TIME FOR BOLDNESS?
CANADA AND THE VENEZUELA CRISIS

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Over the past few years, Canada has stepped out of its comfort zone in hemispheric affairs, to speak and act forcefully against what Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland called the “despicable” regime of Nicolás Maduro. Conceivably, our bold effort, in solidarity with “the people of Venezuela and their desire to restore democracy and human rights” (Min. Freeland), rests on a strategic assessment of a unique alignment of factors, not easily reproduced elsewhere: First, the economic and humanitarian crisis in this country is unprecedented in a time of peace. Second, the unprecedented momentum in the international community to actually do something about the crisis. Third, the presence of a credible and elected opposition, carried by the largest anti-government protests in Latin American history. Fourth, Venezuela is a Western country with a solid democratic tradition, unlike countries of the Middle East for instance, which were similarly (and unsuccessfully) pressured to democratize in recent history. Fifth, Canada’s bold response aligns with its preference as a “middle power” for diplomatic and multilateral solutions to international crisis. Sixth, Canada’s policy toward Venezuela does not depart from an unspoken rule of our foreign policy according to which the promotion of human rights and democratic values are more easily deployed in countries or regions where hard Canadian interests are not at stake.

Now, while various combinations of these factors can be found elsewhere, perhaps nowhere else do we find all of them in place and reinforcing each other. Still, could this be a dry run for a bolder defense by Canada of human rights and democratic governance in the region—or perhaps, beyond?

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