

Research Articles

Foreign Policy Making in Venezuelan Crisis: The Case of Nicolás Maduro's Left-Wing Militaristic Cabinet in Venezuela's Blockade Policy towards Brazilian Aids

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Abstract

Venezuela has experienced a turmoil of economic crisis since 2014 under the administration of President Nicolás Maduro. This crisis has been spilling towards social and political issues, with one being the emergence of opposition group led by Juan Guaidó. This crisis, at first, has invited sympathy from various international actors, both states and non-states, one of them being Brazil. However, in February 2019, President Maduro decided to fully-blockade Venezuela-Brazil borders for any human or goods movement. This paper aims to analyze the presence of President Maduro's cabinet towards Brazil borders blockade in Venezuelan Crisis in 2019. This paper utilizes qualitative social science methodology by analyzing primary and secondary data. By using the groupthink paradigm in foreign policy analysis, this paper argues that there is a position convergence between the members of the cabinet with the background of: (1) the dominance of nationalist military group loyal to President Maduro; (2) the same ideology of left-wing political spectrum. This paper also argues that beside the two internal factors above, the external factors of regional and global tension towards Venezuela also create an isolation as an element of stress towards this government. This paper concludes that the combination of the three factors above become the main factors that formulated the blockade policy.

Keywords: Venezuelan Crisis, crisis cabinet, Brazil blockade, military group

I. Introduction: the Venezuelan Crisis and Brazilian Aids Blockade

Venezuela—a country with an oil-dependent economy in the South American region—is experiencing a crisis. The current crisis in Venezuela is a complex nexus of economic and political issues, interspersed with social sentiments. The uniqueness of this crisis lies in its depth and length. This crisis has officially taken place since around 2010 but has had its roots since the beginning of Venezuela's independence in the 1990s. In dissecting the ongoing Venezuelan Crisis, many academics (Ellis, 2017; Duddy, 2015; McCarthy, 2017) used the momentum of the appointment of President Nicolás Maduro as President of Venezuela in 2013, while continuing to agree that the main root of the crisis came from his predecessor, President Hugo Chávez. More precisely, according to Duddy (2015), the Venezuelan Crisis can be traced to its roots since the start of a new chapter in Venezuelan modern history, the Bolivarian Revolution which occurred in 1999. The Bolivarian Revolution is a left-wing independence revolution led by the United Socialist Party of Venezuela / PSUV) in the context of overthrowing the liberal-democratic power of Venezuela at that time which was supported by the United States (Ellis, 2017). It should also be remembered that in the era before independence, Venezuela itself was one of the proxy events in the South American region which was thick with the Cold War atmosphere.

After the Bolivarian Revolution, the Venezuelan leadership was held by President

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Hugo Chávez, a PSUV leader who had populist characteristics. For a very long time, Bolivarian socialism and nationalism had a special place in the hearts of Venezuelan people. The socialism system, at first, as happened in various other socialist countries, went well. People work in an economic condition that is controlled by the state but get a variety of commensurable socio-economic guarantees. However, as is also the case in many other socialist countries, Venezuela's socialist economic system began to suffer damages at the end of President Chávez's administration. Various cartels emerged to monopolize the market. The PSUV dominates federal and local politics, and oppressed oppositions. The leaders of the executive branch began to prioritize the interests of the group, with the support of the recollected military forces. It should be remembered that as a result of the Bolivarian Revolution, civil-military relations in Venezuela were very closely intertwined, leading to an intense military culture in Venezuela. This is indicated by the absence of sentiment about the dualism of the function of military power held by the National Bolivarian Armed Force. Then later, the socialist and militaristic political system became a familiar political culture in Venezuela.

The Venezuelan crisis departs as an economic crisis. McCarthy analyzes that the worst crisis in Latin American history departs purely from the mismanagement of the country's economy by the Venezuelan government (McCarthy, 2017). For many years, especially during the administration of President Chávez, Venezuela relied entirely on its economy for its enormous oil reserves. Initially, the oil economy was able to maintain Venezuela's condition in a prosperous state—although at that time there was a lot of corruption, money laundering, and cartel monopoly on the Venezuelan market. But then, conditions began to deteriorate at the

end of President Chávez's administration and the beginning of President Maduro's administration, especially with the significant decline in world oil prices in 2015 (Ellis, 2017). This turned out to cause hyperinflation in Venezuela. Nagel noted that in 2016, the Venezuelan inflation rate had reached 800%, and the International Monetary Fund/IMF (Biller, 2018) projected that Venezuela would reach an inflation rate of 1,000,000% in 2018 (Nagel, 2015). This crisis then spread to the social crisis, where the condition of the Venezuelan economy Weakness makes it difficult for Venezuelans to get basic goods, such as food, clean water, access to health, and shelter (McCarthy, 2017). In addition, this economic crisis has spread to several other social issues, such as mass unemployment, poverty, to rising crime rates. In addition, this crisis created a humanitarian crisis - one of the largest in Latin American history. This is because the Venezuelan Crisis created millions of refugees to neighboring countries, such as Bolivia and Colombia (Rendon, 2018). Apart from the economic and social sphere, this crisis has led to political destabilization in Venezuela. The political oppression that had been carried out for years by the PSUV began to reap criticism in early 2019. As noted by Duddy, the management and abuse of power carried out by President Maduro since the beginning of his administration has created legitimacy crisis from the Venezuelan community towards President Maduro's government (Duddy, 2015). This was demonstrated after President Maduro was considered to sabotage the general election in 2017, dissolve the Venezuelan Parliament, and openly fill various political positions at the national and local levels from his colleagues from PSUV (McCarthy, 2017). This forced the emergence of Juan Guaidó, a politician from the Venezuelan Social-Democratic Popular Party

to declare himself the incumbent president of Venezuela.

The humanitarian crisis that occurred in Venezuela initially invited sympathy from the international community, especially neighboring countries in the South American region. One of the sympathizers is Venezuela's neighbor, Brazil. Since 2017, Brazil under the leadership of President Jair Bolsonaro has been actively providing grassroots assistance to the people of Venezuela (Busch, 2019). Initially, this assistance in the form of food and access to health went smoothly and was beneficial. However, in January 2019, President Maduro refused that Venezuela was experiencing a humanitarian crisis that made it worthy of pity for other countries. Furthermore, President Maduro in February 2019 finally declared a blockade or complete border closure between Venezuela and Brazil (Busch, 2019). In this case, as reported by the Wall Street Journal, various logistical assistance from Brazil has so far been distributed by Guaidó and the opposition group President Maduro, making allegations that this assistance strengthens the position of the opposition group (Wall Street Journal, 2019). Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza stated that the government felt that Brazilian assistance had been "hurting Venezuela's national sovereignty". However, the intention and process of making the blockade policy is still not too much attitude. This case is specifically unique and novel to be researched upon, as it is one of the first significant foreign policy of President Maduro during the Venezuelan crisis period.

This paper aims to analyze the presence of President Maduro's cabinet influence on Brazil's border blockade policy in the Venezuelan Crisis in 2019. In general, the author aims to apply the level of group analysis in analyzing this blockade policy. Using the groupthink paradigm proposed by Irving Janis, this paper argues that there is a convergence

of the positions of these cabinet members, which is motivated by: (1) the dominance of Maduro's loyalist nationalist military group; (2) the similarity of left-wing political spectrum ideology (Janis, 1991). This paper also argues that in addition to the two internal factors above, external factors in the form of regional and global pressures also influence the emergence of isolation as an element of stress on the government of President Maduro. This paper answers the questions that have been presented above in two theoretical steps. First, this paper will discuss the patterns of relations between the head of state and his advisers. Second, this paper will also discuss how the dynamics in the advisory group and the cabinet will influence foreign policy, through the groupthink paradigm developed by Irving Janis.

II. Groupthink in Group Level of Foreign Policy Analysis: a Theoretical Survey

For some time, in the Foreign Policy Analysis study, groups have not been one of the promising factors. In this case, groups are often analyzed individually, emphasizing the psychological assessment of each group member. However, this method cannot analyze the influence of dynamics in the group on policy making. Another mistake in placing group factors in foreign policy analysis is also through the generalization of groups as part of domestic politics. However, as argued by Morin and Paquin, groups are too small to be a representation of a particular institution (Morin, 2018). Government cabinet groups, for example, cannot be considered to represent executive institutions in government, because the influence of the president or head of state is often stronger in this institution. In addition, Morin and Paquin also provide a foundation on how the policies of a group can influence the whole system, which in turn influences foreign

policy (Morin, 2018). First, in the socio-psychological level, groups are often a group of individuals with the same thoughts and burdens, so that group decisions are considered more influential in a system. Second, at the administrative level, groups are not only a collection of opinions of several people, but an arena for increasing and decreasing ideas in a group of policy makers. Third, at the political level, group decisions are considered to have legitimacy before the public in general (Morin, 2018).

For this reason, efforts have begun to emerge in explaining the influence of groups on policy in general, and foreign policy in particular. One of them is Irving Janis, a psychologist who proposes a group dynamics model called groupthink (Janis, 1991). Morin and Paquin note that in fact, Janis began developing this model in 1972, but continued to develop it in a few years later (Morin, 2018). In this case, Janis bases her argument from various observations on the policies of several state leaders, especially in relation to the United States (Janis, 1991). Janis, along with various accompanying criticisms, used many reflections on the influence of advisers on major US policies in the Cold War era, especially members of the National Security Council (NSC) which were also filled by National Security Advisers (NSA) (Janis, 1991). Breuning states that advisers are a promising feature of foreign policy making in both democratic and non-democratic countries (Breuning, 2007). This is because in a country with the highest level of democracy, the head of state still has the highest constitutional and practical power in making foreign policy. However, Breuning argues that there are two reasons as to why advisers and advice play a major role in the foreign policy adopted by a country (Breuning, 2007). First, an individual such as the head of state will have a heavy mental and psychological burden in deciding

foreign policies, especially on sensitive and critical issues such as war. Thus, those who can accept the burden of individual heads of state are needed. Second, a head of state or government is often not versatile in various foreign policy sectors, so it is necessary to have an advisor from experts in fields that are not mastered (Breuning, 2007).

In addition to mapping the actors who then play a role in foreign policy making, the next theoretical step that needs to be implemented is to analyze how the group members and their group dynamics can influence foreign policy. This is what is then tried to be answered by Janis through the paradigm or groupthink model. Janis defines groupthink as "a model of thinking when people interact deeply in a cohesive in-group group, where each member will try to put aside their personal motivations to reach a mutual agreement" (Janis, 1991). So then, the main requirement in the occurrence of groupthink is when cohesiveness within a group is high, which causes a rise in solidarity and harmony among its members. The groupthink model then becomes one of the promising models in analyzing the influence of groups on foreign policy. This is because groups in government are often formed based on homogeneity (coming from the same class) and have a position and ideological convergence with heads of state or government. This is particularly evident in the case of advisory and cabinet councils whose election is indeed the prerogative of the head of state or government.

Groupthink then becomes an explanation for the creation of a foreign policy, where groupthink refers to a phenomenon when a group that is solid and cohesive becomes the main justification and quantitative push for a head of state to make a policy. In this case, groupthink as if often driving a head of state, because a head of state

will feel that the experts who advise him to have the same opinion, and therefore, their advice is considered as a 'magic advice' which is running effectively. While in fact, according to Hart, it is sometimes the phenomenon of groupthink leads to irrational policies (Hart, 1998). However, according to Janis, groupthink does not always occur, and is not always bad. Janis argues that when a group has a convergence of positions related to a policy, then not necessarily groupthink occurs (Janis, 1991). Because not necessarily there is a main essence of groupthink in it. It could be precisely the similarity of opinions arise because these alternatives are alternatives with the highest rationalism.

In addition, in some cases, groupthink also seems to have succeeded in becoming an effective policy, regardless of its rationalism policy. Therefore, Janis then gives eight syndromes or symptoms of the groupthink phenomenon as can be seen in box C in graph 1. However, in general, it should be seen that according to Janis, the main requirement for the occurrence of groupthink is the presence of external pressure may be accompanied by isolation, which causes the emergence of stress in the group (Janis, 1991). The author argues that this groupthink syndrome influences the emergence of the Brazilian blockade policy by the Venezuelan government at the group level.

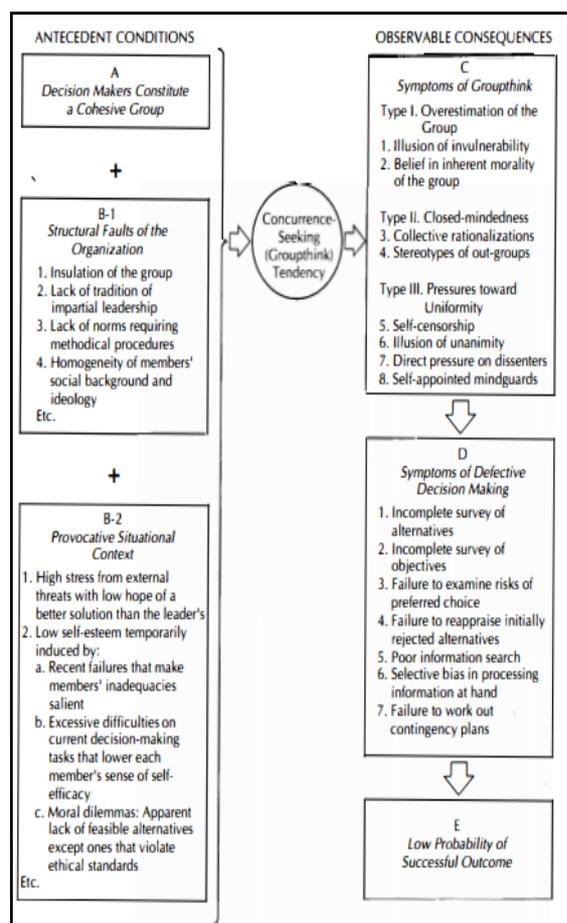


Fig. 1. Analytical Model of Groupthink
Source: Janis and Mann (1977) (as cited in Janis 1991)

III. From Cabinet to War Cabinet: Small Group Dynamics in Crisis Foreign Policy Making

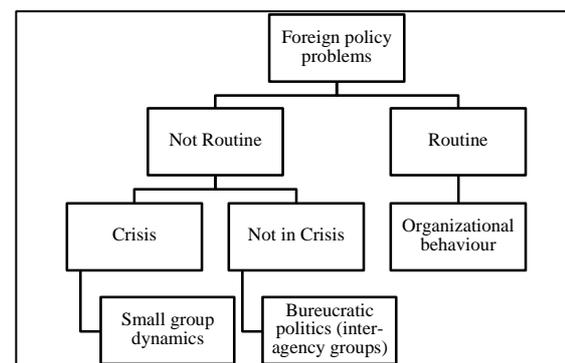


Fig. 2. Model of the involvement of groups in foreign policy making
Source: Hudson (2014), processed by author

Hudson underlines that the crisis becomes a situation that has specificity for foreign policy making in a country (Hudson, 2014). This is because according to Hudson, in a crisis "leaders are required to sit at a table with a series of advisers, and dwell on the debate as it is related to policy choices that exist". In this case, the crisis has the specificity of the gravity of the situation and time, causing

the policy not only to be seen from its substance, but from the time of its making. So then, it is necessary to first analyze the typology of the crisis itself. Brecher (1979) defines crisis as an almost war condition, where there is a high degree of uncertainty and critical conditions (Rosenthal, 1991). The main impact of a crisis on the policy-making process is that a policy in a crisis era is often irreversible - irreversible. Thus, just one wrong policy in a crisis can create massive escalation. Hudson underlines that the foreign policy making process in the crisis era will be dominated by the dynamics of small groups, consisting mainly of fifteen members or less (Hudson, 2014). In this case, indeed, the head of state is still often considered to be the main decision maker, but often also he only acts as the tiebreaker or final decision maker. Moreover, the head of state will depend on the opinions of his advisers, often the people involved in his government cabinet. Related to the influence and relation of the advisors to the head of state and his policies, Hudson underlines that there are two important elements that influence him, namely: (1) the identity and area of expertise of the adviser; (2) conception of its role in the group (Hudson, 2014). Rosenthal and Hart elaborate that the actual area of expertise of the adviser will later be related to its function in group dynamics, as can be seen in table 1 (Rosenthal, 1991).

Type of Adviser	Primary Functions for Decision Makers
Personal staff	Strategic and tactical counsel
Political allies	Tactical intelligence and support
Personal friends	Social-emotional support
Spouses	Social-emotional support
Juridical fora	Formal scrutiny and legitimation

Senior bureaucrats	Expert information and assessment, such as situation assessment (intelligence agencies), option development (think tanks; planning units), feasibility testing (operational specialist), process counseling (management consultants; psychomedical experts), and support generation (media consultants)
In-house consultants	
External consultants and agencies	
Free-floating intellectuals	

Tab. 1. Types of advisors and their primary functions for decision maker

Source: Rosenthal (1991)

But then, the group's influence on foreign policy did not stop there. Lindblom and Cohen (1979) argue that the next stage is whether the head of state as the top policy maker will accept advice from advisers or not (Rosenthal, 1991). It is this relation between the head of state and his advisers that will then underlie the groupthink syndrome proposed by Janis. Kowert argues that the main variables of this factor are: (1) the learning style of the head of state; (2) openness of the advisory structure. In this case, openness in question is the increasingly small gap between the thoughts of advisers or heads of state with what is actually conveyed in the policy making process (Kowert, 2002).

In this case, the Venezuelan Crisis which began its escalation in the Nicolás Maduro presidency era did not evasive to indicate that the replacement of the head of state was the main factor in this case. McCarthy notes that in fact inflation and shallow economic crises occurred in the era of President Hugo Chávez (McCarthy, 2017). But then, President Chávez's populist policies

accompanied by good governance processes prevented the economic crisis from spreading into a political and social crisis - something President Maduro failed to do. This crisis period according to McCarthy initially began with the tightening of President Maduro's grip on political power (McCarthy, 2017). This was indicated at the 2015 Venezuelan Parliamentary Election, which was originally won by the opposition Maduro party to occupy the Venezuelan National Assembly - Venezuela's main legislative body. However, on the other hand, Romo noted that President Maduro tried to compensate for this by placing several confidants from his party - the Venezuelan United Socialist Party - in several strategic positions of government (Romo, 2017). One of them is in the Venezuelan Supreme Court. Maduro's political grip on politics was further strengthened by the occurrence of the 2017 Venezuelan Constitutional Crisis, in which the Venezuelan Supreme Court dissolved the National Assembly on the basis of 'ineffectiveness'. This dissolution led to massive protests in 2016, and was exacerbated by President Maduro's proposal to create a Constitutional Assembly to revise the Venezuelan Constitution — which would certainly be filled by his trusted people (Associated Press, 2017).

Reflections on various policies made by President Maduro above make it increasingly clear that in the era of the Venezuelan Crisis, the regular bureaucratic politics as regulated by the Venezuelan Constitution did not work effectively anymore but was dominated by President Maduro's private interests influenced by the advice of his advisers. The prominence of Maduro and his group was demonstrated by the occupation of important positions by the people of the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, and by the oppression of the opposition. Ellis notes that this oppression of the opposition is carried out

by stripping various institutions dominated by opposition parties - including parliament - from political legitimacy (Ellis, 2017). Another thing that President Maduro also did was monopolize and sabotage local and national elections, and delegitimize political parties other than the ruling party (Ellis, 2017). In this case, the author argues that the main advisors listened to by President Maduro are those who are members of his cabinet, with specialization for those engaged in strategic security political issues.

Pres.	Nicolas MADURO Moros
Executive Vice Pres.	Delcy RODRIGUEZ Gomez
Min. of Agricultural Production & Lands	Wlmar CASTRO Soteldo
Min. of Borders	Jose IZQUIERDO Torres, Maj. Gen.
Min. of Communes & Social Movements	Blanca EEKHOUT Gomez
Min. of Communications & Information	Jorge RODRIGUEZ Gomez
Min. of Culture	Ernesto VILLEGAS Poljak
Min. of Defense	Vladimir PADRINO Lopez, Gen.
Min. of Ecological Mining Development	Victor CANO Pacheco
Min. of Economy & Finance	Simon ZERPA Delgado
Min. of Ecosocialism	Heryck RANGEL Hernandez
Min. of Education	Aristobulo ISTURIZ Almeida
Min. of Electricity	Luis Alfredo MOTTA DOMINGUEZ, Gen.
Min. of Fisheries & Aquaculture	Dante RIVAS Quijada
Min. of Foreign Affairs	Jorge ARREAZA Montserrat
Min. of Foreign Trade & Intl. Investment	Yomana KOTEICH Khatib
Min. of Ground Transportation	Hipolito ABREU Paez
Min. of Health	Carlos ALVARADO Gonzalez
Min. of Housing, Habitats, & Ecosocialism	Ildemaro VILLAROEEL Arismendi, Div. Gen.
Min. of Indigenous Peoples	Alpha NUNEZ Gutierrez
Min. of Industry & National Production	Tareck EL AISSAMI Maddah
Min. of Interior, Justice, & Peace	Nestor REVEROL Torres, Maj. Gen.
Min. of Labor	Eduardo PINATE Rodriguez
Min. of Nutrition	Luis Alberto MEDINA Ramirez, Maj. Gen.
Min. of the Office of the Presidency & Govt. Performance Monitoring	Jorge MARQUEZ Monsalve, Col.
Min. of Penitentiary Services	Iris VARELA Rangel
Min. of Petroleum & Mining	Manuel QUEVEDO Fernandez, Gen.
Min. of Planning	Ricardo MENEDEZ Prieto
Min. of Public Works	Marlery CONTRERAS Hernandez
Min. of Strategic & Socialist Industries	Juan ARIAS Palacio
Min. of Tourism	Stella LUGO de Montilla
Min. of University Education, Science, & Technology	Hugbel ROA Canuci
Min. of Urban Agriculture	Mayerlin ARIAS
Min. of Water	Evelyn VASQUEZ Figuera
Min. of Women & Gender Equality	Caryl BERTHO de Acosta
Min. of Youth & Sports	Pedro INFANTE Aparicio
Attorney Gen.	Tarek SAAB Halabi
Chief, Capital District Govt.	Carolina CESTARI Vasquez
Pres., Central Bank	Calixto ORTEGA Sanchez
Permanent Representative to the UN, New York	Samuel MONCADA Acosta

Tab. 2. Nicolas Maduro's Minister Cabinet, 2019

Source: CIA of the United States of America (2019)

IV. Maduro's Militaristic Cabinet: Domination of Left-Wing Nationalists

President Maduro's government cabinet, as can be seen in table 2, is filled with

two groups of members, namely military officials, and people from the Venezuelan United Socialist Party (PSUV). Smilde (2016) notes that as President Maduro tried to marginalize the influence of the Chavismo group - Hugo Chávez loyalists - from his government (Buxton, 2018). This is because the Chavismo people, even though they belong to the same party as Maduro and Chávez, have a different view of Venezuelan Socialism. Buzton mentions that the views of the Chavismo group who used to advise President Chávez, focused more on honest people's economy, and not the economic elite group as applied by President Maduro (Buxton, 2018). Instead, President Maduro appointed those who were oriented toward maximum economic profit and could be compromised. One example is seen in the case of the Venezuelan National Oil Company PDVSA. Ulmer (2017) explained that the Oil Company was previously headed by the Minister of Oil 2002-2014, Rafael Ramirez, who was later accused of money laundering in 2016 by the government of President Maduro (Buxton, 2018). The position of the Venezuelan Oil Minister and Head of PDVSA was then continued by Eulogio del Pino and Nelson Martinez, who were also accused of corruption (Buxton, 2018). In fact, in the crisis era, President Maduro chose to appoint Major General Manuel Quevedo as the Minister of Oil and the strategic Chair of PDVSA - a very odd game considering that Major General Quevedo did not have any experience in the oil sector.

The case of the State Oil Company above is a perfect illustration of President Maduro's dependence on the Venezuelan military group. Buzton analyzed that the massive inclusion of military groups in President Maduro's cabinet primarily began in 2017 as the year the peak of Venezuelan political conflict and hyperinflation began (Buxton, 2018). This was marked by the

randomization of the cabinet on January 24, 2017, beginning with the appointment of Admiral Carmen Melendez as Vice President for Political, Security and Peace Sovereignty. In addition, a number of Venezuelan military force officials occupy posts that are not actually connected to security but are seen as strategic for the continuation of President Maduro's government. Some examples include the appointment of Colonel Ramon Velasquez as Minister of Eco-Socialism and Water, Admiral Cesar Salazar Coll as Minister of Public Works, Vladimir Pardino Lopez as Minister of Defense, and Nestor Reverol as Minister of Internal Affairs. Based on Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (2017) The existence of the political dualism of the Venezuelan military forces creates the oppression of armed groups in Venezuela which worsen the crisis, including the existence of baseless detention, torture, forced punishment, until the execution without trial by military groups encouraged by the government of President Maduro (Buxton, 2018).

The inclusion of civil society groups in President Maduro's administration has also diminished, especially those outside the PSUV. Some civilian officials who were later released included Elias Jaua as Former Vice President for Social Development and Minister of Education, and Adan Chávez as the Minister of Culture who was also Hugo Chávez's brother. Not only stopped in the field of his officials, Buzton also noted that President Maduro also enlarged the authority of his ministers, such as the authority of Tareck El Aissami as Vice President for Economics (Buxton, 2018). In fact, El Aissami himself according to CNN (2017) noted involved a series of cases, such as passport smuggling, corruption, money laundering, to financing against terrorism. In the economic field, President Maduro also appointed Ramon Lobo as Minister of Finance,

with no economic background at all (Buxton, 2018). In fact, Lobo also served as a series of other important positions, such as the Chief Financial Officer of PDVSA and the President of the Bandez and Fonden State Financial Enitas (Buxton, 2018). However, from a series of many names that adorn the name of President Maduro's cabinet, as the writer argued earlier, there are two basic similarities.

First, as underlined by Buzton, all the people listed above have affiliations or are even members of the PSUV board with the identification of the ideology of the left political spectrum (Buxton, 2018). In this regard, the PSUV itself is a socialist party in Venezuela that began to reap its hegemony in the era of President Chávez since 1998 (Hetland, 2016). Van der Velden explained that Marxism itself is not a new political spectrum in Venezuela (Van der Velden, 2009). This political understanding coincided with a wave of Soviet Union intervention in Latin America during the Cold War era and became one of the ideas that inspired the Bolivarian Revolution that led to Venezuelan independence under President Hugo Chávez. Thus, President Chávez and in particular the PSUV party, and the Venezuelan community in general, have their own emotional attachment to Marxist derivatives. However, the image of socialism in Venezuela began to tarnish at the end of the era of President Chávez's administration, caused by the emergence of a motion of no confidence in the socialist government caused by a massive economic downturn. In fact, more recently, more progressive parties such as the Popular Will Party led by Maduro's opposition leader Juan Guaidó have put more emphasis on a more moderate and populist political and economic approach. Instead, Socialism became a guide for conservatives who exploited it as an effort to maintain political power - the people chosen by President Maduro to advise him.

Second, President Maduro's dependence on military power groups in Venezuela is not new, and he is not the first president to behave that way. This is because Venezuela, like many other post-militaristic countries in Latin America, has opted for a very strong military culture. In this case, the ministers who were widely appointed by President Maduro in his cabinet were from the Fuerza Armada Nacional Bolivariana (FANB) group—a military group that restored Venezuela's political, economic, and social conditions after the failure of the liberal civil government in the 1980s (Fonseca et.al., 2016). President Maduro's predecessor, President Chávez, also gained high legitimacy and populism thanks to his proximity to the FANB. In addition, the FANB also has very strong affiliations with PSUV - President Maduro's party, who controls the cabinet from civil society. This, according to Fonseca et al., due to the natural relations between military groups and the government in an authoritarian left-wing government system, which reflected a lot of stability in the Soviet Union which was very militaristic (Fonseca et.al., 2016). In this case, Fonseca et al. argue that there are strong civil-military relations in Venezuela, due to good sentiment and a sense of indebtedness to the military group (Fonseca et.al., 2016). But unfortunately, this good image crossed out in the era of President Maduro.

Regarding military dualism in Venezuela, Fonseca et al. argue that the main impact this group has had on the policy-making process within the Venezuelan government sphere is the "strong sense of nationalism" (Fonseca et.al., 2016). This nationalism is implemented in at least two main methods. First, since the inclusion of military groups in government, Venezuela's foreign policies, especially in the political and economic fields, have always been based on nationalist-realist ideas. Almost all foreign policy is made based

on national interests, both in general and in the interests of groups. In addition to the PDVSA leadership replacement policy above, Venezuelan oil-related policies are often made without regard to international market stability or the possibility of a boomerang effect that can befall (Hetland, 2016). In addition, Fonseca et al. also notes how this dualism had an influence on the Venezuelan government (Fonseca et.al., 2016). The government of Venezuela in the era of President Chávez which was democratic populist, turned back into a hierarchical and subordinate post-military extreme inclusion in the era of President Maduro. This is most likely due to the extreme hierarchical culture that exists in the National Bolivarian Armed Force (Fonseca et.al., 2016). The practice of bad governance also spreads to the issue of the political elite cartel which dominates the Venezuelan trade economy, as seen in the PDVSA case. The existence of nationalist understanding and prioritization of the interests of this group made a resonance between President Maduro's government and the military group, and made the military group always exist and dominate his cabinet.

In seeing the phenomenon of President Maduro's closeness with this military group, then, it is worth remembering that President Maduro did not come from a military group but came from a civilian group. Then later, the taking of military groups as his advisors certainly could not be separated from rational considerations. As stated through the model proposed by Rosenthal and Hart (1991) in table 3, we can see that military groups can be seen as a group of security experts with several functions. First, the military group was as a giver and assessor of the situation. In a crisis, McCarthy (2017) notes that Venezuelan military groups have doubles as an intelligence agency with members spread throughout Venezuela, especially in border areas. This has

led to the military group being the group that knows the Venezuelan terrain best as one of the inputs in policy making. Secondly, the Venezuelan military group plays the function of providing policy options. In this case, as stated by McCarthy (2017), military groups gave many suggestions to President Maduro through various cabinet meetings related to relations with countries in the Latin American region and other major powers, such as Russia and the United States. Third, the military group acts as a unit of feasibility testing and process counseling, a group that becomes an operational specialist. In this case, what is intended is because it is the military groups who will later implement state security policies, including border closures. Thus, their consideration and technical expertise are needed. Fourth, the military group acts as a supporting advisor, where when there is support from a legitimate military group, the president also feels that the decision he will make is legitimate.

Title and Name	Last Name	Start	End	Branch
Gral. Raúl	Salazar Rodríguez	2/2/99	2/2/00	Army
Gral. Ismael Eliézer	Hurtado Soucre	2/2/00	2/15/01	Army
José Vicente	Rangel Vale	2/15/01	5/6/02	(civilian)
Gral. Lucas Enrique	Rincón Romero	5/6/02	7/3/02	Army
Gral. José Luis	Prieto	7/3/02	1/19/04	Army
Gral. Jorge Luis	García Carneiro	1/19/04	7/12/05	Army
Alm. Ramón Orlando	Maniglia Ferreira	7/12/05	7/14/06	Navy
Gen. Raúl Isaías	Baduel	7/14/06	7/18/07	Army
Gral. Div. Gustavo Reyes	Rangel Briceño	7/18/07	3/3/09	Army
Col. (ret) Ramón Alonso	Carrizales Rengifo	3/3/09	1/27/10	Army
Gral. Carlos José	Mata Figueroa	1/27/10	1/10/12	Army
Gral. Henry de Jesús	Rangel Silva	1/10/12	10/29/12	Army
Alm. Diego Alfredo	Molero Bellavia	10/29/12	7/5/13	Navy
Alm. Carmen Teresa	Meléndez Rivas	7/5/13	10/25/14	Navy
Gen. Vladimir	Padrino López	10/25/14	Present	Army

Tab. 3. List of Venezuela's Minister of Defense, 1996-2016

Source: Fonseca et. al. (2016)

However, as the authors and Kowert have argued previously, in addition to the function of each advisor, the relationship

between the advisor and the head of state will greatly influence the outcome of foreign policy making (Kowert, 2002). In this case, Kowert argues that the more open an advisor will be to all his thoughts, and the greater the willingness of a head of state to listen to his advisers, then an effective pattern of information transmission will be created (Kowert, 2002). Ineffectiveness will often occur if one party is closed, causing information overload or information deficit. In fact, if both parties are closed, the likelihood of delivering effective information is higher. In this case, Kowert argues that a closed structure of visibility will tend to create a high probability of groupthink (Kowert, 2002).

Learning Style	Advisory Group Structure	
	Open	Closed
Open	Effective Information Gathering	Information Deficit-Groupthink Likely
Closed	Information Overload-Deadlock Likely	Moderately Effective Information Gathering

Tab. 4. Combination of advisory group structure and their learning styles

Source: Kowert (2002)

Groupthink syndromes focus on one key — homogeneity. The closed structure referred to in this case is when advisers are elected subjectively by the head of state on personal considerations rather than an analysis of crucial issue areas. In addition, the closed structure can also refer to the similarity of the group of origin and expertise of the advisers. This category is certainly able to define President Maduro's government cabinet, which all come from military groups and the PSUV. All his advisers are security experts, without regard to other strategic sectors. Security experts are placed in various

sectors, causing a process of securitization of issues that are not too important, such as natural and social resources.

V. The Environmental Stress and the Emergence of Groupthink Syndrome

In applying the groupthink paradigm proposed by Janis, it should be remembered that the groupthink syndrome itself is not always bad — although Janis itself states that many of the policies produced by groupthink become irrational and have a negative impact (Janis, 1991). Janis provides a chart as a guide in recognizing the occurrence of the groupthink phenomenon, as can be seen in graph 1. Janis argues that there are several predecessor conditions that cause the emergence of groupthink syndrome, there are three of them (Janis, 1991). In the previous section, the author has explained the first part of this condition, namely the existence of very high cohesiveness within a group of policy makers, mainly due to the similarity of military background and left-wing ideology. This leads to the second condition, namely the existence of structural errors from policy making. Even though Venezuela is in a state of crisis, but as McCarthy has stated, President Maduro has violated the Venezuelan constitution in relation to efforts to create good governance based on socialism-democracy (McCarthy, 2017). President Maduro has oppressed the opposition, and practiced patronage of military groups as the group with the most advanced social class in the social structure of Venezuelan society. President Maduro did not prioritize the principle of inclusiveness and expertise in his cabinet development efforts, and put forward the prioritization of military groups instead of the cabinet which was composed of experts in their respective fields.

Then, a third condition that arises outward-looking, according to Janis,

groupthink syndrome appears as an effect of the isolation of policy-making groups caused by external pressures (Janis, 1991). In this case, the authors analyze that there are three main layers of external pressures which later cause group think syndrome and lead to the Brazilian blockade policy, namely pressure from the national level, Latin American regional level, and global level. At the local level, as stated by McCarthy, pressure from the politicians led by President Maduro's opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, has tried to suppress and isolate the government palace (McCarthy, 2017). This then led to mass demonstrations which took place since 2017. However, Maduro's strong grip on state resources, supported by the Venezuelan armed forces caused this pressure to be asymmetrical. Further pressure comes from the regional level. Various academics have explained how the impact of the Venezuelan economic and political crisis affected the politics of countries in the South American region (Fuentes et. al., 2018; Rendon, 2018). This was mainly caused by a humanitarian crisis that caused a crisis of displacement to neighbor countries, such as Colombia and Bolivia (Rendon, 2018).

Initially, as underlined by Busch, it led to the sympathy of various neighboring countries, one of which was Brazil under the leadership of President Jair Bolsonaro (Busch, 2019). This is certainly beneficial, given the prolonged social and economic crisis in Venezuela. But this did not last long. Since February 2019, President Maduro has announced that Venezuela will close its border completely with Venezuela for the movement of goods and people, including logistics and humanitarian assistance in any form (Busch, 2019). Apparently, this was due to an indication that various aid was received and distributed by the opposition group led by Guaidó. This is exemplified by the existence of a symbolic distribution by Guaidó on the

Cucuta border in February 2019 (Busch, 2019). This provoked a strong reaction from President Maduro and his cabinet, opposing any state intervention on the Venezuelan Crisis and its sovereignty. President Maduro wants to prevent any support and strengthening from any country towards his opposition groups, and his cabinet oversees it. The border blockade then became a rational policy for them, but irrational for the Venezuelan people in general. One of them is a tweet from the Venezuelan Foreign Minister and one of President Maduro's trusted advisers, Jorge Arreaza on February 21, which condemned the intervention of any country that disturbed Venezuelan sovereignty (Arreaza, 2019). Arreaza simultaneously issued a communique from the Maduro government which reminded several countries such as the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico not to follow Brazil's steps (Arreaza, 2019).

"Venezuela has established contacts with the government of the Dominican Republic, the authorities of Puerto Rico and other Caribbean island nations, to remind them of the use of their unused territories to launch operations against our country" (Arreaza, 2019)

The pressure from this regional level then escalates to global pressure, especially according to Ellis as indicated by the intervention of the United States and Russia, each of which supports Guaidó and President Maduro (Ellis, 2017). In this case, the existence of these external pressures isolated President Maduro and his cabinet. Not physically, but in the sense of freedom of thought and the options they have. The progressive policies of the Guaidó opposition group in February 2019 seemed not to give space and time for the Maduro cabinet to think of policies that

benefited both parties, making full blockade the most effective, fast, but irrational alternative policy. The existence of space and time limitations is one of several groupthink syndromes proposed by Janis, where each group seems to believe in the fragility of crisis conditions (Janis, 1991). In addition, it is also evident from the statement and communique of Foreign Minister Arreaza above, that the Maduro cabinet has a shared belief in the morality of his cabinet, that what they are doing is to secure the national security of the country. In addition, the communique listed in Figure 1 above shows the collective rationalization of President Maduro's government on security grounds, and there is a threat to all Latin American countries not to follow Brazil's steps - a result of out-group stereotypes (Janis, 1991). This was then followed by self-censorship marked by a non-transparent policy making (Buxton, 2018), and the illusion of unanimity. In this case, President Maduro was noted to have changed his cabinet several times in the 2016-2019 era, to create advisers who always agreed with him (Munoz, 2019). This, according to Janis, was used to create a cabinet as self-appointed main guards that always justified the thoughts of the head of state from the direct pressure on dissenters (Janis, 1991).

VI. Conclusion: Maduro and the Future of Venezuela's Foreign Affairs

Foreign policy itself is essentially composed of various complex factors, and the foreign policy of President Maduro's government in the Venezuelan Crisis adds to this complexity. The author concludes this paper by explaining what has and has not been included in this paper. On the one hand, this paper has successfully analyzed the involvement of group factors in the policy making of the Brazilian blockade by the

government of President Maduro in the case of the Venezuelan Crisis. In this case, the authors conclude that a combination of homogeneity of groups around President Maduro consisting of military groups and the Venezuelan United Socialist Party caused groupthink syndrome. This is reinforced by the presence of 'isolation' and environmental stress caused by pressure at the national, regional and global levels. This paper has also analyzed two main theoretical stages to explain the influence of President Maduro's crisis cabinet group on the blockade's policy — through an analysis of the advice of the advisers, and their relationship with the dictator. But on the other hand, this paper has limitations on its specificity. This paper specifically discusses the influence of groups, and not the other factors that influence Venezuela's blockade policy towards Brazil. This paper does not explore the individual perspective of President Maduro who might have a big influence, as an authoritarian leader. This paper does not analyze deeply the role of domestic politics and the national public-especially in the perspective of opposition groups-on this policy. This paper also does not discuss in depth the pressure from the international system that led to this policy. Apart from all that, as the authors believe, this policy is a complex policy and cannot be analyzed in one perspective only. But his hope, this paper can be a contribution to the endless foreign policy discourse, and an intellectual effort in analyzing the crisis that occurred in Venezuela.

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