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## Express Update of the Venezuelan situation

Rafael Uzcategui

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The February 21<sup>th</sup>, we wrote a summary of events for those who are on the outside, oversaturated with information about Venezuela, we needed a chronology of events. It has just 4 days of this story, but there are many new elements that an update is necessary to suggest, that any picture of the Venezuelan reality will change in the next few hours.

The first element that stands out is that the manifestations of government critics have continued to the time of this writing, and doesn't seem to stop in the coming days. Venezuelan culture was characterized by the effort to promote short-term results, no permanence in time, so that the sum of each new day of protest politics, contradict itself this immediacy of "doing" in the country. That is why President Maduro uses as one of its strategies encourage its rapid wear, increasing two more days to holiday carnival that will start on 27<sup>th</sup> of February, the day when happens the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the popular uprising of "El Caracazo" when even tens were killed with total impunity.

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A second novelty, as suggested in our previous paper, is that Caracas has ceased to be the epicenter of the national mobilization. On Saturday February 22 both those pro-government and the opposition, made called to march in the city of Caracas, both with large attendance . However, in at least 12 cities of province, some dissident demonstrations were proportionally, as massive as those that were performed in the capital. In the case of the city of San Cristobal, capital of Tachira (border with Colombia); the intensity of the protests and conflicts where were including students, middle class people, and others from popular and rural areas; has led to the militarization of the city being controlled remotely from Caracas. The state governor Jose Vielma Mora, of the ruling party PSUV, publicly criticized the crackdown and called for the release of detainees, and so far, this one has been the first public criticism from a member of the government, of one decision of Nicolas Maduro.

As of this writing, there had been the death of: 15 people in demonstrations or protests related events , 8 of them whose responsibility points to police, military and paramilitary officers, 2 of them victims of “ traps “ the opposition mounted protests called “guarimba”, and the rest by dark events around the demonstrations that should be investigated and clarified (for example, a winding of a 17 years old boy). The reports of the newspaper Ultimas Noticias, supported by pictures and videos circulated on social networks, have forced the Attorney detain officials of the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB ) and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service ( SEBIN ) to investigate the perpetrating of facts. However, high spokesmen of the National Executive, as the Minister of Communication Delcy Rodriguez and President Maduro continue blaming of all deaths to the opposition. Deserves separate chapter president of the National Assembly Diosdado Cabello, who through his daily program “Pounding with the Hammer”, broadcast on state television, makes delusional statements about the causes of the murders.

The “Guarimba” is a strategy that opposition sectors initiated by the end of year 2002. It consists of making a protest, in a place

considered “safe”, (usually in the vicinity of the homes of the protesters); closing the route with barricades and burned trash or rubbers. The “Guarimba” has several features that differentiate it from other events. One is its symbiotic relationship with the coup and the “oil strike” of 2002, so it is loaded from an insurrectional content, prone to physical confrontation with the security agencies. Second, as a result of the above, repeatedly has been criminalized by the government, thereby being an exclusionary strategy: While pro-government people could join a peaceful demonstration by common requirements, hardly they ever do a “guarimba”. Third, generate a broad rejection within opposition groups themselves, as demonstrated by the mobilization in Caracas February 22, where there were many banners of rejection to “guarimbas” as to the actions of paramilitary groups. As President Nicolas Maduro has stimulated repression to publicly congratulate the performance of GNB, not recognizing state responsibility with fatalities, and institutionally legitimized the actions of paramilitary groups by encouraging the “Popular Commands against coup” has generated a hotbed of indignation that has allowed the emergence of the “guarimbas” with some foci in Caracas and cities throughout the country. However, a look at all types of mobilization, that remain on the street in all cities of the country; corroborates that this remains a largely peaceful demonstration.

The delivery of the conservative opposition leader Leopoldo Lopez, on February 18<sup>th</sup>, was a real “performance” to catapult your image as “new leader” of the Venezuelan opposition and be the center of the national protest movement. Their delivery was performed with a mass concentration at the border between the municipality of Libertador and Chacao, in Caracas. However, until today the dynamics of crowds in the street remains decentralized networks, with multiple centers. There are number of calls through the social networks like “pancartazos”, “Do national prayers at the same time” and even “bailoterapias”. Some, become viral and are assumed by much of the movement. Many opponents

accustomed to vertical Leninist organization of the analog era, permanently demands that protests “have addresses” and “common requirements”.

The government insists that it is facing a “coup”, some say “repeats the script in April 2002” and others argue that it would be a “rolling coup”. Nicolas Maduro called to confront the protesters on the street activating “Popular Commands antigolpe”. However, the two demonstrations called in recent days by the government in the streets of Caracas, doesn’t have the support and levels of call made by Hugo Chavez. While the middle and upper levels of government publicly expressed its support for the decisions of Maduro, the basis of Chavismo begins to resent the open crack-down on protesters, which has generated hundreds of images that flow through cell phones. Moreover, the president himself issued conflicting messages about the nature of the hypothetical threat that faces: Calling insistently celebrate carnivals, dancing in front of the cameras, (asking publicly in several opportunities); improve diplomatic relations with the United States, designating its representative to the International Monetary Fund, removing working credentials in Venezuela to CNN (which meant in fact the expulsion from the country), and within the 24 next hours, invite them to transmit again from the country.

Although International level, remains the informative media polarization about Venezuela, internally the country continue to suffer a major informative blackout. Nationwide television stations don’t report about the demonstrations, nor broadcast live messages of political opposition leaders, while their screens are taken over by statements from public officials. The government thought the conflict in analog terms, thinking that television concealment plus repression would be enough to silence the protests. Belatedly has initiated a crackdown on social networks, while Internet service, state-controlled, suffer irregular slowdowns and blockages in some of the most popular applications used by users such as Twitter and What’sApp.

The radicalization of the two main sides to the conflict, still doesn’t make dialogue a majority requirement to resolve the crisis. President Maduro called the realization of a “National Peace Conference”, but however, in parallel, his government (and himself), continue disqualifying as “right-wing fascist” the opponents, and its increasing the number of detainees throughout the country, which alleges torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment during their detention. The number of killed people has increasing, injured by gunfire, tear gas and birdshot, increases the spiral of violence and resentment on both sides, doesn’t leaving political channels the conflict resolution; payable the way for the military to assume ensure “governance” through a coup, either of trend of the Chavismo, or those who support to the opposition. The bizarre image of a retired general of the Venezuelan Army, Angel Vivas Perdomo, on the roof of his house showing a weapon of war (in the attempt to arrest him after being accused of masterminding the traps located in a “Guarimba” that caused one death in Caracas); have caused a storm of rumors about the alleged “malaise” within the Armed Forces. Plus this, there is series of looting of shops in several places in the country with such a coordination that sum too much suspicion.

The events are in full development: The photo of this moment can be completely different in the next 48 hours. We hope to continue to have internet to telling.