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SPEAKERS

Becca Human

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Becca Human 00:14

The rumors are true. The international community's favorite whirlwind romance has come to an end. President Trump and Vladimir Putin have broken up. (Laughter)
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Becca Human 00:26

It was a slow process. First it was Russia's involvement in our elections. Then it was President Trump's inability to publicly acknowledge their relationship. And then there was the issue of Venezuela because as the New York Times on April 1, 2019, explains, "The country of Venezuela has become a hot point between the US and Russia. The United States has recognized opposition leader Juan Guido as the rightful leader of Venezuela, but the Russian regime still continues to prop up Nicolas Maduro supporting his government economically and politically and recently sending 100 "military advisors" to Venezuela conveniently after the United States said they would be willing to send military troops into Venezuela themselves.
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Becca Human 01:12

Now, given that the Venezuelan situation seems to echo the situation in Syria, in which the

United States propped up a rebellion force, while the Russian regime propped up a tyrannical ruler, it seems likely that this might be heading towards conflict, making it important to ask the question, will U.S. and Russian involvement in Venezuela spark a proxy war? The answer to this question is likely Yes, because both countries have compelling reasons to involve themselves militarily.

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Becca Human 01:41

We'll see this first because both countries have deep economic ties in Venezuela.

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Becca Human 01:46

Second, because they both have important regional ties that are related to their influence in Venezuela.

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Becca Human 01:53

And finally, because they both have compelling domestic political reasons to involve themselves if there's a one thing the United States is willing to go to war for, its oil. And unfortunately for Venezuela, they've got a lot of it. That's why the first reason why the U.S. and Russia might spark a proxy war in Venezuela, is because they both have deep, deep economic interest in the country of Venezuela.

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Becca Human 02:19

As the Washington Post on March 29, 2019, explains, "Venezuela has one of the largest oil reserves known in the world." In fact, oil makes up 95% of their exports and 25% of their total GDP. And historically, US businesses have been able to capitalize on this. The fact that they're so geographically close to Venezuela means the US has gotten a lot out of Venezuelan oil fields in the past, but they've been forced out by the hostile Maduro regime, and the fact that Venezuela has gone in economic and humanitarian crisis in the past couple of years.

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Becca Human 02:55

The United States would love to get back to these oil fields if they possibly could. A U.S. backed administration would almost certainly allow them to capitalize on that. But Russia has just as much of an interest in this economic area. In fact, as CNN on February 1, 2019, explains, Russia has already lent \$3 billion to Venezuela. In fact, their state oil company has lent them \$2 billion alone just to revitalize their oil economy.

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Becca Human 03:24

Russia has already lent Venezuela this money. But if Maduro were to be overthrown by a U.S. backed regime, there's no guarantee they would ever see a return on this investment. So Russia literally has billions of dollars at stake, enough of a stake for them to get involved and support Maduro in any way they can. So the first reason why the US and Russia are likely to start a proxy war in Venezuela, is because they both have deep economic concerns that would justify such an involvement. But it's not just that these countries want something that is economic out of these countries. They also have international concerns to keep into account.

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Becca Human 04:02

So the second reason why the US and Russian involvement in Venezuela might start a proxy war is because both of these countries have regional interests that make it important for them to be involved in Venezuela. As the New York Times on February 20, 2019, explains, Venezuela is essentially a test for Russia. It's a test to show that they're serious about their international obligations, that when they say they don't believe in the U.S.'s way of doing foreign policy, that they don't believe in the U.S.'s policy of undermining the sovereignty of certain states that they're actually serious about this. If Russia were truly to defend Maduro militarily, it would show that Russia was serious about defending their international interests, and it would give them more leverage and interest in Latin America and across the world. So the U.S. has just as much of a reason to stay involved in this crisis. As the aforementioned CNN article explains, the U.S. essentially sees Russian military involvement Venezuela as a poke in the eye, it's right in the United States' backyard. This is even more personal than a proxy war happening in Syria in the Middle East.



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Becca Human 05:09

This is in Latin America, that's supposed to be the United States's territory. So the second reason why the United States and Russia may enter a proxy war in Venezuela is because they both have deep regional interests in keeping their influence in Venezuela. Trump has claimed over and over again that there was no collusion between his campaign and Russia in 2016. And yet, so many of his foreign policy decisions seem to either support Vladimir Putin or let him get away with international.. international situations.

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Becca Human 05:44

So the final reason why the US and Russian involvement in Venezuela may start a proxy

war is because they both have domestic political reasons to get themselves involved in Venezuela, as the Atlantic Council argued on February 22, 2019, this issue in Venezuela is essentially testing the legitimacy of the Trump administration, both because it's an argument that they aren't just taking things easy on Russia because Trump is tied to him, but also because the Trump administration has made red line statements involving Venezuela. Similar to the red line statements President Obama made about Syria, but then failed to uphold something the Trump administration has criticized him about deeply.

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Becca Human 06:26

If the Trump administration wants to retain their credibility, they need to follow up on these statements. And as CNN on March 1, 2019 explains, the sheer amount of money Russia has already sunk into Venezuela is enough to put domestic political pressure on Vladimir Putin to get some kind of return on this Venezuelan investment. Both of these leaders have severe political domestic issues weighing on them enough for them to do anything they can to retain their influence in Venezuela. So today, when we ask the question, Will U.S. and Russian involvement in Venezuela's spark a proxy war? We said yes, because these countries have deep interest in retaining their influence, first for economic reasons, second for regional influence reasons. And finally, for domestic political reasons, President Trump and Vladimir Putin don't seem to be getting back together anytime soon. (Applause)



07:43

So just for clarity, what does a proxy war mean? What's the standard that we have to meet for to actually be a proxy war?

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Becca Human 07:50

Sure. So a proxy war is essentially the United States and Russia are not going to war against each other, but maybe the United States is providing military support to Juan Guido and his supporters in Venezuela. While, Russia may be providing military support to the Nicolas Maduro regime in Venezuela. It's kind of similar to what we've seen in Syria where Russia has provided some military support to Bashar Al Assad and the United States provides military support against him. So that's what I mean by proxy war.



08:16

Okay. Just to further clarify that a little bit. Does that mean direct airstrikes and US troops

involvement? Or does it just be in military advice and whatnot?

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Becca Human 08:24

I think it could mean either of those things. But the United States has made it pretty clear that they're actually willing to send US troops to Venezuela. And Russia has already sent Russian military advisors to Venezuela as well. So I think in this case, it could mean that both countries are willing to actually send US troops US military to get involved in Venezuela.



08:43

Okay, so your first point, the big benefit for Russia is that they get something out of these oil deals, right?

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Becca Human 08:48

Yes.



08:48

So Russia is already having an energy crisis where they're producing too much oil. It's basically worthless on the international community because there's way too much supply. So how does adding more oil back into the market solve that problem?

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Becca Human 09:00

Sure, well, to clarify my point, Russia has actually already loaned Venezuela billions of dollars in order to reinvest in their oil. Russia may not need to actually get the oil out of Venezuela, which would be the United States' interest, but Russia still has an economic interest in Venezuela because they've already lent this money to Venezuela. If Nicolas Maduro were to be removed from office, they have no guarantee that they would get any return on this investment. So I should clarify that for the United States that economic interest is oil specifically. But for Russia, it's more about getting a return on this loan that they've already given to the Maduro government.



09:33

So you said that loan was about \$3 billion, right? Yes. So are they really going to start a proxy war with the United States the most powerful military on earth over \$3 billion?

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Becca Human 09:43

Well, that's a good question. But I think Moscow is already pretty economically stressed. They've given \$3 billion in loans to the Maduro government, and then as I also said, their state oil company has given an additional \$2 billion. So while that may seem to be a slightly smaller scale in the long run, it's still enough of an investment, certainly for Russia to see some kind of return on this investment. And additionally, as I mentioned, in my third point, there are a lot of domestic political reasons where you wouldn't want to just throw away \$5 billion for any reason. So even if it's a small scale proxy war, where Russia isn't necessarily going to war with the United States, kind of like they aren't going to war with the United States and Syria, I think it would still be worth it for Vladimir Putin to try and return some of that investment on those billions of dollars.



10:28

Okay. And then just for time, we're going to jump down to your third point. President Trump is actively work to take the United States out of conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. How is it politically popular brand to start another one?

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Becca Human 10:40

Well, as we've seen in the past, there is nothing to make a president more popular like war, war tends to really rally people around the president no matter what war it is, as you saw in the Iraq War. President Trump has already made statements saying that he would get involved militarily in Venezuela. So I think the main political reason for him to get involved would be to show that he's following up on the threats he's made in the past, and that he's not making the same mistakes that he says President Obama has made in Syria, where President Obama made threats that he didn't follow up on. (Applause)