

El American

‘Colombia Joins The Axis Of Havana, Managua And Caracas’: Daniel Raisbeck

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THIS WEEK marked the beginning of what could be a great and worrisome alliance: Colombia resumed relations with Venezuela. Both countries sent their respective ambassadors to each other’s capital. After years of hostilities and heavy feuds when Iván Duque was president and led the international offensive against Maduro’s dictatorship, the new Colombian president, Gustavo Petro, intends to undo everything.

Some of the most disturbing images come from Caracas. The ambassador appointed by Petro, Armando Benedetti, met this Tuesday with the major figures of the Chavista regime: Diosdado Cabello, Padrino López, Jorge Rodríguez and Tarek El Aissami. All these individuals have been accused of human rights violations, drug trafficking, or terrorism by the United States.

Petro, an extreme leftist, triumphed in the June elections and in early August became Colombia’s first explicitly socialist president. One of the great concerns surrounding him is his willingness to re-establish relations, not only with Venezuela as a country, but also with the Maduro dictatorship, which remains accused of drug trafficking and numerous human rights violations.

We spoke with renowned scholar, historian, and Cato Institute analyst [Daniel Raisbeck](#) to understand what is coming for the continent with the reestablishment of relations between Colombia and Venezuela.

“The election of Petro and the strategic shift in Colombia means a big failure for U.S. diplomacy”, Raisbeck told to El American.

Is the restoration of relations between Colombia and Venezuela good news?

It depends on one’s perspective. Certainly, it is good news for the people of both countries that trade is resuming. On the other hand, there are precedents to make this happen without having to legitimize Maduro’s regime, much less with grotesque spectacles such as Armando Benedetti, Petro’s new ambassador in Caracas, paying homage to the ruler of Miraflores on behalf of the Colombian nation.

Were the encirclement and pressures of Ivan Duque’s government against Venezuela working?

The diplomatic isolation of Venezuela opened a small window of opportunity that the opposition -as usual- did not know how to take advantage of. Beyond this brief moment, Duque's policy vis-à-vis Venezuela failed because it required recognizing the so-called government of Juan Guaidó, which was evidently a farce. Maduro's regime never ceased to have a monopoly on force in Venezuela, something that had to be accepted, if only de facto.

What does it mean to have Benedetti as Colombia's envoy for Venezuela?

It means an extremely important turn in Colombian foreign policy. Benedetti is not just any ambassador -he certainly is not a career diplomat. On the contrary, he is a politician by profession and an ideological juggler who, after his previous convenient stints in Uribeism and Santismo, turned out to be the organizer of Petro's recent campaign and his main link with the old and corrupt political class, which brought him the victory in the second round. That Benedetti's prize is the embassy in Caracas is a clear sign of the importance for Petro of his new alliance with Maduro. As I said a few months ago in [El American](#), this also means that Colombia joins the axis that includes Cuba and Nicaragua. The embarrassing situation a few weeks ago at the OAS, where Colombia absented itself from a session condemning Daniel Ortega's human rights abuses, confirms this.

Does the restoration of relations benefit Maduro?

Of course, it does. It benefits Maduro because he can argue in international bodies that if Colombia not only recognizes him, but also celebrates his autocracy, why shouldn't the other countries that broke relations with Caracas do the same?

Should the US be concerned about an eventual alliance between Venezuela and Colombia?

It seems to me that the alliance is already a fact and that it is too late for the US to worry. As I mentioned, the election of Petro and the subsequent strategic shift in Colombia signifies a major failure for US diplomacy, especially after sending billions of dollars to Colombia over the past decades. It is yet another defeat for "nation-building" theory and interventionism around the world. The main focus should be on opening trade.