has turned away Venezuelan asylum seekers at our southern border. This is absolutely unacceptable.

The Administration must change course.

Through my VERDAD Act last year, Democrats and Republicans, in concert with the Administration united in our recognition of Interim President Juan Guaidó. However, in June, President Trump stated that he did *not* think this decision to recognize President Guaidó was "very meaningful"—sending the wrong signal to our allies and our adversaries.

We must be purposeful and lead the formidable coalition we helped build to support President Guaidó. So, I expect to hear a strategy about how we will work with our partners to ensure that Maduro doesn't use fraudulent elections to strengthen his dictatorship.

Moreover, with Maduro and his cronies facing charges in the U.S. for drug trafficking and graft, there should be no doubt about their criminal credentials. We are dealing with a massive law enforcement challenge in Venezuela. Never have so many in our hemisphere fallen victim to a cabal of criminals so willing to destroy their own country for the sole purpose of enriching themselves and avoiding justice.

We must coordinate an international campaign to confront the regime's criminality, and I look forward to hearing from Special Representative Abrams on what changes we will make to increase our chance of success in the next 6 months. Yes, changes.

There has been bipartisan support for most of our sanctions and the \$600 million in foreign assistance we have used for humanitarian aid. But, Maduro remains entrenched in power and humanitarian access into Venezuela is extremely limited.

We cannot continue on the same course and expect to achieve different results. I fear the Administration has squandered a limited window of opportunity crafted by valiant Venezuelans. I hope it is not too late to open that window again.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Menendez. Those remarks are well taken. I think out of all the things that are going on in the Congress today that divides us, probably nothing bring us together more than a sense that Maduro has to go and that we are united, if not universally, very close to universally in that effort. So we are anxious to hear what these witnesses have to say.

Today, I am pleased to welcome to the committee U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela Elliott Abrams and Mr. Joshua Hodges, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean at the U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID.

Mr. Abrams is a scholar and experienced foreign policy expert. He has served in two administrations on the staff of Senators Henry Jackson and Dan Moynihan. He has written five books on

American foreign policy and teaches on the subject at Georgetown University's Edmond A. Walsh School of Foreign Service.

Mr. Hodges oversees USAID programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. He previously served on the staff of Congressman Mike Johnson and Senator David Vitter of Louisiana, at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration and the National Security Council in the White House.

We will start with Mr. Abrams.

Mr. Abrams, the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF HON. ELLIOTT ABRAMS, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR VENEZUELA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. ABRAMS. Thank you, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and members of the committee—

The CHAIRMAN. Your microphone is not on, Elliott. It is very complicated.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ABRAMS. Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on our efforts in support of the Venezuelan people.

This policy has, with broad bipartisan support, been successful in supporting the democratic opposition, maintaining a broad international coalition, and denying revenue to Maduro's brutal regime.

But we have yet to see the convoking of free and fair presidential elections nor do we see the conditions that would permit such elections.

In January 2019, the U.S. was the first country to recognize interim President Juan Guaidó. Since then, he has secured the support of nearly 60 countries. We remain steadfast in our support for interim President Guaidó.

We have proposed a democratic transition framework for Venezuela as a path to establish a broadly acceptable transitional government to oversee free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections.

We are prepared to work with all Venezuelans and with other nations to achieve this goal and to lift sanctions when the necessary conditions are met.

I want to thank this committee and Congress for its support through legislation and funding. The U.S. is the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance for Venezuela.

From 2017 to now, the U.S. has provided more than \$856 million to Venezuelans suffering inside Venezuela and in neighboring countries, and we should recognize those that have welcomed 5 million Venezuelans, especially Colombia, Peru, Ecuador for their continued support as well.

Criminal dictatorships like Maduro's are hard to defeat. The Maduro regime's relentless attacks on dissidents and against Venezuela's last remaining democratic institution, the National Assembly, demonstrated its obsession with retaining power regardless of the cost to the nation and its people.

In July, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, released two reports on human rights violations

in Venezuela. She reported that Maduro and his thugs continue intimidation, repression, arbitrary detentions, torture, and murder.

This includes 1,324 extrajudicial killings from January to May of this year. For more than 2 and a half years, the regime has unlawfully detained six U.S. oil executives: Tomeu Vadell, Alirio Zambrano, Jose Luis Zambrano, Gustavo Cardenas, Jorge Toledo, and Jose Angel Pereira.

We were relieved to hear July 30th that Mr. Cardenas and Mr. Toledo were moved to house arrest. This is a positive first step and, of course, we hope for more.

The regime also continues to detain nearly 400 political prisoners, including military officers, medical professionals, journalists, dissident Chavista Nicmer Evans, Guaidó's chief of staff, Robert Marrero, National Assembly Deputies Juan Requesens, Gilber Caro, Ismael Leon, Renzo Prieto, and Antonio Geara, and labor rights activist Ruben Gonzalez.

We remain concerned over foreign malign influence in Venezuela and the Maduro regime's collaboration with non-state armed groups such as the ELN and FARC.

Illegal armed groups are forcibly recruiting vulnerable Venezuelan children into armed conflict, compelling many into forced labor. Cuba treats Venezuela as a colony, shipping food, medicine, diesel, and gasoline from Venezuela to Cuba, even as the Venezuelan people suffer shortages of all of them.

Cuban security personnel surround Maduro. Cuban intelligence officers are embedded in the military. China helps the Maduro regime with cyber operations.

Russian military aid and loans have helped the regime maintain its security forces, and now we are seeing a rekindling of the relationship with the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Maduro's recent hijacking of the National Electoral Council and of the major democratic political parties foreshadow how the regime plans to take control of the National Assembly through fraudulent elections in December.

On Sunday, 27 democratic political parties in Venezuela joined in unity to say they refuse to participate in that farce, and I am sure democracies around the world will also refuse to recognize such a fraud.

We look forward to the day when free and fair elections are held, a new democratically-elected government is in place, U.S. sanctions can then be lifted.

We look forward to restoring once close Venezuela-U.S. relations to helping Venezuelan migrants and refugees return to their beloved country and to seeing Venezuela's children share in the beauty and bountiful natural wealth of their country.

Mr. Chairman, Senator Menendez, thank you for inviting me here today and for your continuing interest and the strong bipartisan support this committee has shown toward the struggle for freedom in Venezuela.

I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Abrams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and Members of the Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our efforts in support of the Venezuelan people. The ongoing crisis and the defense of democracy in Venezuela remain key U.S. strategic priorities. This policy has, with broad bipartisan support, been successful in supporting the democratic opposition, maintaining a broad international coalition, and denying revenue to Maduro's brutal regime, but we have yet to see the convoking of free and fair presidential elections, nor do we see the conditions that would permit such elections.

In January 2019, the United States was the first country to recognize interim President Juan Guaidó, and since then we have secured the support of nearly 60 countries, the OAS, and the Inter-American Development Bank in recognizing him as the constitutional president of Venezuela. The United States also joined other countries to invoke the Rio Treaty, a collective security agreement, which resulted in a resolution mandating travel restrictions for 29 regime collaborators. This is the first time in more than 50 years the Rio Treaty has been used to impose such measures. U.S. sanctions continue to deny the regime access to spoils, and we have implemented visa restrictions and revoked visas for over one thousand regime officials and their family members. These measures are intended to increase pressure on the Maduro regime and its affiliates to agree to a broadly acceptable political transition.

Criminal dictatorships like Maduro's are hard to defeat. The Maduro regime's relentless attacks on dissidents and against Venezuela's last remaining democratic institution, the National Assembly, demonstrate its obsession with retaining power regardless of the cost to the nation and its people.

In July, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet released two updated reports on human rights violations in Venezuela. She reported that Maduro and his thugs continue committing the most serious violations and abuses of human rights through systemic intimidation, repression, arbitrary detentions, torture, and murder. This includes 1,324 extrajudicial killings from January through May of this year. The reports also focused on how the regime is twisting the rule of law and presiding over a violent campaign of repression in the Arco Minero, Venezuela's mining belt. This region is increasingly a source of revenue for the regime as U.S. sanctions effectively limit income from more traditional sources, and Maduro's mafias are using violence to grab every last ounce of gold.

The regime also continues to detain nearly 400 political prisoners, including military officers, medical professionals, journalists, and dissident Chavista Nicmer Evans, Guaidó's Chief of Staff Roberto Marrero, and National Assembly deputies Juan Requesens, Gilber Caro, Ismael Leon, Renzo Prieto, and Antonio Geara. Even after a series of health crises during detention, the regime continues to detain labor rights activist Rubén González.

For more than 2 and a half years, the regime has unlawfully detained six U.S. oil executives—Tomeu Vadell, Alirio Zambrano, Jose Luis Zambrano, Gustavo Cardenas, Jorge Toledo, and Jose Angel Pereira. We were relieved to hear July 30 that Gustavo Cárdenas and Jorge Toledo were released from prison and granted house arrest in Venezuela. This is a positive first step and of course we hope for more.

The regime's repressive practices also have directly worsened the COVID-19 pandemic in Venezuela. We have countless examples of ongoing regime intimidation of doctors and medical workers fighting to counter the spread of COVID-19. The regime has arrested nearly a dozen independent journalists and respected medical providers who have attempted to report suppression and manipulation of COVID-19 case data or who voiced concern with the regime's negligent response to the pandemic. We are concerned by the regime's criminalization of returning refugees and the reports of the shameful conditions of their quarantine.

Venezuela's Maduro-made crisis has led to serious humanitarian consequences which are well-known and documented; and, along with Congress, we are deeply concerned about the human cost of his regime's mismanagement, corruption, and deliberate abuse of the population. Venezuela's health system, infrastructure, and social services are collapsing. Decades-long economic mismanagement and neglect of infrastructure while looting state resources have led to the collapse of nearly every sector of the economy. Crude production has fallen to the lowest point in nearly eight decades to under 400,000 barrels per day. The World Food Program (WFP) reported this year that 9.3 million Venezuelans are moderately or severely malnourished. The recent National Survey of Living Conditions (ENCOVI) in Venezuela stated children born in Venezuela since 2015 are likely to have a 3.7 year shorter life span than official projections, and infant mortality rates have regressed 30-35 years. All of these factors have forced more than 5 million Venezuelans to flee in

search of a better life outside of Venezuela and away from Maduro's man-made disaster.

I want to thank Congress for its support through legislation and funding. The United States is the single largest donor of humanitarian assistance for the Venezuela regional crisis. From 2017 to today, the United States has provided more than \$856 million in humanitarian and development aid, including nearly \$611 million in humanitarian assistance, to Venezuelans suffering inside Venezuela and across 17 neighboring countries, supported by a recent commitment of \$13.7 million in COVID-19 specific support inside Venezuela. We maintain close cooperation with U.N. agencies and NGOs that are committed to providing lifesaving resources to Venezuelans. We also recognize the neighboring countries that have welcomed so many Venezuelans, especially Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, for their continued support as well. The United States will continue to call upon other donors to make or increase contributions to help address the crisis.

We have taken significant steps to address Maduro's use of narcotics as a financial lifeline for his illegitimate regime. On April 1, President Donald Trump launched an historic counternarcotics operation—deploying additional military and law enforcement assets to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific—to disrupt the flow of dangerous drugs to the United States. The narco-traffickers include the illegitimate regime of Nicolas Maduro. The enhanced operation is a “whole of government” effort that has led to the disruption and seizure of over 100 metric tons of cocaine and marijuana. One thousand traffickers have been arrested over the past several months. This operation has cost the cartels and the Maduro regime over \$3 billion in revenue.

We remain concerned over foreign malign influence in Venezuela and the Maduro regime's collaboration with nefarious non-state armed groups. Cuba treats Venezuela as a colony shipping food, medicine, diesel, and gasoline from Venezuela to Cuba even as the Venezuelan people suffer shortages of every single one of them. Cuban security personnel surround Maduro, and Cuban intelligence officers are embedded in the military. China works with the Maduro regime to refine digital authoritarianism, helping the regime with cyber operations. Russian military aid and loans have helped the regime maintain its security forces and thus its provision of safe haven in Venezuela to FARC dissident and ELN terrorists. And now we are seeing a re-kindling of a relationship with the world's worst State sponsor of terrorism, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

LOOKING AHEAD

Maduro's recent hijacking of the National Electoral Council and of the major independent political parties foreshadow how the regime plans to take control of the National Assembly through fraudulent elections in December. We are supporting the opposition as they consider a concerted response, and we remain steadfast in our support for interim President Guaido and a resolution to Venezuela's crisis via a broadly acceptable transitional government organizing free and fair presidential elections.

Free and fair presidential elections are required for Venezuela to regain its democracy and prosperity peacefully. The United States will recognize the results of a free and fair election, no matter which party wins; what we oppose is the abuse of state power that enables one party to rule indefinitely regardless of the will of the people. We have proposed a Democratic Transition Framework for Venezuela as a path to establish a broadly acceptable transitional government to oversee free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections. We are prepared to work with all Venezuelans and with other nations to achieve this goal, and are prepared to lift sanctions when the necessary conditions are met.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, the Maduro regime has survived by relying on classic autocratic tools coupled with its callousness and criminality. This has only strengthened our resolve, and the resolve of other democratic states, to see Venezuela once again become a free and prosperous nation. Until this objective is achieved, our pressure will continue and will increase. We look forward to the day when free and fair elections are held, a new democratically-elected government is in place, and U.S. sanctions can be lifted. We look forward to restoring once-close Venezuela-U.S. relations, to helping Venezuelan migrants and refugees return to their beloved country, and to seeing Venezuelan children share in the beauty and bountiful natural wealth of their country.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for inviting me here today and thank you for the continuing interest and the strong bipartisan support this Committee has shown toward the struggle for freedom in Venezuela. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Abrams.
Mr. Hodges.

STATEMENT OF JOSHUA HODGES, SENIOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. HODGES. Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity and honor to be here to testify on behalf of USAID. We are grateful for your bipartisan support for the response to the Venezuela regional crisis.

Eighteen months ago, the Trump administration recognized Juan Guaidó as the legitimate and legal interim president of Venezuela in accordance with the Venezuelan constitution.

As you know, this crisis has been manufactured by an inability to govern and rampant corruption, which has resulted in an economic collapse with severe humanitarian consequences and a culture of repression that the regime continues to use to jail, torture, and even murder the Venezuelan people.

Today, the Guaidó interim government and National Assembly continue to push forward, despite very challenging circumstances, including the humanitarian and economic crisis, the illegitimate Maduro regime's radical oppression and, most recently, COVID-19.

Because of these dire realities, more than 5.2 million Venezuelans have left home and relocated to neighboring countries, extending the crisis across borders.

To address this crisis inside Venezuela and throughout the region, the United States government interagency process is providing substantial coordinated humanitarian and development assistance.

Inside Venezuela, USAID's humanitarian assistance is saving lives through health care that stems the spread of infectious disease, meals for vulnerable families, and vital water, sanitation and hygiene supplies.

A few tangible examples of this assistance includes serving more than 1.4 million hot meals to vulnerable Venezuelans and delivering enough medical supplies to health facilities to help 160,000 people.

In addition to the previous existing challenges, COVID-19 is exacerbating an already dire situation inside Venezuela. In response to the pandemic, USAID is providing COVID-19-related emergency assistance inside Venezuela and throughout the region.

While our efforts are making an impact, Maduro has stood in the way of allowing more help to Venezuelans in their time of need by creating numerous obstacles and barriers for international NGOs.

Humanitarian organizations face constant harassment from security personnel affiliated with Maduro and the illegitimate regime continues to impede international expert staff from obtaining visas and registry in certain organizations.

Let me be clear. USAID condemns any efforts to intimidate or threaten humanitarian workers who are seeking to save lives.

Throughout the region, USAID's priority is to support communities that are generously hosting Venezuelans in their time of great need, especially in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.

We are aiming to provide approximately 943,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants in these countries with food assistance, health care, and clean water.

While humanitarian assistance is saving lives, the agency recognizes that a balanced mix of medium and long-term development assistance is also needed.

Our regional development programming is aligned to help the receiving host country governments address areas impacted by the Venezuelan migration such as education systems, health care, economic development, and vocational support as well as government capacity building.

Back inside Venezuela, we are using development assistance to support the interim government and the National Assembly with technical training, staffing support, equipment, and communications efforts.

USAID support bolsters the interim government's abilities to effectively operate and interact with their constituents. Despite the increased repression from the illegitimate regime, our assistance has enabled increased participation with legitimate officials.

Our commitment to democracy and the rule of law is essential to our engagement in the hemisphere. In addition to the Guaidó administration and National Assembly, USAID strongly supports those who defend human rights and serve as civil society watchdogs.

Our help each year to dozens of NGOs has been critical to investigating and then document rampant corruption, flagrant electoral fraud, and wide-ranging human rights abuses.

With our support, independent news outlets are able to better operate so they can share information with Venezuelans through online reporting, radio and other forms of communications.

USAID is also helping democratic forces plan for the day the Maduro regime gives way to freedom and authentic change can take place.

When change does occur, funding through our bilateral agreement will position us to be ready to expand our work quickly into other sectors.

For the time being, though, the effort continues to support the people of Venezuela, the Guaidó administration, the National Assembly, scores of NGOs, and activists who bravely continue their struggle, despite repression and despite the very difficult situations on the ground.

One critical step must be taken for a free and prosperous Venezuela. The world must continue to pressure Maduro to relinquish control and allow for Democratic change. This includes truly free elections, not the rigged so-called elections Maduro is planning for in December.

Venezuelans have suffered long enough under the brutality of Nicolás Maduro. We look forward to the day when we can celebrate with all Venezuelans as they meet their potential as a free, prosperous, and democratic society, and thank you today for the invitation to testify.

I look forward to your questions.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Hodges follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JOSHUA HODGES

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, and Distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). It is an honor to be here with you today. USAID is grateful for your ongoing, bipartisan support for our work in Latin America and the Caribbean, and especially our response to the Venezuela regional crisis.

Eighteen months ago, the Trump administration, along with nearly 60 other governments around the globe, recognized Juan Guaidó as the legitimate and legal Interim President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in accordance with the Venezuelan Constitution. President Trump recognized Guaidó's interim presidency on January 23, 2019. The United States and the international community based our swift recognition of Guaidó upon respect for the rule of law.

Since 2019, USAID has coordinated with Interim President Guaidó to implement democracy and governance programs, to support the interim government and the National Assembly structurally operate as best as possible under these challenging circumstances. In 2019, we formally established our cooperation when then USAID Administrator Mark Green signed a Development Objective Agreement (DOAG) with the Interim Government. However, USAID began our support for democracy in Venezuela long before this Agreement. For the past several years, with your bipartisan support, we have been assisting human-rights defenders, independent media, and civil society inside Venezuela. The United States, along with several other governments, has provided technical and financial support to the National Assembly, which helps this body remain operational as the sole source of legitimate, democratic, citizen-responsive governance in Venezuela.

Since January 2019, Interim President Guaidó and other democratic actors have faced innumerable challenges in their fight for freedom. Compounding factors that have complicated their struggle are the depths of the Maduro-made humanitarian and economic crisis; the radical steps the illegitimate regime has taken to oppress the Venezuelan people; and, most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Nicolás Maduro's use of repressive tactics and assistance from malign foreign actors further complicate the situation. This chaos has eroded Venezuelan citizens' ability to feel safe when leaving their homes to organize and stand up to the injustices and corruption of the illegitimate regime. A weak and isolated population is precisely what the regime needs for it to appear that Venezuelans have lost their will or interest in change. As I am sure the Committee will agree, based on your own engagement with them, the Venezuelan people have neither lost their will nor desire for freedom and prosperity. Millions of brave men and women in Venezuela continue to demand and advocate for transparent elections, a respect for human rights, and a restoration of democracy.

This prolonged crisis has been manufactured by Maduro's inability to govern and his corruption, which has resulted in an economic collapse with severe humanitarian consequences and the culture of repression that the regime uses to jail, torture, and even murder the Venezuelan people. This situation, and other sinister steps taken by the illegitimate Maduro regime to undermine democracy and rule of law, have prolonged the effort needed for a democratic transition.

Because of the dire realities within Venezuela, more than 5 million Venezuelans have fled the tyranny and deprivation in their homeland—mostly into neighboring Andean countries like the Republics of Colombia and Peru. These desperate people have left their homes, families, and communities behind, often with nothing but the clothes on their bodies. The United States is cognizant of the burden this places on our hemispheric allies and host communities, and the emotional burden it has on those who have fled and the family members they left in Venezuela. COVID-19 has only complicated this tragic situation. Until Maduro departs, many of these Venezuelans either will not or cannot return home; their country will need them to rebuild as a democratic and prosperous state.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE: ADDRESSING MADURO-MADE CRISIS INSIDE VENEZUELA
AND ACROSS THE REGION

Mr. Chairman, I know this Committee cares deeply about the humanitarian crisis that is facing millions of Venezuelans, so I would like to talk specifically about our response. Inside Venezuela, USAID has provided nearly \$44 million in humani-

tarian assistance since 2017. With this funding, our partners have served more than 1.4 million hot meals to vulnerable Venezuelans—especially women and children—across nearly 100 community kitchens and schools. Our assistance has helped save lives through primary health care, immunizations against infectious diseases, treatment for malaria, and training health care workers. We have also brought safe drinking water to health facilities and schools, which has benefited more than 7,000 Venezuelans. USAID has helped provide women and children with safe spaces and protection against violence and exploitation, as well as coordinated with the humanitarian community to improve the effectiveness of the response to the economic collapse in Venezuela.

Humanitarian efforts in Venezuela face many challenges because of the ongoing repression, obstruction, and intimidation tactics of the regime. Maduro has created obstacles for international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are seeking to provide assistance and reach places in need, such as impeding them from legally registering inside Venezuela and preventing their employees from obtaining visas. These restraints, coupled with NGOs' ongoing concerns for their safety to operate and logistical impediments, hinder the ability to respond at a scale that matches the needs created by this Maduro-made economic and political crisis. Another impediment to relief efforts is the continued harassment of humanitarian organizations and health workers by security personnel affiliated with the illegitimate Maduro regime.

USAID condemns any efforts to intimidate or threaten humanitarians who are working to save lives, and we know this Committee strongly supports us on this front. In Venezuela and everywhere else in the world, humanitarian organizations must have full and unhindered access to reach people in need.

Despite the obstacles to applying full-scale operations with qualified international staff, USAID continues to provide humanitarian assistance where possible. However, humanitarian efforts, while the right thing to do, are not a solution that will end the crisis in Venezuela. As the members of this Committee are aware, humanitarian assistance cannot, and is not intended to, address the root causes of Venezuela's instability and desperation. The only way to address these root causes is through political and economic change.

As this Committee knows, the U.S. Government has made it a hemispheric, and even global, priority to support the communities that are generously hosting Venezuelans in their time of need. We understand that responding to this crisis is no easy task, and has put our neighbors under great strain. The influx of Venezuelans has especially affected countries across South America. To help address their needs, since Fiscal Year 2018 USAID has provided nearly \$297 million in humanitarian funding in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru and regionally, excluding coronavirus supplemental funding. Our assistance on the humanitarian side has included nutritious meals, health assistance, and clean water for approximately 943,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

The U.S. Government is working throughout the region to combat efforts that would seek to undermine international or regional support for Venezuelans who have had to flee their homeland because of the crisis caused by Maduro. Through close coordination, U.S. Department of State and USAID's combined humanitarian assistance has been vital in meeting life saving needs and supporting protection for those fleeing Venezuela. At the same time, neighboring countries, especially Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador, have welcomed Venezuelans, and State and USAID share the goal to work to ensure that other donors to provide new or increased assistance to address this regional crisis.

In addition to the pre-existing challenges, COVID-19 is exacerbating an already-difficult humanitarian situation, both inside Venezuela and across the region. More than 4.2 million cases of the disease have been reported in Latin America and Caribbean to date. That number, which we believe is likely low because of under-reporting in places like Venezuela, continues to grow. In Venezuela and the rest of the region, economic distress, mass school closures, disruption of access to regular health care, and significant increases in gender-based violence have been compounded by the pandemic. As a result, many Venezuelans who have fled to neighboring countries are concerned about how they will afford rent, food, and other basic necessities during lockdowns related to containing the novel coronavirus, and more people than ever before are in need of humanitarian support to make ends meet. This is in addition to other challenges, such as lack of access to legal status. Also, to address the combined challenges presented by COVID-19 and the Venezuela regional crisis, the U.S. Government's partners continuously are examining the impact of our existing programming to help ensure Venezuelans have the resources they need.

Due to job loss and general familial concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic, about 100,000 Venezuelans have made the tough choice to return to Venezuela, and our Department of State and USAID humanitarian partners have scaled up food, shelter, health, and sanitation assistance to help these Venezuelans on the move, as they face real vulnerabilities while in transit across borders. We are also working with our partners inside Venezuela to provide assistance to the COVID-19 pandemic. USAID and our partners have distributed nearly 4,500 hygiene kits and supplied personal protective equipment to 15 health facilities to prevent the spread of the virus.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE: PROMOTING DEMOCRACY AND ADDRESSING LONG-TERM CHALLENGES

As we monitor and respond to the immediate humanitarian needs of Venezuelans who have fled the chaos in their home country as well as the countries and communities that are hosting them, USAID recognizes that this prolonged regional crisis requires a balanced mix of medium- and long-term development assistance. In Colombia, Perú, the Federative Republic of Brazil, and the Republic of Ecuador, we are working alongside other parts of the U.S. Government with a variety of partners, such as host-country governments, NGOs, civil society, and faith-based organizations, to help communities absorb the influx of vulnerable Venezuelans. In total, USAID has invested more than \$102 million in the region to address these longer-term needs since Fiscal Year 2017. Development initiatives in parts of the region include strengthening primary education and health care; improving government agencies' capacity to manage migration and socioeconomic integration; protecting human rights; expanding access to justice; and offering vocational training, linked to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in the private sector.

Moving back to Venezuela, President Guaidó and his Interim Government, the democratically elected National Assembly, and civil society continue to push for a peaceful democratic transition. USAID provides direct technical training, staffing support, equipment, and communications support to the Interim Government and the National Assembly. Our technical support to the Interim Government has bolstered its ability to have administrative infrastructure, media operations, planning systems, and improved strategic decision-making. Additionally, our support to the National Assembly has ensured that its important and legitimate legislative work continues. Our funding has enabled 101 Deputies and 60 Alternate Deputies to participate in plenary sessions despite the increased repression from the illegitimate regime. A total of 79 Deputies and 15 Alternate Deputies from 10 democratic political parties have taken part in other initiatives, such as international policy exchanges, training, in-person events, and social-media communications efforts. Through these initiatives, the members of the National Assembly have increased their visibility with Venezuelan citizens, and their ability to engage with their local constituents. For example, with USAID's funding, National Assembly Deputies have held almost 800 constituent-engagement fora to promote dialogue with civil society. The members of the National Assembly have been subject to constant harassment and undermining, and our programming helps them overcome challenges, such finding meeting places, providing alternative communications platforms, or providing supplies the regime has illegally seized.

USAID also supports Venezuelan citizens who continue to assert their rights and maintain a democratic voice in the face of dictatorship. For years, the Agency has empowered Venezuelan human-rights defenders, civil-society organizations, and independent media who expose and document rampant corruption, flagrant electoral fraud, and wide-ranging abuses in the country. Our funding helps these groups define, discuss, and advocate for a free and democratic Venezuela. Our \$128 million in development assistance inside Venezuela includes the more than \$98 million in our 2019 bilateral agreement, which is critical to our work in the country. Not only does the DOAG allow us to continue to finance our current activities, but it positions us to be ready to expand our work quickly into other sectors once the democratic transition occurs.

To bring that day closer, our current efforts bring accurate and unbiased news and information to the people of Venezuela. To help 18 local civil-society organizations improve their reporting on human-rights abuses, USAID has funded the training of more than 2,300 people on the proper protocols for investigating, documenting, and reporting violations. This investment resulted in the production of more than 570 documented, verifiable reports during Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. With this documentation and evidence, these organizations are able to share essential information with the rest of the world.

To raise awareness of the Maduro's kleptocracy corruption and unconstitutional actions, the conditions of the failing Venezuelan state, and the environmental and human catastrophe caused by regime-sponsored illegal gold mining in the Arco Minero in the South of the country, USAID-funded civil-society organizations produced and distributed almost 950 reports, analyses, and videos in FY 2019. Additionally, these groups leveraged the power of the Internet to push out vital information. Collectively, their websites received more than 672,500 unique visitors in FY 2019 alone, which increases widespread awareness of the tragic situation in Venezuela.

Those who are pushing for democratic change and citizen-responsive governance face dangerous obstacles at the hands of the illegitimate Maduro regime and the nefarious actors that are keeping him in power. Malign actors such as Cuba, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and the Islamic Republic of Iran actively are propping up the corrupt Maduro regime and encouraging efforts to stifle the Venezuelan people by spreading their own disinformation and lending best practices in how to oppress democracy. The United States is committed to working with our partners to stop these cynical attempts to erode democratic and economic progress. USAID will continue to promote and demonstrate democratic values in Venezuela and the region to advance a free, peaceful, and prosperous Hemisphere and world.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE: DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

The United States continues to support the people of Venezuela in their quest for freedom and prosperity even as we address the ongoing, man-made humanitarian, economic, and political crisis, and, of course, COVID-19. We know this Committee shares these goals. Venezuelans are appreciative of this shared unity and support, from the Administration and Congress—they remember the active participation of many Members of Congress and staff who have made numerous visits to Colombia, Brazil, Perú, and other countries to see first-hand the effect of the crisis on Venezuelans who have fled the chaos in their homeland.

With the support of Congress, USAID will continue to support the Venezuelan people as they work hard to steer their country back on a path to prosperity and create the opportunities, dignity, and stability that they deserve. For the sake of the Venezuelan people, the world must continue to pressure Maduro to relinquish control and allow for democratic change. One step in the process will be truly free elections—not the rigged so-called “elections” Maduro is planning for December. Far from solving the political crisis, this process will end up aggravating the current political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Like the fraudulent vote in 2018, the regime plans to hold the December “elections” under false pretenses and without any respect for Venezuelan rules and regulations, and seeks to undermine the last truly democratic voice of the people.

When the illegitimate Maduro regime has given way to freedom and authentic change, funding through our bilateral agreement will be able to finance recovery efforts led by a democratically elected Venezuelan administration. USAID will be a key part of the U.S. Government's support to the new democratic Government of Venezuela as it works to restore a crumbling health sector and shattered economy, and reinvigorate critical work in agriculture to rebuild the private-sector production and distribution of food in Venezuela. We already are supporting the construction of ideas and discussions about those visions and the change that is needed, partly through our support to the Interim Government's recovery strategy, Plan Pais.

CONCLUSION

The Venezuelan people deserve to live in peace and prosperity, and we are grateful for Congress' bipartisan support for this endeavor. The Interim Government of Juan Guaidó and the National Assembly are working very hard—even under the added hardship of the pandemic—for a peaceful transition to democracy that will enable Venezuelans to rebuild their country.

For too long, Venezuelans have suffered at the hands of the late Hugo Chávez and now Nicolás Maduro and their kleptocracy. I look forward to the day when we can celebrate with all Venezuelans as they meet their potential as a free, prosperous, and democratic society that is once again a leader in the region and the world.

Thank you for the invitation to testify before you. I look forward to taking your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. We will do a round of questioning now. I am going to start, briefly, and then turn it over to Senator Menendez.

You mentioned these elections that are coming up. Mr. Abrams, this question is for you. It is my understanding that Maduro has taken a page out of the Iranians' book where they have an election commission that decides who can run and who cannot run.

Anything that happens like that, of course, immediately takes away any legitimacy that the election would have, and I think it is important that this be highlighted and that the people understand this.

I mean, if you can pick your opponent or opponents there is no question how the election is going to come out.

Your thoughts?

Mr. ABRAMS. Mr. Chairman, I agree with that. They have prevented a large number of people from running. They have taken over several of the largest political parties, simply replaced the leadership of the parties and given all the parties' assets—offices, the parties' symbols—to people that their regime chooses.

They are going to hold this election, they say, December 6th. There are today in Venezuela zero voting machines. Zero.

So how they are going to do this, you know, I think defies comprehension and, like the 2018 presidential election, this is going to be another fraud.

The CHAIRMAN. Thanks. I think that is critical for everybody to understand, and I also think that we need to underscore that this is not an election at all. It is just a façade that has no legal or practical authority whatsoever.

Secondly, you did not mention the military's role in all of this. We all know there is a robust military in Venezuela. I am told there are 3,500 generals. I am not exactly sure how you discipline a military that has got 3,500 generals.

But your thoughts on where they are and where they are going?

Mr. ABRAMS. There are more generals in Venezuela than in all the NATO countries put together.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ABRAMS. I think there is a lot of worry in many ranks of the military about the condition of the country. You know, you are a soldier. You are an officer. You have a mother and father, aunts, uncles, cousins. You see how they are living. You know what is happening to the country.

But you are being spied on by these thousands of Cuban intelligence agents, and at the very top you have got a lot of people who are quite corrupt and are profiting from this regime.

So the military has at least up to now been unwilling to separate itself at all from what the regime is doing to the country, and it is tragic because a democratic Venezuela is going to need a professional military. They have a lot of security problems that they are going to need to deal with.

Our hope, of course, would be that they would try to reestablish the honor of the military and distance themselves from the crimes of this regime.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you much.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Abrams, on Sunday, Venezuela's opposition coalition announced that it will not participate in Maduro's fraudulent undemocratic legislative elections.

Yet, this decision carries implications for Venezuela's currently democratically-elected National Assembly and the government of interim President Juan Guaidó.

Venezuela's beleaguered constitution, to the degree that it still exists under Maduro's dictatorship, calls for a new National Assembly to be seated the first week of January 2021.

So I am deeply concerned that Maduro will use the moment to fully consolidate his criminal dictatorship in Venezuela.

Given the opposition's decision not to participate in Maduro's fraudulent legislative elections, how will this impact the interim government in the first week of January when there is supposed to be a new National Assembly? What are the implications for U.S. policy and our recognition of the Guaidó government?

Mr. ABRAMS. Thanks, Senator.

Juan Guaidó occupies the office of interim president because it was vacant as a result of the May 2018 corrupt and fraudulent presidential elections.

In our view, nothing changes on January 5th with respect to Juan Guaidó. That office of the presidency is still vacant because of the 2018 election.

It cannot be that Maduro can improve his situation legally or practically by holding another corrupt and fraudulent election.

So in our view, the constitutional president of Venezuela today and after January 5th, 2021, is Juan Guaidó, and the National Assembly that has been meeting until about, I guess, about March is not going to be able to meet.

I think you can expect that if they tried to meet, everybody in it would be arrested by this regime.

So I do think that there is the danger that Maduro is going to be able to shut down the operations of any kind of independent National Assembly. But he will not change the legal status, I think, for many, many countries around the world and especially for us.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, let me ask you about that. What efforts are we taking with our international partners to push both against Maduro's undemocratic elections and then their continuing recognition of Guaidó after January, assuming this plays out the way we envision it?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, on the question of recognition of Guaidó and on the recognition of this fraudulent parliamentary election, we have been discussing this with lots of partners.

There are about 60 countries that have recognized Guaidó and I do expect that all of them, and we will be in touch with any we have not been yet, will continue to recognize him and will not recognize this fraudulent election.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I hope that there is a more robust engagement with our international partners because my personal sense of conversations I have had is that it is framed, and I think we can all afford that at the end of the day.

Let me turn to illegal mining and what I call blood gold. As Venezuela crises deteriorates, there is growing evidence that violent

groups are competing for control of the country's mineral resources, which has resulted in a boom of illegal gold mining.

That blood gold industry is destroying vast areas of the Amazon rain forest, fueling human rights abuses, particularly among indigenous populations, and generating illicit income for illegal armed groups that threaten the stability of the country and the region.

What specific steps is the United States taking along with other international actors to ensure that companies that purchase, sell, and trade gold that are being extracted in this way are following regulations and not unwittingly supporting illegal gold mining operations in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. Senator, there is more illegal mining, and the July 15th report of the U.N. High Commission for Human Rights has a whole section on the Arco Minero.

What we have been doing is following every single case we can find of the shipment of gold out of Venezuela and the purchase of gold by anybody, and as we find it we go after both the country and the company.

And in a number of cases we have gone to governments and said, this is happening in your territory and you have got to prevent it, and we have been successful and we find, for example, people doing this last year have now stopped.

But there is more of it now, and so we are stepping up our activities, we being the State Department and the Treasury Department, to go after every single case of this we find.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I would be interested to know if you need any other legislative or regulatory assistance to do this because, obviously, a lot is getting out and the country's national patrimony is being used in a way that is so corrupt and so pervasive against its own people.

A final question, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

Does the Trump administration have the authority to grant TPS to eligible Venezuelans?

Mr. ABRAMS. The authority, yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. Do you agree that it would not be safe to deport Venezuelans back to Maduro's dictatorship at this point in time?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, and we are not doing that.

Senator MENENDEZ. So then why has not the president designated Venezuela for TPS?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the answer to that question is in court decisions that have, in essence, removed the T. That is, that it seems irreversible now, and I think that makes for some reluctance to do it.

So what would be better—

Senator MENENDEZ. I do not think court decisions can undermine the statutory realities of TPS. It depends upon how one undoes TPS.

So it just seems to me that we applaud Colombia, we applaud Ecuador, we applaud all these countries that have taken millions of people, and we cannot even give a temporary protected status to those Venezuelans who are already here.

That is not leadership. It is not sending a global message that what we ask others to do we are willing to do ourselves.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we are not deporting Venezuelans back to Venezuela, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I am glad to hear that. But at the end of the day, they are in an indefinite limbo in their lives here.

There is no reason for that when you have a process that can give you a temporary protected status, give you a pathway forward to regularize your life while you are waiting for the moment to return to your country.

I just do not get it. The aversion to this is beyond the imagination.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

And, Mr. Abrams, I am going to join in Senator Menendez's invitation to you. If you need statutory assistance regarding the illegal gold or oil, for that matter, I think we are all in.

These countries and these dictators survive because they have a flow of cash and that cash comes from those products. So I think Senator Menendez and I would be glad to join in any efforts to assist you legislatively.

Senator Paul.

Senator PAUL. Thank you.

Mr. Abrams, without a doubt, Venezuela is a socialist nightmare. It is, indeed, a vivid indictment of the economic system of socialism.

It is appalling that a country like Venezuela that sits atop more oil than Saudi Arabia is in such a dire state that people actually eat their pets. No one disputes the disaster that is Venezuelan socialism.

However, when it comes to regime change, the U.S. track record is less than stellar. It has been largely ignored that the possible replacement for Maduro, Guaidó, is also a socialist. His political party is recognized by the Socialist International.

My fear is that even if you get a kinder, gentler form of socialism, it is still socialism, and the results will be similar economic malaise and economic disaster.

What do you say as to replacing one socialist with another in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not think the main problem in Venezuela is that one party or another is a member of the Socialist International, which a lot of partners of ours in Europe are and have been.

It is that it is a vicious brutal murderous dictatorship and that is the real reason that we are engaged there. He has driven 5 million people out of the country—

Senator PAUL. I guess that response sort of somehow alleviates the stigma of socialism from being a problem—you know, that socialism is not the problem there.

And I guess many others who have watched socialism through the years have argued that you really cannot have a kinder, gentler form of socialism, that what happens with democratic socialism is that when you want to have the state own the means of production or when you want to have the state own property, that, ultimately, it devolves into a cronyistic system—that what Chavez and Maduro started out as is not what it ended up as.

When you have a more complete form of socialism, as socialism evolves, that perhaps authoritarianism is a side effect of socialism.

You know, when Batista was rooted out, you know, he was a so-called cronyist or whatever. There were people who supported Castro. Many well-intended people supported Castro in the beginning, and it turned out Castro was not any better than Batista but was actually probably worse than Batista.

So I think that we ought to be careful with this, and I think that discounting that socialism has anything to do with it is really discounting an economic nightmare that has happened in Venezuela and saying it is just because you got a bad socialist; if we had better socialists, we would not have so much of a problem.

Do you think that the President has the right to militarily bring about regime change in Venezuela without the authority of Congress?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is not our policy.

Senator PAUL. Do you think the President has the right to do that?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the President has the right to conduct the foreign policy of the United States under the Constitution and we, certainly, would like to see a democratic Venezuela.

Senator PAUL. Sounds like a non-answer. But, I mean, the question is do you believe that the President has the right to do so without congressional authority? This is a very important constitutional question.

Also, if the answer is that socialism is not the problem—we think one socialist is a little bit more benign than another socialist and we think the President has the right to do it—we could very much be involved in this.

And the reason why this is important and why the discussion of regime change is important is that President Trump gets it more than almost anybody else that the Iraq war, which I know you were a big proponent of, was an utter disaster, that in getting rid of one bad person we were left with something maybe even worse and that is the vacuum, the chaos, and the terrorism that comes from having no government.

This happened again in Libya. So the real question of whether or not we want to always think we know what is best for another country and we are going to replace one leader with one less bad is an important one.

Do you still believe that the Iraq war is something that you would support today? Do you still think the Iraq war was a good idea?

Mr. ABRAMS. Senator, I have not thought about the Iraq war in years because I am in this job trying to deal with—

Senator PAUL. Sounds like another non-answer. But it would be nice to know if the President had people around him who actually agreed with him.

The President thinks it is the worst public policy decision of the last generation, that it led to a vacuum that actually led to chaos and more terrorism but also led to more of the emboldenment of Iran.

So the same hawks that wanted to go after Hussein now want to go after Iran, but now Iran is worse because Hussein is gone.

So, see, one thing leads to another, and there are unintended consequences, and I think the discussion of regime change is an important one, and I think we should not so casually dismiss socialism as being the problem in Venezuela.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I am not casually dismissing it, and I think that it is a very bad economic policy. But we have had allies—I mean, England has had socialist governments. France has had socialist governments. Germany has had socialist governments. They were allies of ours throughout the Cold War.

That was not the problem as long as they were democrats. Whether they pursue a terrible economic policy is essentially theirs to decide because it is their country.

The problem with Venezuela is that it has a murderous corrupt regime that is having an impact not only inside but on all the neighbors.

Senator PAUL. Then the question is whether murderous thugs are an accident of history or whether they are a consequence of socialism.

Why does it seem that time and time again socialism leads to autocracy? And that is an important thing because if you get a benign democratic socialism how long does that last until it devolves into authoritarianism? I think it is a question worth asking.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Paul.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you both for being here.

As you know, Ambassador Abrams, foreign powers like Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, and Turkey have not only publicly supported the Maduro regime but through a network of shell corporations and sanction evasion schemes they have significantly enriched Maduro and his cronies while ordinary Venezuelans continue to suffer.

So I know that a number of sanctions have been taken in response to illegal activities stemming from adversaries like Russia, Cuba, and Iran.

But Turkey, on the other hand, is engaged in these same activities as a NATO ally. Now, Venezuelan government associates have established numerous front and shell companies in Turkey.

For example, and I may not be pronouncing this correctly, Grupo Iveex Insaat, a tiny Turkish company tied to Maduro, has capital of just \$1,775 and no refineries. Yet, it was responsible for 8 percent of Venezuela's oil exports in 2019.

So given what is going on with Turkey, is not there more that we should do to disrupt President Erdogan and Turkey's support of Maduro and those corrupt links?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, Senator. It is a real problem.

Turkey is not doing in Venezuela what the Russians and the Cubans are doing. Their presence is not so great. But they are lending themselves to this kind of corrupt activity. Also gold. We see a lot of gold passing through Turkey.

We saw earlier this year some of these front companies develop in Mexico. But with the help of the Mexican government, we are shutting them down. We just have not had that kind of help from the Turkish government.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, that is why I ask if we do not think there is more that we should be thinking about in terms of sanctioning Turkey.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we keep trying. We, again, is the Treasury—OFAC. We keep going after companies as we find them.

Senator SHAHEEN. And so can you give us a list of those companies that we have gone after in Turkey that—and what success we have had at doing that?

Mr. ABRAMS. I cannot today, but I would be happy to supply it to you, and some of it for investigations that are ongoing we would not be able to do it—we would do it—or we would do it in a classified form. But be happy to do it.

Senator SHAHEEN. I think that would be helpful, Mr. Chairman, if perhaps that could be something that is shared with the whole committee.

The CHAIRMAN. I agree with that.

Mr. Abrams, if you could provide that list, or what you can that is not classified for the record, that would be much appreciated. Senator Shaheen's points are well taken as it relates to Turkey.

[The requested information referred to above follows:]

In July 2019, the Treasury Department designated the Turkish-registered company Mulberry Proje Yatirim Anonim Sirketi in light of its role in the sale of gold in Turkey in connection with Alex Saab's corruption network. We will continue to review all tools available to deny the illegitimate Maduro regime access to illicit income streams, including those from gold sales abroad.

Senator SHAHEEN. Now, during the last hearing that the committee held on Venezuela in March of 2019 we discussed the impact that this conflict is having on women, and several people have mentioned that already.

Then USAID Administrator Mark Green stated that the disproportionate humanitarian effects on women and girls is the darkest and gloomiest part of Venezuela's crisis.

So can you, either one of you, give us an update on the humanitarian assistant efforts that we have undertaken with respect to women and girls, particularly given what is happening with the coronavirus?

Mr. HODGES. Yes, thank you, ma'am.

And so this is an issue we are tracking closely sort of across the region, just stemming from the pandemic and its impacts to different countries.

But specific to Venezuela, USAID promotes these types of promotion activities that are streamlined through all of our programming.

To date, we have focused on the most immediate lifesaving assistance first and foremost, primarily health and food, and the prevention of gender-based violence and response to gender-based violence is, as I stated, sort of covered under the protection activities writ large throughout all of our programming.

It is an area, given the pandemic, we are looking to step up and make sure that within Venezuela and throughout the region we are more directly addressing.

But it is part of all of our programming and with regards to inside of Venezuela as access becomes available to funding, additional funding, we will make sure to incorporate this further.

And, again, just to highlight the number, to date the U.S. Government has provided \$611 million in humanitarian assistance and so portions of that funding impact this, and it is an area I know we need to do more and we are working on that.

Senator SHAHEEN. So when you say we need to step up, are you suggesting that more money needs to be provided? We need to be engaging in different kinds of activities?

We need to be working more with the international community? What do you mean specifically when you say step up?

Mr. HODGES. Yes, ma'am. So we are already working aggressively with the international community on this. In fact, there are some specific programs that are funded through USAID that directly address this.

What I mean by that is to make sure that as we are pushing this. As we are seeing these trends emerge because of the pandemic, we are having discussions with our implementing partners to ensure it is not just a part of their program where it becomes something they do as one a number of things.

But rather, that it be an area of focus that they are taking seriously, that they are actually coming up with new ways to address it.

And I can speak to COVID writ large across the region. We have already had conversations to ensure that we have specific programs in place that are addressing gender-based violence and helping women and minorities who are being targeted.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator Romney.

Senator ROMNEY. Mr. Abrams, thank you, and both of our individuals this morning who have testified. I appreciate your work and your perspective.

Mr. Abrams, in June, the President took a surprising tack with regards to Mr. Guaidó. He said, "Guaidó was elected. I think that it was not necessarily—I think that I was not necessarily in favor but I said, some people that liked it, some people did not.

"I was okay with it. I do not think it was—you know, I do not think it was very meaningful one way or the other."

And I think that was a surprise in that the policy of our nation had been pretty consistently saying that we recognized Mr. Guaidó as the President of the country and someone whom we firmly supported.

There really is only once voice that matters when it comes to speaking the nation's foreign policy. The State Department and all of us can express our various views, and I am sure those have some weight. But to the world and to the people of Venezuela, it is the President who speaks for the nation.

Perhaps he shares Senator Paul's comment that all socialists are pretty much the same and whether it is Guaidó or whether it is Maduro does not make a big difference.

But what is the posture of the United States of America with regards to the presidency of Venezuela and will that ever be communicated to the world unless the President expresses it himself?

Mr. ABRAMS. The policy, Senator, is that we recognize Juan Guaidó as the interim President of Venezuela and have since January 5th, 2019. We continue to do so.

We will continue to do so after these corrupt parliamentary elections and we try to say that in many different ways every day.

Senator ROMNEY. Yes, and my question was until the President says it, will that ever break through?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, I think the President has said it, and you remember the State of the Union when Guaidó not only met with the President but was the guest in the balcony there and got happily bipartisan ovations.

So I think the President has said it.

Senator ROMNEY. Without Russia and Venezuela and Cuba supporting Maduro, do you believe he would be able to hang on?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not. I think those maybe 2,500 Cuban intelligence agents and the Russian veto in the Security Council are really important in keeping Maduro in power.

Senator ROMNEY. What then could we do with regards to Russia, China, Cuba? If we were really serious about removing Maduro and seeing a democratically-elected president in that country, what would we be doing?

Would the President not be having this at a call with Putin and Xi Jinping and would we not be blockading, perhaps, fuel coming in from Cuba and Venezuela?

What actions could we take if we were very serious about removing Maduro and seeing 5 million people be able to return to their homes?

Mr. ABRAMS. There is a spectrum, Senator, and I suppose at the far end of it you could blockade Venezuela. That is an act of war, but you could do it and you could prevent ships from going in and coming out.

We have, obviously, chosen not to do that. We do talk to the Chinese about this. We talk to the Russians about this. I do not think either of them has very great confidence in Maduro.

If you look at the amount of money China has put into Venezuela this year, it is, basically, zero. They are backing away. The Russians are taking money out of Venezuela, trying to get their money back. But they maintain the political protection and the protection in the U.N.

Senator ROMNEY. Given your expression of their timid support for Maduro, would it not be possible for us to exert sufficient incentive for them to walk away from him as opposed to continuing to support him in such a substantial way were this not a high priority for our nation?

Are we so incapable of use of soft power to get two nations, which you suggest do not have a great commitment to Maduro, to back away?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, it has not worked so far. I think from the point of view of Putin, you know, this is a kind of freebie in the sense that it is not costing him any money now and, obviously, he has got a kind of base in South America.

But as you start to weigh what are the things you would actually do in that bargain with Putin, we have not found anything attractive.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will return the time. But your point that it is a freebie for Russia I would suggest that it is in our interest to make sure it is not a freebie for Russia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Romney, for returning the time. We will put it in a bank, but it is a minus seven.

[Laughter.]

Senator ROMNEY. Is there a per, you know, minute charge for that? A per second charge, Mr. Chairman?

The CHAIRMAN. We will talk.

Senator ROMNEY. All right.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I feel like it is Groundhog Day in this committee. We have been told by the Administration, frankly, multiple administrations for years that Russia's support for Assad and Iran's support for Assad is tepid. It is fragile. It is just a matter of time before he falls.

The truth of the matter is they were always willing to do more than we were in Syria to protect their interests and that is likely the exact same case here in Venezuela, and so our policy has been misguided by fundamentally flawed assumptions from the beginning.

And I have deep respect for both of you who are testifying before this committee. But we just have to be clear that our Venezuela policy over the last year and a half has been an unmitigated disaster, and if we are not honest about that then we cannot self-correct.

We have to admit that our big play, recognizing Guaidó right out of the gate and then moving quickly to implement sanctions, just did not work. It did not.

All it did was harden Russia and Cuba's play in Venezuela and allow Maduro to paint Guaidó as an American patsy, and a lot of us warned that this might happen.

We could have used the prospect of U.S. recognition or sanctions as leverage. We could have spent more time trying to get European allies and other partners on the same page. We could have spent more time trying to talk to or neutralize China and Russia early before we back them into a corner, a corner from which they are not moving. They are not moving. But all we did was play all our cards on day one and it did not work, and it has just been an embarrassing mistake after mistake since.

First we thought that getting Guaidó to declare himself President would be enough to topple the regime. Then we thought putting aid on the border would be enough. Then we tried to sort of construct a kind of coup in April of last year and it blew up in our face when all the generals that were supposed to break with Maduro decided to stick with him in the end.

We undermined Norway's talks last summer and then this March we released a transition framework that, frankly, is almost a carbon copy of the very one that was in front of the parties last year.

And now, after wasting all of this time, we are stuck with elections about to happen, that is, we have talked about today, Guaidó and the opposition refuse to enter.

And then we are going to be in a position where we are recognizing someone as the leader of Venezuela who does not control the government, who does not run the military, and who does not even hold office, and we do not do this in other places, right.

Nobody knows the name of the guy who finished second in the 2018 Russian presidential election. We do not recognize that person as the President of Russia no matter how corrupt those elections are because doing that makes us look weak and feckless if we cannot actually do anything about it.

And so I do think it is important to ask some questions about what comes next, and I might have time for only one but I have two.

The first is this question of what do we do with Guaidó. So you are saying we are going to recognize him because he is the former leader of the National Assembly. You know, Mr. Abrams, there are contests for supremacy within the opposition.

What happens if 6 months from today someone else emerges as a more legitimate voice for the opposition than Juan Guaidó? What criteria do we use to recognize someone new or is Juan Guaidó going to be the recognized leader of Venezuela permanently no matter how conditions change on the ground?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think the situation with Guaidó is unique because he is the President of the National Assembly. They are going to have a corrupt election now, which no one, I think—no democratic country is going to recognize, and that corrupt election, that fraud, is not going to change Guaidó's status, and I do not think you will find anybody in the opposition leadership who will claim otherwise.

Also, I would just like to say, Senator, you know, that was not the vote of confidence in the policy I would have liked.

Senator MURPHY. I understand, you dispute my premise. I will stipulate to that.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MURPHY. I will stipulate to that. Okay. I think that that is a fallacy to suggest that no one is going to step forward and replace Guaidó, and I think we have to sort of at least think through the criteria by which we may recognize somebody else.

Let me ask a quick second question, which is this. Guaidó's prerequisites for participating in the election did not include Maduro stepping down, and yet, you have said as recently as a week ago that the only thing we want to talk to Maduro about is his removal from power.

Are we open, the United States of America, to a discussion with Maduro in which he stays in power as a transition to an election that is actually free and fair? Because, frankly, even if he is not in power there is no guarantee that his allies could rig an election. So why are not we open to that as a possible path forward?

Mr. ABRAMS. Because we do not believe that a free election in Venezuela is possible with Maduro in power, in control of the army, in control of the police, in control of the colectivo gangs, with 2,000 or 3,000 Cuban intelligence agents. We do not see that that is a possibility of a free election.

Senator MURPHY. I would say Guaidó does not share that view because his preconditions for taking part in the elections did not require the removal of Maduro, and it is also not clear that even without Maduro there could be a free and fair election.

And so I think this is just a prescription to get stuck in a downward spiral of American policy from which we cannot remove ourselves. We have got to be more nimble, more creative, more open to solutions by which we could get to an election even with Maduro there as a transition.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am over my time.

Mr. ABRAMS. Could I respond for just a few seconds?

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead.

Mr. ABRAMS. You know, we presented this Framework for a Democratic Transition precisely to show what we would like to see happen, and in the Framework, both sides, the Chavistas and the opposition, in the National Assembly, elect a transitional government.

Each side has veto power. Guaidó and Maduro would not participate in the transitional election. Both could run for president in a future free presidential election.

We thought we were putting out, and many, many countries have looked at this, have said this is a positive formula and we showed the way to the lifting of U.S. sanctions.

And I would just say, again, just under 60 countries support Guaidó. So the notion that we have done this alone and without international support, Senator, I would submit is not accurate.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Rubio.

Senator RUBIO. On that point, thank you both for being here.

How many countries in Latin America recognize Guaidó as the legitimate interim president?

Mr. ABRAMS. Every country except, I think, Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico.

Senator RUBIO. I imagine Nicaragua?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, Nicaragua. Sorry.

Senator RUBIO. Let me ask you, we did not just pull Guaidó out of the air and say, this is who we will recognize.

The basis of our support for Juan Guaidó as the legitimate interim President and the basis for why all these other countries have also recognized him is because he is the democratically-elected member of the National Assembly who the democratically-elected members of the National Assembly have made the President of that assembly that, under the Venezuelan constitution, fills the role of president when there is a vacancy in that office. Is that not the reason why we recognized him?

Mr. ABRAMS. That is correct. We did not choose Juan Guaidó. The constitution of Venezuela chose Juan Guaidó.

Senator RUBIO. As interim President until the next free and fair election?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator RUBIO. Because I also heard a comment earlier by one of my colleagues—I believe that was Senator Paul, who is no longer here—but he said that our policy of replacing Maduro with Guaidó, that is not the policy of the United States.

The policy of the United States is to try to promote a transition to free and fair elections where the people of Venezuela choose who the next president of Venezuela is.

Mr. ABRAMS. That is exactly right.

Senator RUBIO. Let me ask you another thing you hear a lot about: is he still clinging to power. First of all, I think it is fair to say that the Maduro regime is not really a government in the traditional sense of the word.

It is an organized crime ring. Is that a fair characterization?

Mr. ABRAMS. It is, and I think it is what distinguishes it from many Latin American cases of military juntas, which were replaced by democratic government.

Senator RUBIO. And as a criminal enterprise, basically, what it is comprised of, these individuals that allow Maduro to remain, "in power," much of the country they do not really exercise much government writ any longer but heavily focused in Caracas.

But to the extent that they are in control of national territory, the people that allow them to do it, the reason why they do it is not—it is fair to say most of them it is not either ideological or a personal affinity towards Mr. Maduro.

It is actually the fact that these people have become very rich and want to maintain power that allows them to keep their money and their personal freedom. Would you not say that is the glue that holds together this criminal enterprise?

Mr. ABRAMS. I would, Senator, and I think that explains part of the difficulty in getting them out.

Senator RUBIO. And the reason why they will not leave is not because they love Maduro. Some of them want to replace him. The reason why they cannot leave is because right now he is their best bet, at least for this moment. In essence, of all the options before them, this is the one that most guarantees them the power for the time being to protect their wealth and their personal freedom.

Mr. ABRAMS. Senator, I think that is right, and I think, again, it explains the great difficulty of Venezuela.

Senator RUBIO. Is it not also fair to say that one of the things that a lot of those folks in there are probably thinking about is, let us see what happens, moving forward, in American politics. Maybe there will be a change in policy.

To me, this is an issue that has had pretty strong bipartisan support. I think it is a bad assumption on their part.

But there are some that are sort of standing around saying, well, let us wait and see because maybe after the elections there will be a change in policy that will take the pressure off of us.

Mr. ABRAMS. That is our calculation, too, that Maduro is, to some extent, watching and waiting.

Senator RUBIO. I think it is a bad bet. I do not think he has very many supporters here that are in favor of him remaining in power.

The last point is a pretty straightforward question. You have answered it many different ways and times but I want to reiterate once more.

Whether it is the President or anybody else, when they discuss talking to Maduro, that means a negotiation with Maduro about how he leaves his current position and allows for there to be free

and fair elections. We are not discussing talks. We are not open to talks about how he remains in power.

Mr. ABRAMS. That is right. We are open to talks about his leaving power. Does he want to stay in Venezuela? Does he want to leave Venezuela? What happens to the sanctions? That sort of thing, for him and other people.

Those discussions we are willing to have. But a negotiation about his remaining in power in Venezuela, we are not going to have.

Senator RUBIO. And my last question is we see them buying all of this gasoline from the Iranians. One of the most oil-rich countries in the world no longer has any refining capacity and that has been the case for a long time, way even before these sanctions took hold. How are they paying for it?

Mr. ABRAMS. They are paying Iran with gold, as far as we are aware.

Senator RUBIO. From both their reserves and from illegal mining?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes. The gold reserves—the value seems to be rising because the price of gold is rising. But we are able to see sometimes the movement of gold out, which we think is to Iran, and they are trying to refill it in part through current gold mining in the Arco Minero.

Senator RUBIO. So, in essence, they are depleting their national gold reserves to buy time to provide even very limited amounts of fuel?

Mr. ABRAMS. They are.

Senator RUBIO. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses. This is a very hard problem, and I think the situation we all acknowledge in Venezuela is disastrous from a humanitarian standpoint.

I think the Trump administration has gotten some things right and I think the Trump administration has gotten some things wrong. I do not think it was easy to get 70 nations to recognize the Guaidó government.

I think that was a good bit of diplomacy, and I do not think anybody should take for granted that that was simple. And so that I would put in the positive side of the ledger with respect to the efforts.

I think the early suggestion that military options were on the table meant that many of the nations that recognized the Guaidó government would not also embrace the sanctions that we wanted them to, and I have had conversations with leadership in some of the nations that have been with us on the recognition but not on the sanction, where they expressed reticence and used that as a reason.

But, fundamentally, I do not think the Venezuelan reality, you know, is bad because of the United States or bad in spite of the United States. It is a brutal dictatorship, and it is a dictatorship that is propped up by the world's leading authoritarian nations.

And, in a way, I almost think Venezuela is like the perfect example to the world, if you want to live under an authoritarian government, take a look, because you got Iran there and Russia there and

China there and Turkey there and Cuba there, and if this is the form of government you want then take a look at what it has done.

So what should we do now? I, first, think we have to be realistic. One of my concerns has been from the very beginning that from the witness side of the hearing rooms in this committee we have often heard optimism expressed about what the recognition of Guaidó might do and we are right around the corner from a transition.

And it has been interesting to me because when I have had conversations with the Colombians they have never been optimistic about anything quickly. They are right on the border. They have dealt with Venezuela under so many challenges over so many years. They were never optimistic that a transition would be quick.

And so this is not just a Venezuela issue. I think it is an issue that, you know, for a whole series of reasons including some good ones. We are a can-do optimistic people. We often overestimate our ability to affect the internal reality of a country, and we have to be a little more humble about that. So maybe a little humility would be important.

Second, the humanitarian challenges. There are now 40,000 to 50,000 Venezuelans that have crossed the border from Colombia back into Venezuela because when Colombia had to shut down the economy due to COVID it put so many people in desperate situations that even though they were going to be desperate in Venezuela they would have a roof there with family, and so you see people crossing back.

I am really interested in Colombia. I am really worried about the effect that the Venezuelan reality has on Colombia, and so I would put as a very top priority, first, continuing to do everything we can to get humanitarian aid to Venezuelans, and you cited the number. We should do even more.

Second, do everything we can to protect the hard-won gains that administrations in both parties have made in terms of turning Colombia around because Colombia, right on the border of Venezuela, offers the antidote.

If Venezuela stands as the example of you want to live under authoritarians this is what your life is going to be like. Colombia can offer the opposite.

If you embrace democratic norms and work over time, look at the positive arc you can be on. And I think we have an enormous amount invested in that arc that is fragile, that is at risk, and the Venezuelan situation puts it at risk.

So I think the second element of a strong Venezuelan policy in addition to humanitarian support needs to be continued support for Colombia, and I want to ask about that in my last minute after I say this third thing.

I do think the third thing that would be really important is TPS. I echo what Senator Menendez said before I came into the room. If our critique is this is a brutal dictatorship and these people are living under intolerably bad conditions, to say all of that and we want to change but we do not want to let you come into our country it undercuts our message, in my view, and suggests we are not that worried about them. And I think this is the perfect example of how TPS should be used.

My question is, tell me how we are doing in Guatemala right now and what more we can do to support that government as they deal with this Venezuelan challenge.

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, thanks, Senator.

First, I agree with you about the importance of making sure that this multi-decade bipartisan effort in Colombia stays on track, and the Colombians have been, you know, amazing in welcoming now about 2 million Venezuelans, and you can see the burden on the hospital system, the educational system. But they are doing it.

So I think money is part of what we should be doing to help Colombia, and they are doing this, by the way, as they continue even in the context of COVID to eradicate coca. It is really extraordinary. I think, you know, hats off to President Duque and his government.

So I think we need the bipartisanship to continue. We need political support from the Administration, which we have, and we probably need to look again at the aid levels because, you know, we come up with these numbers before this surge of a couple of million Venezuelans into Colombia.

Mr. HODGES. And, sir, I would add to that I completely agree with your comments and the Special Representative. This is an area where we are definitely engaged.

We are engaged directly with the Colombians throughout the interagency on both the coca eradication, on the Venezuela crisis, and, in addition, making sure all of those conversations are connected back to the response to the COVID pandemic.

And so we have taken a series of steps from the USAID side to make sure that the pandemic is not going to wash away the gains that we have made within Colombia. Obviously, the pandemic sets new realities in country for some of the assistance that we have going on there.

But we are continuing to evaluate our programs, update them to make sure they are based on the current reality, and not where we were 6 weeks ago or 4 months ago.

And so we are actively doing that and we are working closely with the State Department interagency on all of this.

Senator Kaine. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

Senator Cruz.

Senator Cruz. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your good work, your service, your testimony.

Mr. Abrams, does Maduro survive the year and what can we do to maximize the chances that the answer to that question is no?

Mr. ABRAMS. Well, we, obviously, hope he does not survive the year and we are working hard to make that happen.

What needs to happen for that to occur? The Venezuelan people have to react against this election. International support of the—I think it is 59 countries, and we hope to add to that, have to reject this election as a complete fraud.

We need more sanctions, personal sanctions, of the sort the EU, Canada, the Rio Treaty countries have done—travel restrictions.

Here is a case where more is better because they put more pressure on the regime, and we need to continue in the case of, particu-

larly, the Iran-Venezuela relationship, to try to prevent it from growing.

Senator CRUZ. So do I understand correctly that Maduro was on a plane, he was ready to leave, he had given it up, and the Russians called him and convinced him to stay? Is that right and what changed in his calculus that caused him to get off that plane?

Mr. ABRAMS. I do not know if it is right. I have heard several stories about it. One version is it was his wife who actually did leave.

Another is that he was not on a plane but was going to get on a plane and the Russian ambassador met with him and persuaded him to stay, we are behind you.

I do not have firm intelligence of that. Those are different stories. I think, you know, the day will come when he is going to have to make the decision of where he is safest—fleeing to a place like Cuba or Russia, or is he safest staying in Venezuela because then we cannot extradite him.

Senator CRUZ. I would think one of the important questions on that is where the Venezuelan military lines up and, in particular, their generals and admirals. What do we know in terms of the calculus those military leaders are engaging in right now about what is good for their future, what is good for their families, what is good for their country, although I am not sure with many of them that third question is the predominant question.

Mr. ABRAMS. Our impression is they are thinking. Some of them are ideologically Chavistas. Most are not. Some of them are criminals. Most are not.

They are on a spectrum here in how that view that regime. Many are trying to figure out “what happens to me,” and it is probably the case—we have heard this from a lot of people—that the opposition has not spoken clearly enough about the questions of guarantees and amnesty and so forth for some behavior.

There have been those kinds of amnesties in every country that has gone from dictatorship to democracy in Latin America, for that matter, in Europe, South Africa.

So they are thinking about that and we do try to get messages through to the people in the high command, sometimes publicly saying, look, Venezuela needs a modernized paid military, and you are not going to get it from Maduro. We need to reestablish the kind of mil-to-mil relationship we once had.

Senator CRUZ. So what more in terms of carrot and stick can Congress do and can the Administration do to change the calculus for the generals and admirals so that they come to the unequivocal conclusion it is much, much worse for me if Maduro stays in power than if this illegitimate regime is toppled and if, instead, you have democratically legitimate government in Venezuela?

Mr. ABRAMS. Actually, I think the best thing we could do would be a bipartisan expression that this policy is not going to change. It has support in both parties.

We are not going to let up on the sanctions. We are not going to let up on the criminal prosecutions. We are going to stay with it. So this is going to keep on going year after year until this regime is replaced.

Senator CRUZ. Well, I think that is a good invitation, and I know this committee has acted in a bipartisan manner before. I think that would be a very positive thing if this committee were able to come together and do that again to make clear that Maduro will have no friends regardless of what happens in an election 91 days from now.

Let me ask about a different aspect of Venezuela, which is, as you know, for over 2 years six Americans and five of them from Texas have been imprisoned in Venezuela related to charges manufactured about their work for CITGO. They have missed birthdays, they have missed weddings, they have missed funerals. They are imprisoned in inhumane conditions. They are subject to abuse. Their families continue to live in fear for their health and well-being.

Last week, two of the men were rereleased to house arrest. But a lot more needs to be done. What is the status of your efforts to make sure that the CITGO 6 are brought home?

Mr. ABRAMS. We are in touch with the families. We are in touch with anyone who is trying to help, and that would include Governor Richardson, who was down there a couple of weeks ago.

We have made and we continue to make a—I guess I would call it a global diplomatic effort with the governments, for example, of Mexico, of Spain, of Argentina, with the Vatican.

We keep asking ourselves who could we go back to? Who is somebody new who has influence in Caracas? What can we do to increase the pressure or the inducements on the regime?

Moving two to house arrest, again, is a positive step. We hope that the next step is the other four go to house arrest as a step toward getting home. It has been since 2017. It is getting on to 2 and a half years now and they belong home with their families. These men have never had a trial.

Senator CRUZ. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cruz.

Senator Menendez.

Senator MENENDEZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hodges, 40 percent of hospitals in Venezuela lack electricity. Seventy percent of hospitals lack access to water. The U.N. estimates 7 million people in Venezuela are in need of humanitarian assistance but only able to address 10 percent of that.

What are we doing—State Department, USAID—to expand access inside Venezuela for organizations seeking to deliver lifesaving assistance along the lines with our respect for humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence? Are we building on the recent agreement between Guaidó and Maduro health officials to support the Pan American Health Organization's work in Venezuela? Is that a one-off deal?

I mean, I am very focused on creating democracy in Venezuela. But in the interim, there is a humanitarian catastrophe happening.

Mr. HODGES. Absolutely, sir. And from a humanitarian assistance perspective, it is less a question in my mind of whether or not we remain committed to the bipartisan support for this issue. As you have all stated, the reality is this is Maduro against the Venezuelan people, the Venezuelan families who are suffering day in and day out.

And just to cite some specific examples of funding regarding what is inside Venezuela, as the committee knows, we have provided \$128 million in support of longer-term development programs, but, more specifically, \$43 million for critical health, water, food assistance.

And within that, we have reached—

Senator MENENDEZ. This is inside of Venezuela?

Mr. HODGES. Inside Venezuela. Yes, sir.

And we have reached 9 million people if we include sort of the totality of our programs within Venezuela. That does include vaccination campaigns.

But in our strictly day-to-day health support, we have reached around 600,000 people. We continue to seek ways to do exactly what you are saying, sir, and it is an area where we know more needs to be done. We call on the international community to—

Senator MENENDEZ. And what about the Pan American Health Organization agreement that Guaidó and Maduro's people have?

Mr. HODGES. Yes, sir. We are supportive of this and we are working, as you are aware, with PAHO with the State Department and others over the course of the last several months to overcome several obstacles to make sure that the U.S. taxpayer funds that were provided to PAHO would be used in the manner that—

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I would like you to follow up with our office to get the totality of what you are doing in this regard.

Mr. HODGES. Absolutely, sir, and it is—

Senator MENENDEZ. And one other question. Of the \$611 million that has been provided for humanitarian assistance in response to the Venezuela crisis, how much is supporting efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence?

Mr. HODGES. So, sir, I will have to follow up with a specific figure on that. As I mentioned earlier, all of our programming throughout the region includes aspects that deal with this.

But we do not have specific line items or earmarks designated for gender-based violence.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, I would like to know what is being spent because we have a horrific situation where violence against women, girls, LGBTI individuals, persons with disabilities, and we know that women and girls fleeing Venezuela are facing grave threats of sexual violence and trafficking by armed groups.

This committee has a long history of supporting efforts on trafficking against persons against—obviously, against their will and human trafficking, sexual trafficking, and what not. I would like to know what we are doing in that regard.

Mr. HODGES. Absolutely, sir, and we will get you those specific funding numbers. And one thing I do want to state here is that inside Venezuela we do have funding that is dedicated to protection.

That is protection for all, and with that figure, I think, is right under \$4 million. But we will follow up with an exact figure sort of across all programs.

Senator MENENDEZ. Mr. Abrams, let me ask you a question.

As mentioned in my opening statement that the U.N. has documented over 8,000 extrajudicial killings in the last 2 years alone within Venezuela, Canada and several countries have mounted evidence of Maduro's regime crimes against humanity.

Under Section 142 of the VERDAD Act, which I wrote, when Congress required the State Department to conduct an assessment of the regime's role in potential crimes against humanity, you sent us a report that contained "a list of allegations," a list that failed to include any mention, any mention, of the U.N. report.

By every standard, that report failed to contribute to an indelible record of the Maduro regime's crimes, a record I know that you and I both agree about.

So do you believe a state-sponsored campaign of more than 8,000 murders in 2 years should be considered a crime against humanity?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, Senator.

Senator MENENDEZ. Would you go back to the department and ask them to resubmit Section 142 of the report and treat it with the seriousness it deserves?

This is a compelling reality. We got a U.N. document, 8,000 extrajudicial killings. We do not even mention it our statement and we did not do anything more than a list of allegations. We can do much better than that.

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes, sir.

[The requested information referred to above follows:]

I reviewed the Department's "Report on the Former Maduro Regime's Accountability for Crimes Against Humanity" submitted February 2020 and believe that it appropriately responds to the relevant reporting requirement in the VERDAD Act. The report does not merely provide a list of allegations; it specifically provides detailed information about the degree to which the former Maduro regime and its officials have "engaged in actions that constitute possible crimes against humanity," including the constituent acts of murder, imprisonment, torture, and certain forms of sexual violence, and other serious abuses of human rights. Such acts can, under certain circumstances, constitute possible crimes against humanity. The report also included options for holding the perpetrators of such acts accountable.

The U.N. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the most cited organization in the Department's report and is mentioned more than 10 times. For example, the subsection on 2019 unlawful killings states that the NGO Observatorio Venezolano de la Violencia (OVV) "reported at least 2,124 unlawful killings for murders committed by the former Maduro regime identified as resistance to authority over the same period. Information analyzed by the OHCHR suggests that many of the former Maduro regime resistance to authority killings may constitute unlawful executions. In September 2019, Bachelet stated that regime-aligned security forces had probably committed 57 additional murders since her July 2019 report."

The Department looks forward to working closely with Congress on future reports involving this legislation.

Senator MENENDEZ. Now, lastly, I just want to go through a series of things, and you tell me yes or no whether they are the case.

We see Colombian guerillas operating openly across Venezuela in large swaths of ungoverned territory. Is that true?

Mr. ABRAMS. We do, including even in eastern Venezuela.

Senator MENENDEZ. We see a wide range of armed actors profiting from drug trade, illegal gold mining, and human trafficking. Is that true?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. We see femicide, sexual violence, trafficking of Venezuelan women and girls reportedly on the rise. Is that true?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. Is it fair to say that Maduro's regime has perpetrated more state-sponsored murders than any Latin American government since the dirty wars of the '70s and '80s?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. And you have already acknowledged the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights report of 8,000 extrajudicial killings as well as grotesque patterns of torture and rap. That is true as well, right?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. It is true that 5.2 million Venezuelans have fled their country, is it not?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. And at the rate it is going, it is possible that more Venezuelans would flee Venezuela than Syrians fled that horrific war?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. It is true that Maduro and his cronies face charges in the United States for drug trafficking and graft?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. And that we are dealing with a massive law enforcement challenge in Venezuela. Is that true as well?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. And it is also true that, in fact, what we have here is the challenge in a regional context. While Colombia has been a great neighbor and a good hemispheric leader, it has consequences.

It has consequences to Colombia's stability if, in fact, the demand continues, several million, to smaller countries like Ecuador and others. Is not that the potential for regional instability if this continues to hemorrhage?

Mr. ABRAMS. Yes.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, if I look at all of that, it sounds to me that Venezuela is a clear and present danger to the United States.

Mr. ABRAMS. To the United States and to its neighbors.

Senator MENENDEZ. So in my mind, if all of that rises to a clear and present danger to the United States, then we would be far more serious in our engagement. We would be following and sanctioning the Turkish companies that are making it profitable for Maduro to benefit.

We would be proactively seeking out the transfers of oils that are going to Cuba, which is why Cuba is keeping several thousand of its security agency around Maduro to prop him up.

We would be sanctioning Russian companies that specifically are providing assistance to the Maduro regime inside of it and we would use, to take a page from Senator Murphy, clearly, we would be engaging with the Russians and Chinese as well as the Turks and others in ultimately making it something of value to them to undermine Maduro, because right now they are propping him up and they see no consequence to them of keeping him propped up.

In our own hemisphere, in our front yard, to have a clear and present danger to the United States is pretty amazing.

There is a lot more that should be done here and I just fear that, at the end of the day, we are on auto pilot and that auto pilot is not going to get us to where we want.

Mr. ABRAMS. Senator, I would only respond that we have already done and are doing many of the things that you have mentioned. It was our sanctions on Rosneft that got it out of Venezuela.

It was our move against Greek-owned ships that turned them away from bringing Iranian gasoline to Venezuela. We have sanctioned over a thousand different people and entities.

So we are doing this. It has not had the impact that you and the members of the committee and, of course, all of us wanted to have, which is the restoration of democracy in Venezuela, yet.

Senator MENENDEZ. Well, you know, I would engage with the Spanish, who seem to be a problem in helping us in this regard. You know, they have influence with other countries in the hemisphere.

I could lay out for you a dozen different initiatives that if we are really serious and focused on getting rid of Maduro and restoring democracy to Venezuela and stability to the region as a result of the hemorrhaging that is going on. I mean, the lawlessness that is taking place in Venezuela is alarming. Even if Maduro leaves you are going to have a real challenge at the end of the day.

So yes, there is bipartisan support here to get us to where we need to be. But some of us have a sense that, again, we are on autopilot and we are not engaging in ways and with others in order to bring this to a successful conclusion, one that I know we both share in terms of a vision but one which I honestly say I think we have different views.

And I appreciate the chairman's willingness to give me this extra time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Menendez.

Good points all along. I, however, do question whether or not either the Russians, the Chinese, the Cubans, or anyone else that is engaged there are going to listen to us as far as trying to convince them that it is in their best interest to leave when they enjoy putting a stick in our eye.

Nonetheless, I think, perhaps, you have made some good suggestions. I think, perhaps, some bipartisan legislation urging the kinds of things that you have laid out might be appropriate, and I really think that everybody is pulling the wagon the same here. And I think perhaps some bipartisan legislation in that regard and I will be happy to join in that regard.

Senator Murphy or Senator Kaine, anything else for the good of the order?

Senator MURPHY. There we go. Just one additional question.

Much of our policy over the course of 2019 was predicated on the idea that we could force a fissure between Maduro and military leadership and, in fact, the episode in April in which we had hoped that there would be a substantial break did not pan out, in part because many of those leaders at the last minute appeared to get cold feet.

I guess sort of just two questions on that. One, when you say to Senator Cruz you hope he is not there at the end of the year, how much of that is predicated on a continued belief that you can split the military leadership away from Maduro?

And second, what did we learn from 2019 about the ways in which Maduro has successfully and perhaps, surprisingly, to American diplomats been able to hold together his leadership?

Mr. ABRAMS. I think we learned, one, that there are a number of people in the military who, unlike military leaders in previous

Latin American dictatorships, are really part of a criminal gang, and they are going to be extremely difficult to dislodge.

I think we learned that a lot of people in the military are concerned about the questions of guarantees and an amnesty and want to hear about it more quickly.

I think we learned that they want more of a sense of what happens after Maduro, which is one of the reasons we put forward the framework to show here is how we see it playing out.

I think we learned that we need to keep trying to reach out to military leaders in every possible way directly, indirectly, in public to get our messages across and we try to do that. SOUTHCOM, for example, tries to do that in their communications as well.

I would also say that we learned that there is no substitute for keeping the pressure on. And I would say the last thing the policy is is on auto pilot. We are constantly trying to think, who have we not reached out to? Who should we go back to again? What have we not tried that we should try?

Because, like you, we all want this policy to work to restore democracy to Venezuela or, better said, to help Venezuelans restore democracy to their own country.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. HODGES. If I may, on that, I just want to add that USAID is actively engaged on this with the State Department.

We are actively working with civil society groups to raise awareness of the brutality, of the repression, of the real-life situation on the ground so that everyone throughout Venezuela can have access to that information.

We know the regime does not want that information getting out and we are trying to break through by various different means.

And so we are very proud of the work we are doing in this space to increase that access to information to everyday Venezuelans including folks in different security sectors.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Well, Mr. Abrams, Mr. Hodges, thank you so much for your service. I think this has been a hearing that will help enlighten Americans to where we are on all these very difficult issues, been appropriate discussion of some of the real knotty problems that we face in trying to do what we all want to see done.

For information, members, the record will remain open until Thursday. We would ask witnesses to respond as promptly as possible.

To questions that are raised and we had some discussions here about things that would be supplied to the record, for the record we would ask you to do that as promptly as possible.

And with that, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY CHAIRMAN JAMES E. RISCH

Question. Cuban military and intelligence support is the linchpin to Maduro's survival. What more can be done to drive up the cost to the Cuban regime? What options are there to block the oil shipments between the two?

Answer. Cuba provides support that allows Maduro to cling to power and gives him the false sense that he can be shielded from some of the effects of international economic and diplomatic pressure while the Venezuelan people suffer. The U.S. government targeted for sanctions firms, vessels, and state-owned enterprises engaging in transporting Venezuelan oil to Cuba. We consistently pursue new actions to raise the costs to Cuba for its support of Maduro, its destabilizing role in the hemisphere, and oppression of its own people by focusing on the Venezuela-Cuba oil trade as well as the Cuban regime's primary sources of hard currency revenue.

Question. Considering the well-documented ties between the Maduro regime and the Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional (ELN), and Cuba's harboring of ELN terrorists, should the Cuban regime be listed as a State Sponsor of Terrorism?

Answer. As a matter of law, in order to designate any country as a state sponsor of terrorism, the Secretary of State must determine that the government of that country has repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.

The Department of State consistently, and on an ongoing basis, reviews available information and intelligence, from many sources, on possible state support for acts of international terrorism, evaluating all credible, verified, and corroborated information in its entirety.

In 2015, Cuba's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation was rescinded after careful review of all available evidence. We continue to review new evidence as it arises, but to date the Secretary has not made a determination for another change.

Question. In February 2016, the Office of Foreign Assets Control allowed the Cuban regime to register the Havana Club rum brand in the U.S. What is stopping the Administration from reversing this decision?

Answer. The Department routinely works with OFAC to provide foreign policy input into OFAC's licensing decisions. Regarding specific licensing issues, we defer to the Department of Treasury for further information. Similarly, we refer questions regarding trademark registration to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

RESPONSES OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENEDEZ

Question. What is your assessment of specific states and/or territory in Venezuela that are not under the complete control of the Interim Government or the Maduro regime—i.e. ungoverned territory in Venezuela?

Answer. Venezuela's ungoverned territory is growing and disputed among armed actors. The illegitimate Maduro regime and local criminal organizations, and infrequently dissident forces, share control in many parts of the country. Regime control is probably weakest in Amazonas, Apure, Bolivar, Tachira, and Zulia because of their distance from the capital, the prevalence of illegally armed groups like the ELN and FARC, the impact of illegal mining, and security force manpower shortages. In some instances, we have seen how the Maduro regime has actively empowered illegally armed groups, gifting them mines, weapons, or medications to enforce their control over territory in exchange for political support. This landscape is constantly changing, in part depending on the regime's ability to fund and shield the groups and sporadic operations to bring them back under regime influence. Armed colectivos—armed groups that are largely regime sponsored—operate in 15 of Venezuela's 23 states, according to a 2019 InSight Crime report. As we plan for a transition scenario, focusing on the challenges presented by these ungoverned territory is a priority.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of members of Colombia's ELN that operate in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. According to local and international media, ELN was present in 12 of Venezuela's 24 states (with particular strength in Anzoátegui, Amazonas, Apure, Bolivar, Zulia, and Tachira states). The ELN's presence has expanded beyond its historic base in the border zone with Colombia. Colombian authorities estimate there are around 3,000 active members of the ELN in total, 1,400 of whom the gov-

ernment assesses are camped across the border in Venezuela. Colombian authorities have also assessed there are 36 ELN camps strategically located on the Venezuela side of the Colombia-Venezuela border.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations conducted by Colombia's ELN operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. The ELN engage in narcotrafficking, illegal mining, money laundering, extortion, and kidnapping in Venezuela. Media reports indicate an increasing role for the ELN in regime-subsidized food distribution, contraband (gas, basic goods, meat), extortion, illegal mining, and recruitment propaganda, at times via control of radio stations. The ELN is increasingly recruiting vulnerable Venezuelans, including children and those seeking to migrate, to join its ranks. There were also reports noting sporadic activity by ELN in the areas of road/border checkpoints. These activities contribute to instability in the region—one of many reasons why the Maduro regime needs to go as it is unwilling and unable to counter the ELN's illegal activities.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of members of former members of Colombia's FARC that operate in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia dissidents (FARC–D) are present in Venezuela, but we do not have reliable estimates of their numbers at this time, in part because Venezuela permits criminal groups to transit easily and to operate in the border regions of either side. Maduro stated publicly in July 2019 that former FARC commanders Ivan Marquez and Jesus Santrich are “leaders of peace” and “welcome in Venezuela,” shortly before the two announced a return to armed conflict as FARC dissidents. In 2019 in Colombia, an estimated 2,600 FARC dissidents who never demobilized, left the peace process, or are new recruits, continued violent attacks, primarily to enable narcotics trafficking and other criminal activities particularly in border regions and areas previously controlled by the former FARC.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations conduct by former members of Colombia's FARC operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. The dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC–D) engage in narcotrafficking, illegal mining, money laundering, extortion, and kidnapping in Venezuela. Financial ties with FARC–D and Venezuelan paramilitary groups facilitate the public corruption and graft schemes of the regime to include members of the armed forces acting at the behest of Maduro and his inner circle or in their own personal interest. Of concern, there were reports noting sporadic cooperation with FARC–D in the areas of road/border checkpoints, subsidized food distribution, recruitment and forced displacement of vulnerable indigenous communities, and trafficking of illegal narcotics and gold. These activities contribute to instability in the region—one of many reasons why the Maduro regime needs to go.

Question. Is it your assessment that there are paramilitary groups operating in Venezuelan territory? If yes, please provide a description of their numbers, organization, and operations.

Answer. I assess there are paramilitary groups operating in Venezuela. The groups probably range in size from a few dozen to several thousand members, are typically hierarchical in structure, and often have some linkage to the Maduro regime or other armed groups through alliances or non-aggression pacts. A few of the larger groups are likely to oppose a transition from the Maduro regime because of their mutually beneficial relationship for maintaining power and money, even if there are no ideological ties. They most commonly fund themselves with extortion, drug trafficking, and illicit mining.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of members of colectivos operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. There are roughly a dozen armed colectivos operating in the country with smaller groups operating within them. It is impossible to provide an estimate because the groups evolve and combine or divide frequently, depending on their loyalty or resistance to the Maduro regime and their ability to control territories.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations of colectivos operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. Armed colectivos are more likely to be legitimized and funded by the regime and be more ideologically consistent with it than other non-state armed groups. Some colectivo members have overlapping membership in a Venezuelan security service or are politicians. Thus, colectivos are most likely to take up arms to

defend the regime in a transition. The groups are the most powerful in Caracas and the greater capital district and near the border. While most armed colectivos operate in cahoots with regime authority, some are an expression of their community and may accept a transitional government if they are allowed full political participation.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of Cuban intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. Media reports that the total Cuban presence, including medical doctors, probably reaches between 20,000 and 25,000. It is not just the number that is significant, however, but also their role. We assess Cuban elements are pervasive in Maduro's security and intelligence forces, and conduct training exercises and loyalty checks to root out anyone who is seen to be sympathetic to the opposition. I have made statements to the press that there are more than 2,000 Cuban intelligence personnel in Venezuela.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations of Cuban intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. Cuban military and intelligence advisors actively support Maduro through the provision of security forces, intelligence officers, and providing direction to Venezuelan authorities. They equip the regime with the tools they need to repress any domestic or internal dissent, including in his military. In its 2019 annual report, the Casla Institute, a Czech human rights body, revealed the "systematic repression and torture, Cuban influence, and significant changes in the methods of torture in Venezuela." The Cuban intelligence personnel are also, in my view, critical to Maduro in heading off coups, by spying on military officers and hindering lateral communication among them.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of Russian intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. The State Department does not have an estimate for the number of Russian intelligence personnel in Venezuela. The Department would be willing to provide a classified briefing on this issue. Nevertheless, according to media reports, as many as 100 Russian troops are present in Venezuela, without the constitutionally required consent of the legitimate National Assembly.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations of Russian intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. Russian support for the Maduro regime includes military advisors and proxies, disinformation mechanisms, political influence on the world stage, and financial backing. In return, Russia receives access to Venezuela as a potential military power projection platform in the Western Hemisphere, a foothold for disinformation and influence campaigns against the United States and our allies, and investment payoffs from foreign military sales and the exploitation of Venezuela's oil and other natural resources.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of Chinese intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. We do not have an estimate for the number of People's Republic of China (PRC) intelligence personnel operating in Venezuela. The Department would be willing to provide a classified briefing on this issue.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations of Chinese intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. We do not have an estimate for the number of People's Republic of China (PRC) intelligence personnel operating in the country. However, media reports note that the Chinese telecommunications firm ZTE has played a critical role in the illegitimate Maduro regime's "fatherland card," a national identification card program that enables the regime to deliver social services, while also surveilling the Venezuelan people to channel a subsidized food program to political supporters. More broadly, we assess that the PRC's support for the regime is grounded in protecting its economic interests. The State Department is willing to provide a classified briefing on this issue.

Question. What is your estimate of the number of Iranian intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. We do not have an estimate for the number of Iranian intelligence personnel operating in Venezuela. The Department would be willing to provide a classified briefing on this issue.

Question. What is your assessment of the operations of Iranian intelligence personnel (military and/or civilian) operating in Venezuelan territory?

Answer. We have seen cooperation between Venezuela and Iran increase as the economic and social conditions within Venezuela deteriorate. Venezuela and Iran have established joint military ventures, including for the manufacture of munitions, though the factory to produce such munitions is incomplete.

Question. What is your understanding of the value of assets stolen from the Venezuelan people by the Maduro regime and the Chávez government?

Answer. Though it is impossible to precisely quantify how much public money has been stolen by these regimes, we currently estimate the total value of stolen and misspent assets is hundreds of billions of dollars.

Question. What is the total value of blocked assets in the United States as a result of U.S. sanctions and/or legal cases against the Maduro regime, members of the regime, regime intermediaries, and/or legal entities related to the regime?

Answer. We refer you to the Department of the Treasury for details on U.S.-based assets blocked under our sanctions. We refer you to the Department of Justice for details on the disposition of any assets associated with legal cases involving members of the Maduro regime or its associated entities.

Question. Outside of the United States, which three countries have blocked assets of the greatest value as a result of sanctions and/or legal cases against the Maduro regime, members of the regime, regime intermediaries, and/or legal entities related to the regime? (Note: please provide the name of the country and the estimated value of the assets.)

Answer. Our Venezuela sanctions program has helped block malign individuals and entities from accessing the U.S. financial system, which, in turn, has dissuaded third countries from conducting business with the Maduro regime. We do not have an estimate for the size of third country commercial activity that was suspended as a result of sanctions. As identified in our recent report to Congress on recovering assets stolen from the Venezuelan people, a number of public cases related to corruption of Venezuelan officials have been brought in other countries, including Andorra, Liechtenstein, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland.

Question. What is your assessment of which individual countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have the most developed legal frameworks to impose targeted sanctions (visa revocations and/or asset blocking) that could be and/or have been used against members of the Maduro regime? (Note: please provide the names of the countries and a description of their respective sanctions capacities.)

Answer. Despite the resolutions adopted late last year under the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR) addressing sanctions in connection with persons associated with the Maduro regime, some countries in the region lack the legislation and/or do not have sufficiently-developed frameworks to apply targeted sanctions. However, many TIAR countries have transmitted TIAR sanctions lists to the appropriate domestic migratory, legal, and financial authorities to ensure implementation of travel restrictions and consider opening investigations into illicit Venezuelan activities. Brazil, for example, has implemented travel/entry restrictions against 100 Venezuelan officials affiliated with the illegitimate Maduro regime. While implementing targeted financial sanctions such as asset blocking will require technical capacity-building, we believe Western Hemisphere countries can do even more to implement travel and visa restrictions. We continue to work with all willing nations to leverage all available tools against the Maduro regime.

Question. Please provide a brief overview of all active legal cases against current and former Maduro regime officials, as well as individuals affiliated with the Maduro regime.

Answer. For specifics on active legal cases against current and former Maduro regime officials, we would refer you to the Department of Justice.

Question. Please provide a list of all completed legal cases against current and former Maduro regime officials, as well as individuals affiliated with the Maduro regime.

Answer. For a list of all completed legal cases against current and former Maduro regime officials, we would refer you to the Department of Justice.

Question. Please provide a detailed summary of all settlements and judgments against current and former Maduro regime officials, as well as individuals affiliated with the Maduro regime.

Answer. For a detailed summary of all settlements and judgements against current and former Maduro regime officials, as well as individuals affiliated with the Maduro regime, we would refer you to the Department of Justice.

Question. Please provide a summary of the financial value of all assets recovered or in the process of being recovered through civil or criminal forfeiture proceedings as a result of the previous two questions above, including the total combined value of all such assets.

Answer. For a summary of the financial value of all assets recovered or in the process of being recovered through civil or criminal forfeiture proceedings, we would refer you to the Department of Justice.

Question. Please identify the current location of all such assets described in the previous question, specifically whether they are located in a DOJ managed fund and/or a Treasury managed fund, including, but not limited to the Treasury Forfeiture fund.

Answer. I refer you to the Department of Justice and the Department of Treasury for specifics on the size and nature of funds deposited in the Treasury Forfeiture Fund or other holdings.

Question. Please provide a detailed summary of how DOJ/Treasury are managing such funds described in the previous two questions above, including a review of accounting procedures to keep track of such funds and intention for use of such funds.

Answer. I refer you to the Department of Justice and the Department of the Treasury for details on accounting procedures associated with criminal and civil asset forfeitures and the Treasury Forfeiture Fund.

Question. Please provide a detailed review of whether such funds described in the questions above have already been used, allocated, or obligated for any U.S. Government programs, projects, initiatives and/or activities.

Answer. Any funds in the Treasury Forfeiture Fund recovered from Venezuelan cases are held in conjunction with funds recovered from all other asset forfeiture cases. I refer you to the Department of the Treasury for specific rules and processes for disposition of resources from the Treasury Forfeiture Fund.

Question. Please provide an overview of any plans or provision the executive branch has made for the return of such assets described in the questions above to the Interim Government and/or people of Venezuela.

Answer. In our recent Verdad Act report on asset forfeiture, we explained the processes and procedures under U.S. law that exist for a foreign country to request forfeited funds. The U.S. Government relies on licenses to enable the Interim Government to access assets blocked under our sanctions program, and we believe that funds subject to forfeiture should be returned to the people of Venezuela to the greatest extent possible provided that doing so can be done in accordance with operative U.S. laws, regulations, and processes.

Question. Have any of the funds described in the questions above been utilized for any expenditures or obligations related to the construction of a border wall on the southwestern border of the United States?

Answer. Any funds in the Treasury Forfeiture Fund recovered from Venezuela are held in conjunction with funds recovered from all other asset forfeiture cases. As a result, it is not possible to determine the origin of the funds used to support Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) security work at the border.

Question. What specific steps are the State Department and USAID taking to expand access inside Venezuela for organizations seeking to deliver life-saving assistance, with respect for the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence?

Answer. State and USAID have provided more than \$76 million in funding to humanitarian partners for critical health, water, food, and other life-saving assistance inside Venezuela. Maduro has made it extremely difficult for international NGOs to register, and for humanitarian workers to obtain entry visas to deliver aid. State and USAID are working with the U.N. humanitarian country team to advocate for increased access to beneficiaries. As an example, State has pressed hard, including enlisting other governments with friendlier relations with the Maduro regime, to get Maduro to approve the opening of World Food Program activities in Venezuela. Despite all the constraints, partners continue to provide life-saving assistance where possible, and we commend them for these efforts in such difficult circumstances.

Question. What is the status of the Lima Group and what specific diplomatic efforts have U.S. officials made to support its agenda in the past 3 months?

Answer. The Lima Group remains active and continues to be a close partner of the United States in denouncing the illegitimate Maduro regime, bolstering support for Interim President Juan Guaidó, and calling for free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections in 2020. On April 2, the Lima Group announced its backing for the U.S. proposed Democratic Transition Framework for Venezuela. On June 16, the Lima Group issued another statement strongly rejecting the illegitimate naming of a new National Electoral Council (CNE) and reiterating its call for free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections. We also are working with concerned members of the Lima Group, the International Contact Group, and the European Union on a joint declaration on democracy in Venezuela. The United States continues to engage with the Lima Group toward our shared goal of a democratic transition in Venezuela.

Question. What is the status of the Quito Process and what specific diplomatic efforts has the United States made to support this forum in the last 6 months?

Answer. The United States continues to support the Quito Process as it enhances coordination among key host countries of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, fosters region-led solutions to the Venezuela situation, and promotes greater burden sharing in the humanitarian response to Venezuelan outflows. The United States recently joined the “Group of Friends” of the Quito Process and participated in the first meeting on August 6, 2020. The United States will participate in the sixth Quito Process meeting, hosted by Chile, in late September, and will continue advocating for a regional solution to the Venezuela situation.

Question. Please describe specific diplomatic efforts U.S. officials have undertaken in Colombia to improve protection for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Answer. Colombia has borne the largest share of refugees fleeing the Venezuelan crisis, welcoming over 1.8 million refugees. Supporting Colombia in this crisis is a significant U.S. priority. Since FY 2017, the United States has contributed more than \$265 million in humanitarian assistance to international and non-governmental organizations in Colombia to assist with emergency response efforts, including protection from gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. We also welcomed a Colombian initiative to confer Colombian nationality on Venezuelan children born in Colombia and applauded its constructive efforts in regional refugee forums. U.S. officials regularly engage other key donors to highlight the importance of protection and encourage increased burden sharing in the humanitarian response.

Question. Please describe specific diplomatic efforts U.S. officials have undertaken in Ecuador to strengthen protection of Venezuelan refugees and migrants, particularly to improve access to asylum and legal status?

Answer. Ecuador has accepted over 362,000 Venezuelan refugees since the start of the Venezuelan migration crisis. Since FY 2017, the United States has contributed more than \$80 million in humanitarian aid to international and non-governmental organizations in Ecuador to assist with emergency response efforts, including protection from gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. Through our partners, the United States has also supported the Government of Ecuador’s efforts to register and grant legal status to Venezuelans in the country as well as strengthen asylum and refugee adjudication processes. U.S. officials regularly engage other key donors to highlight the importance of protection and encourage increased donor burden sharing in the humanitarian response.

Question. Please describe specific diplomatic efforts U.S. officials have undertaken in Peru to improve protection for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Answer. Peru has welcomed close to 830,000 Venezuelan refugees since the start of the Venezuelan crisis. Since FY 2017, the United States has provided nearly \$59 million in humanitarian aid to support Peru’s efforts to respond to the influx of Venezuelans, including support for protection from gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. The United States prioritizes efforts that strengthen Peru’s capacity to provide protection and identify and assist the most vulnerable Venezuelans, and we advocate for measures to register and regularize the status of undocumented Venezuelans. U.S. officials regularly engage other key donors to highlight the importance of protection and encourage increased donor burden sharing in the humanitarian response.

Question. Please describe specific diplomatic efforts U.S. officials have undertaken with governments in Caribbean island nations to improve protection for Venezuelan refugees and migrants.

Answer. Since FY 2017, the United States has contributed more than \$19 million in humanitarian aid to international and non-governmental organizations in the Caribbean to assist with emergency response efforts, including protection from gender-based violence and trafficking in persons. U.S.-funded programs also help host governments develop contingency plans and build institutional capacity. As a result, for example, in May 2019, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago registered more than 16,000 Venezuelan asylum seekers in 2 weeks. Previously, the government had treated asylum seekers as illegal entrants. U.S. officials regularly highlight the importance of protection and encourage increased donor burden sharing.

Question. Given the U.N. Population Fund's leadership in humanitarian response to gender-based violence, its critical role supporting maternity hospitals in Venezuela, and its provision of reproductive health care for Venezuelan refugees and migrants, what is the impact on Venezuelan women of this Administration's prohibition on funding UNFPA?

Answer. In light of the UNFPA funding prohibition, the State Department has focused its resources on funding a variety of programs aimed at strengthening health services for Venezuelan refugees, particularly women. This is especially important in Venezuela, given the disproportionate impact on women caused by the regime's support of illicit mining. In doing so, there are many organizations we work with to prevent and respond to gender-based violence (GBV), and which support maternal health care, voluntary family planning, and reproductive health programs. Venezuelan partners work to provide survivors of GBV access to case management, legal assistance, health services, and humanitarian aid. All of USAID's programming in Venezuela includes components to address GBV.

Question. How is the financial crisis resulting from COVID-19 affecting the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank's proposed concessional financing for Colombia, Ecuador, and other countries hosting Venezuelan refugees and migrants?

Answer. Despite the financial crisis due to COVID-19, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank continue to offer loans to Colombia, Ecuador, and other countries hosting Venezuelan refugees and migrants. In April, the World Bank approved for Ecuador the \$500 million Second Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Development Policy Loan, which was supplemented with \$6 million from the Global Concessional Financing Facility. In June, the World Bank approved for Colombia the \$700 million "COVID-19 Response Development Policy Financing" project.

Question. How many Venezuelans have requested asylum in the United States to date in FY 2020?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans have been granted asylum in the United States to date in FY 2020?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans requested asylum in the United States in FY 2019?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans were granted asylum in the United States in FY 2019?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans has the United States returned to Mexico under the Migrant Protection Protocols?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans has the United States expelled to Mexico under Title 42?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. We understand that representatives of Venezuela's Interim Government have visited Venezuelans in immigration detention facilities. How many Venezuelans are currently in immigration detention in the United States?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans have been deported from the United States to date in FY 2020?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. How many Venezuelans were deported from the United States in FY 2019?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. When was the last date that a Venezuelan national was removed from the United States?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. During the course of FY 2018, FY 2019 and/or FY 2020, were any Venezuelan nationals deported, removed, or transferred from the United States to any country other than Venezuela?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. During the course of FY 2018, FY 2019 and/or FY 2020, if there were any Venezuelan nationals deported, removed, or transferred from the United States to any country other than Venezuela, which countries were they deported, removed, or transferred to?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. If countries were affirmatively identified in the response to question #50, what diplomatic outreach did the State Department conduct in order to arrange for and such deportation, removals, and/or transfers?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. During the course of FY 2018, FY 2019 and/or FY 2020, if there were any Venezuelan nationals deported, removed, or transferred from the United States to any country other than Venezuela, how many Venezuelan nationals were deported, removed, or transferred to such countries?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. If a number of individuals was affirmatively identified in the response to the question above, what happened to any such Venezuelan nationals once they were deported, removed, or transferred to such countries?

Answer. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) manages the statistics on these programs; we refer your question to DHS for more information.

Question. What additional steps do we need to take to counter the Cuban regime's continued activities inside Venezuela?

Answer. The illegitimate Maduro regime has destroyed Venezuela's institutions, economy, and infrastructure through its abuse of power and by welcoming malign support from outside nations, including Cuba. The Department and White House have condemned Cuban involvement in Venezuela and have encouraged our partners to do the same. Among responses to Cuban individuals and/or entities supporting the illegitimate Maduro regime, the U.S. Government has targeted for sanctions firms, vessels, and state-owned enterprises engaging in the trade of Venezuelan oil to Cuba, giving away a natural resource at the expense of the Venezuelan people. We will seek additional opportunities to implement appropriate measures in connection with Cuban individuals and/or entities responsible for funding or otherwise enabling the Maduro regime.

Question. What changes do we need to make to address Putin's continued maneuvering in Venezuela?

Answer. The Department and White House have condemned Russian involvement in Venezuela and encourage our partners to do the same. Moreover, the U.S. Government has designated Rosneft Trading SA and TNK Trading International, indicating that we no longer are merely going to message on Russia's malign activities,

we are going to take clear action. We must continue to raise the costs for Putin's continued maneuvering in Venezuela and we will seek additional opportunities to implement appropriate measures in connection with Russian individuals and/or entities responsible for funding or otherwise enabling the illegitimate Maduro regime.

Question. What additional steps do we need to take to put a stop to Turkey's transactions in Venezuelan gold and oil?

Answer. The Department of the Treasury last year designated a Turkish company that was used as part of Alex Saab's corruption network for the illicit sale of gold to Turkey. The Administration's maximum pressure campaign includes commercial and economic sanctions, deterring all activities that benefit the illegitimate regime, and cutting off the financial lifelines that sustain it. This maximum pressure campaign will continue until a democratic transition is in place. The international business community should already be aware of the legal risk of any transactions with the illegitimate and tyrannical regime of Nicolas Maduro. The Department is working to uncover other networks for disruption through sanctions and other actions.

Question. What additional steps do we need to take to better counter Iran's support for Maduro?

Answer. The President has made clear the United States will not tolerate continued meddling in Venezuela by supporters of an illegitimate regime, including Iran. The Administration's maximum pressure campaign includes commercial and economic sanctions, deterring all activities that benefit the illegitimate regime, and cutting off the financial lifelines that sustain it. This maximum pressure campaign will continue until a democratic transition is in place. The international business community should already be aware of the legal risk of any transactions with the illegitimate and tyrannical regime of Nicolas Maduro. The Department continues to work with regional partners to counter Iran's influence in Venezuela.

Question. How can we make it clear to Beijing that continued support for Maduro will not be overlooked and will come with a cost?

Answer. The People's Republic of China's (PRC) support for the regime is grounded in protecting its own economic interests. The PRC could play a constructive role in helping end the misery, but declines to do so, instead taking hundreds of millions of dollars from the Venezuelan people and providing the regime diplomatic support. We will continue to work with our regional allies to demonstrate that PRC support for Maduro comes at a cost for the PRC in the region, and we will seek additional opportunities to implement appropriate measures to prevent the PRC from further enabling the illegitimate Maduro regime.

RESPONSES OF JOSHUA HODGES TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR ROBERT MENENDEZ

Question. What are the State Department and USAID doing to expand access inside Venezuela for organizations seeking to deliver life-saving assistance, with respect for the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence?

Answer. USAID and State continue to advocate for the illegitimate Maduro regime to provide unrestricted access to the global humanitarian community to safely deliver aid directly to those who need it, to assess situations in real time, and to be able to monitor the results. In addition, USAID is working with international partners on pathways to increase access inside Venezuela. Maduro should allow all humanitarian actors to work in Venezuela under the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence.

To date, Maduro has made it extremely difficult for international NGOs to legally register and for humanitarian workers to obtain visas to enter the country. This, coupled with ongoing logistical impediments and security concerns for our partners, prevents humanitarian organizations from responding at a scale commensurate with the magnitude of the needs created by this economic, political, and social crisis. Despite these constraints, partners continue to provide life-saving assistance where possible, and we commend them for these efforts in such difficult circumstances. State and USAID have provided more than \$76 million in funding to humanitarian partners for critical health, water, food, and other life-saving assistance inside Venezuela. USAID is supportive of the humanitarian architecture that has been established by UN OCHA in 2019, including the appointment of a Humanitarian Country Team, activation of the cluster system for coordinating the response, and release of the Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plans. We continue to work to ensure that funding is used in an effective and qualitative manner.

We will continue to provide humanitarian partners with support as they work to operate on the ground inside Venezuela, to help save lives and mitigate suffering.

Question. What steps are you taking to help the World Food Program negotiate access to deliver humanitarian assistance in Venezuela?

Answer. The U.S. Government continues to call on the illegitimate Maduro regime to provide unrestricted, safe, and continuous access to the global humanitarian community to deliver aid directly to those who need it, to assess situations in real time, and to be able to monitor the results.

USAID has supported the World Food Program's (WFP) negotiations for access to Venezuela for over a year. At this point, WFP has informed USAID that access negotiations are nearing a successful breakthrough; however, the agency continues to proceed with necessary caution to ensure full independence and neutrality are secured in their agreements with the regime. Ensuring an agreement adheres to United Nations policies and principles, and the general restrictions due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, continue to affect the timeline for establishing operations in the country. As background, in 2019 USAID provided \$15 million to WFP to support their Multi-Country Limited Emergency Operations for Venezuela and countries impacted by the crisis in Venezuela. This funding supported WFP's Emergency Food Security Assessment in 2019 and planning efforts for the Venezuela response.

Question. Please describe the factors preventing NGOs from registering and/or expanding assistance in Venezuela and what specific steps the State Department and USAID are taking to address these challenges.

Answer. Maduro and his illegitimate regime have continued to impede relief efforts and limit access of critical needs to the Venezuelan people, and have made it extremely difficult for international NGOs to legally register and for skilled foreign aid workers to obtain visas to enter the country. This, coupled with ongoing logistical impediments and security concerns for our partners, prevents humanitarian organizations from responding at a scale commensurate with the needs created by this economic and political crisis. While the illegitimate Maduro regime has impeded relief efforts and made it extremely difficult for international NGOs to register and for international humanitarian expert staff to enter the country, partners continue to provide life-saving assistance where possible, and we commend them for these efforts in such difficult circumstances. As long as it is possible for U.S. Government (USG) partners to operate on the ground inside Venezuela, we will continue to provide them with support to help save lives and mitigate suffering.

The main factors preventing NGOs from registering in Venezuela are the fabricated bureaucratic impediments and restrictions imposed by the illegitimate Maduro regime. Even after a year of advocacy from the United States, United Nations and the NGO community, the regime has not established a legal process or mechanism at the national level in Venezuela to recognize international NGOs. The regime is not creating this legal mechanism because it has an aversion to NGOs setting up operations and expanding operations.

Without a national level mechanism, select NGOs are opting to register at the municipal level as a work-around. If they obtain this municipal level registration, NGOs are able to function at some level. While municipal level registration does not provide NGOs with the legal agreements required to obtain humanitarian staff visas or import permits; it does allow them to set up offices, hire domestic staff, and work inside Venezuela.

USAID has been advocating with UN OCHA since 2019 to pressure the Maduro regime to stop inhibiting NGO registration and legal entry as international entities.

Question. Are gender-based violence and reproductive health priorities for U.S. humanitarian assistance inside Venezuela? If so, how is this reflected in U.S. programs on the ground?

Answer. The United States is committed to helping ensure the safety and well-being of women around the world.

Health, protection, and gender-based violence (GBV) are priorities for USAID-funded assistance in Venezuela. USAID humanitarian funding supports protection activities that seek to prevent, mitigate, and respond to harm, exploitation, and abuse for crisis-affected populations, prioritizing the most vulnerable. Through humanitarian partners, protection activities may include a specific focus on the needs of children, prevention and response to GBV, psychosocial support services for individuals or groups affected by trauma, and data collection and reporting to strengthen advocacy efforts. USAID supports stand-alone protection activities as well as incorporating protection into other forms of assistance, and ensuring the assistance is delivered to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, and abuse. USAID health activities may also include support for survivors of GBV, such as clinical manage-

ment of rape, prevention, and treatment of sexually transmitted infections, and mental health services.

In Venezuela, one partner works with survivors of GBV to ensure they have access to case management, legal assistance, health services, and humanitarian aid to meet basic needs. Given the relative lack of services available to GBV survivors in Venezuela, the partner also focuses on prevention activities to include awareness raising, providing referrals, and capacity building of local partners. Over the next 12 months, the partner is expected to reach 24,400 beneficiaries, primarily women and children.

In Venezuela, another humanitarian health program managed by a U.N. agency is targeting 600,000 beneficiaries and includes the procurement and distribution of supplies, including midwifery and obstetric and neonatal kits and equipment. Across 10 states, this program supports the training of health workers in antenatal, maternal, and neonatal care practices.

Question. How is USAID adjusting development plans in Colombia, Ecuador and other countries to integrate the needs of Venezuelans and their host communities? What resources is USAID devoting to health and education infrastructure in communities hosting Venezuelan refugees and migrants?

Answer. In Colombia, Perú, Brazil, and Ecuador, USAID is working alongside other U.S. Government agencies and with a variety of partners, such as host-country governments, NGOs, civil society, public international organizations, and faith-based organizations, to help communities absorb the influx of vulnerable Venezuelans. In total, USAID has invested more than \$102 million in development funding across the region to address these longer-term needs since Fiscal Year 2017. While USAID does not have development programming that specifically targets health and education infrastructure, we are working in the health and education sector in Colombia.

In Colombia, USAID has strategically focused part of its new country strategy to support the medium to long term response to the Venezuela regional crisis. By doing so, USAID will work to increase stability in areas impacted by migration from Venezuela by fostering socio-economic integration in migrant receptor communities. Projects supporting these efforts include the Agency's recently launched health system strengthening program. This program will support the Government of Colombia to integrate refugees and migrants into the health system and provide sustainable health services to migrants. In May 2020, USAID/Colombia also launched an activity to protect migrant human rights and expand their access to justice (Conectando Caminos por los Derechos). USAID is also planning to initiate a new education activity targeting refugees and migrants in the coming months.

Development initiatives in Perú, Brazil, and Ecuador for refugee and migrant populations in the region include support for socioeconomic integration through job training and placement programs, support for small business and entrepreneurs, and facilitating access to financial services. While these programs do not directly target the health or education sectors, there have been some tangible benefits. For example, our development assistance supports the local recognition of professional degrees, which has resulted in nearly 100 Venezuelan doctors in Perú obtaining their local medical license. These Venezuelan doctors are now able to contribute their medical expertise to Perú's health system.

RESPONSES OF ELLIOTT ABRAMS TO QUESTIONS
SUBMITTED BY SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY

Question. When asked about the May 3–4 raid attempted by Venezuelan expats and the security contractor Silvercorp USA, Secretary Pompeo said, "This was not an American effort. This wasn't something that we directed or guided." When did the Administration become aware of Silvercorp USA's planned activities? Please provide a date.

Answer. To the best of our knowledge and belief, the State Department and I became aware of Silvercorp USA's planned activities the day of the raid, May 3, 2020. A member of the media contacted Department press officers on a handful of occasions prior to May 3, but there were no questions or indications of ongoing activities and Operation Gideon was not referenced.

Question. When asked about the May 3–4 raid attempted by Venezuelan expats and the security contractor Silvercorp USA, Secretary Pompeo said, "This was not an American effort. This wasn't something that we directed or guided." Did Silvercorp USA obtain its weapons or equipment without any knowledge within the U.S. intelligence or diplomatic community?

Answer. To the best of our knowledge and belief, the State Department was not aware of Silvercorp USA's efforts to obtain weapons or equipment.

Question. According to the Wall Street Journal,¹ the CIA was monitoring the would-be raiders' activities in La Guajira, Colombia. Was the State Department unaware of this intelligence?

Answer. As a matter of policy and practice, the Department does not comment on such intelligence matters in unclassified communications.

Question. According to the Wall Street Journal,² the CIA was monitoring the would-be raiders' activities in La Guajira, Colombia. Secretary Pompeo has emphasized that the U.S. did not provide "direct" support to the raid, but did the Administration make any effort to prevent this diplomatic disaster from occurring?

Answer. To the best of our knowledge and belief, the State Department and I became aware of Silvercorp USA's planned activities the day of the raid, May 3, 2020. More broadly, the State Department and other USG agencies have repeatedly emphasized to all actors who have expressed an interest in the violent toppling of the Maduro regime that we support a peaceful resolution and would not back their efforts, either quietly or overtly.

Question. According to the Washington Post,³ Juan Guaidó's appointed "Strategic Committee" was tasked last August with exploring "under the table" regime change strategies, including kidnapping Maduro and his associates. To that end, the committee reportedly met with "a handful" security contractors in separate meetings in U.S. territory, some who wanted as much as \$500 million for the job. Was the Administration aware of meetings between Guaidó representatives and security contractors on U.S. soil?

Answer. I was not made aware of meetings between Guaidó representatives and security contractors on U.S. soil related to this effort.

Question. Has the State Department conducted any assessment of U.S. sanctions to determine their unintentional humanitarian impacts?

Answer. We routinely assess the effects and consequences of sanctions to ensure our actions are targeting the true perpetrators of Venezuela's misery: the Maduro regime. We mitigate unintentional impacts of our sanctions program by continuing to support exemptions and carve-outs for all medical and humanitarian aid, and to date there has not been an instance of U.S. sanctions preventing the delivery of food or aid. It is also true in this as in all cases that our sanctions exempt food and medicine, and the regime fully understands this: from October 2019 through April, the latest data we have available, the United States was the second-largest supplier of food to Venezuela. In April 2020, the United States was the largest exporter of food and agricultural products to Venezuela.

Notes

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/poorly-organized-and-barely-hidden-venezuela-invasion-was-doomed-to-fail-11589122800>

² <https://www.wsj.com/articles/poorly-organized-and-barely-hidden-venezuela-invasion-was-doomed-to-fail-11589122800>

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/from-a-miami-condo-to-the-venezuelan-coast-how-a-plan-to-capture-maduro-went-rogue/2020/05/06/046222bc-8e4a-11ea-9322-a29e75effc93_story.html