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MIGRATION AGGRAVATION: FAILING STATES FLOODING BORDERS

— David Smolansky

The biggest crisis of the Western Hemisphere has not been caused by war or natural disaster. It has been caused by a regime which, over 20 years ago, invoked democratic values – free and fair elections, freedom of the press, checks and balances – to stay in power and become a dictatorship. Now, we are witness to a failed state, managing one of the richest nations in the world, which is becoming a threat to the whole region. Welcome to Venezuela.

Ironically, Venezuela has 20 percent of the world's oil reserves, but 2 out of 3 people can't have three meals a day because they don't have enough money to buy food (when it's not scarce anyway). Money can't buy you much when hyperinflation reaches 1,000,000 percent (2018), and looks to peak at 10,000,000 percent in 2019, according to recent forecasts from the International Monetary Fund.

The economic system has collapsed: GDP dropped 50 percent in 5 years, and imports decreased by 80 percent. But this economic model is a consequence of a political system which currently holds over 300 political prisoners, has killed hundreds of people who have participated in nonviolent protests, and has turned violent crime into the new normal, with 300,000 homicides over the past two decades. Caracas is the most violent capital city in the world, and Venezuela, according to a recent Gallup survey, is the most dangerous place to live on the planet.

More than just a failed state, Venezuela is a criminal state: a paradise for drug trafficking; a safe haven for former and active Colombian guerrilla members; a hub for human trafficking; and an opportunity for the proliferation of illegal mining. It's a nation which has lost its sovereignty by the occupation

of organized crime groups on its own territory. According to InsightCrime, over 100 tons of cocaine are transported from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic every year. This is a consequence of the impunity, lack of transparency, and the loss of control of government institutions which occupy the last spot in the rankings of the World Justice Project when it comes to separation of powers and access to justice.

In this context, Venezuelans have two options: try to survive at home or migrate against their own will. According to the United Nations, 2,300,000 people abandoned the country between 2014 and June 30, 2018. More than 1,300,000 people suffer from malnutrition, and over 100,000 are HIV positive. During my last visit to the border, I learned that Colombian authorities had confirmed to the Organization of American States that 5,000 Venezuelans entered their country every day. At this rate, more than 3,000,000 will have left the country by the end of this year. If you take into consideration UNHCR figures suggesting that 44,400 people are forced to migrate every day, this means that 11.26 percent of the world's daily displaced population is Venezuelan. Just to understand the magnitude of this tragedy, the Venezuelan crisis has exceeded Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia, and is just behind Syria.

When the causes of the migration flows of these countries are analyzed, the common denominator is war; whether it be external military action or internal armed conflict. What is incredible is that Venezuela's level of social, economic, and institutional destruction is equal to, or even worse

than those nations at war. Unfortunately, what remains the same for all these countries, including Venezuela, is the massive violation of human rights. For example, the regime of South Sudan persecutes people for their ethnicity; chemical weapons are used in Syria against defenseless populations; and in Somalia, pirates guard the coasts, and there is no state.

Some Western countries have completely ignored the violations of human rights perpetrated by these regimes. This is darkly ironic because they cannot subsequently ignore one of the most obvious consequences, namely massive refugee problems coming right to their own borders. When millions of people are forced to flee from oppression and poverty, a debate inevitably opens up in Western countries between those who welcome refugees as an opportunity, and those who reject them for xenophobic and nationalist reasons. It seems extraordinary to those of us who live in countries such as Venezuela that it does not occur to some people in the West to adopt strategies to combat the oppression, the lawlessness, and the disastrous economic policies

of the regimes which produce the refugee problem in the first place. A lose-lose scenario could become a win-win scenario if such strategies were indeed adopted.

The world cannot stand by while Venezuela passes the point at which it becomes too late to save. It is an exceptional case: a narco-petro state that with corruption, massive human rights violations, and blockage of food and medicine, has caused the biggest migration crisis in Latin America. According to the non-governmental organization ACAPS, there are 12 nations around the world who suffer humanitarian crises, but Venezuela is the only nation from the Western Hemisphere. Will we let Venezuela become the Syria of our hemisphere, or will we act and hold accountable those who are responsible?

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