



The Source with Max Blumenthal **The Management of Savagery & the Venezuelan Crisis**

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Rees Jeannotte (RJ): Hello, I'm Rees Jeannotte, and welcome to The Source. Joining me today is independent journalist, author and founder of the Grayzone Project, Max Blumenthal. Today we'll be speaking about Venezuela where he spent some time covering US regime change attempts there and about his new book which just came out "The Management of Savagery". Max Blumenthal, thank you for joining us.

Max Blumenthal (MB): Thanks for having me on.

RJ: Before we discuss the situation in Venezuela, I'd like to talk with you about your new book, which just came out, "The Management of Savagery - How America's National Security State fueled the rise of al-Qaeda, ISIS and Donald Trump". I managed to breeze through the book in a couple of days. It was an intense read and I have the feeling that readers will probably find this to be a good antidote to the whole Russiagate fiasco that's been going on. But what prompted you to write the book?

MB: Well, that's a great question. I mean the book begins two years after I was born. I was born in 1977 and I began when the US through Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Council Director of Carter, made the decision to enter Afghanistan in the form of a proxy war and to initiate Operation Cyclone which was the largest covert CIA operation in history to arm the Mujahideen but also to exploit the newly formed special relationship with Saudi Arabia. The Saudi kingdom had agreed to put up a matching fund and match every dollar the CIA committed in order to topple the Soviet-backed government in Kabul. This is what ultimately led to the rise of al-Qaeda. I came to the conclusion, some time after Trump was elected, after covering his campaign and seeing how effectively he had exploited both, the legacy of the Iraq war and what a failure and a catastrophe it was, and exploited this rising sentiment of Islamophobia which is sweeping across the West.

It occurred to me that if we didn't go back to 1979 - you can even go back further - and if we didn't understand the context of 9/11, if the US hadn't embarked on that covert operation that saw bin Laden be

sent to the Afghan border as the key funder of the services bureau operating under the auspices of Pakistani intelligence clearly with US knowledge, I don't believe that 9/11 would have happened, and if 9/11 hadn't happened, I concluded that Donald Trump and figures like him would not have happened. The Iraq war wouldn't have happened.

And then I looked at the fallout from subsequent regime change wars like Libya and Syria and how those wars were sold to the public using the same tactics of humanitarian intervention that had been honed over the years to sell all these previous wars and how the refugee crises caused by all these regime change wars changed politics in the West. And it just occurred to me that if we didn't go back into that Cold War history and put this whole thing into context, we would be allowing the demagogues in our societies - whether it's AfD over there or Donald Trump over here - to monopolise the discussion about the refugee crises. About the whole issue of immigration itself. And at the same time we would be seating in a way the discussion to ISIS and to al-Qaeda without acknowledging that these groups have benefited so much from western regime change wars. And what I wanted to do in looking at the politics that had shaken my life and plunged us into a state of permanent war where the idea of peace seems so impossible that almost no presidential candidate even mentions it.

What I wanted to do is point the fingers at the managers of savagery - and these are people in air-conditioned offices in Washington, D.C., who have benefitted from the instability that they sought to cause while the rest of us, from Damascus to Benghazi to Boston, the rest of us are the ones who have suffered. So this book is kind of a - I synthesize the history of the politics of my own life to try to explain from a unique angle how we got here.

RJ: Can you talk specifically about the title of the book. Because at first look you might think that's kind of a provocative title, "The Management of Savagery", but it really does have a specific meaning to the book. It sort of carries the narrative of the best of enemies - the narrative flows throughout the book. Can you talk about the title and why you chose it?

MB: "The Management of Savagery" was actually the name of a blueprint put forward by a proto-Islamic state ideologue who was anonymous operating under a pen name in Iraq, I believe in 2004, and it described how extreme Salafi jihadi forces could exploit the US invasion to establish regions of savagery that would then be used not just to challenge the US occupation but to actually bring down further postcolonial Arab states, referring obviously to Syria, by using these zones of savagery to stage attacks, spectacular attacks, and then to build an Islamic state in areas that were conquered.

And the document reminded me so much of a lot of the blueprints that we saw tumbling out of neoconservative think tanks in the 1990s, specifically in the year 1996. There is one called "A Clean Break", issued by the Jewish Institute for Near East Studies which was put forward for Benjamin Netanyahu the first time he entered the Prime Minister's office by two figures who would be central in making the case for the war in Iraq, Richard Perle and Douglas Feith, along with a series of other neocons. And what they called for was to destabilise the Middle East in part by working with some of the, in their words, the Sunni Arab tribes in northeastern Syria, which is what later became ISIS' region of savagery, the center of its caliphate. They were basically calling for attacking the same countries and

bringing down the same previously stable postcolonial Arab states starting with Iraq, moving to Syria and then towards the prize, Iran, by using these kinds of destabilisation tactics.

Then we saw that same year the “Project for a New American Century” appear. It was basically a collection of neocons who declared that we should exploit the post-Cold War unipolar order where America was the lone superpower to establish benevolent hegemony. And then the following letters issued by Robert Kagan who would go on to advise both Mitt Romney and Hillary Clinton, and William Kristol, “Bill” Kristol, who’s kind of like right now a hero among a lot of the anti-Trump liberal resistance because he’s anti-Trump. They basically said *We’ll start advancing this post-Cold War unipolar benevolent hegemony by toppling the government of Iraq.*

And these became the blueprints for doing exactly what al-Qaeda, which is at a low point at this point, would have hoped to have happened. And it allowed the Islamic State to be born in Iraq in the catastrophe of America’s mismanaged occupation. And so, like you said, they’re the best of enemies. There’s a symbiotic relationship between the managers of savagery in Raqqa and the managers of savagery at so many think tanks and now in the White House in Washington.

RJ: Can you talk a little bit about the creation of al-Qaeda? The first chapter of your book is called “The Afghan Trap”. And Afghanistan plays such a central role in the whole story. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

MB: Well, Brzezinski had said that he had hoped to trap the Soviet Union and the Red Army in Afghanistan and that entailed luring it in by destabilising the situation in Kabul to the point where the Soviet Union decided it had to intervene to prop up or save to government of Mohammad Najibullah, which was the Communist government. And they succeeded there, but what they also did was they created what Jack Blum, who was the Senate Select Committee Investigator on Iran Contra and on Afghanistan and the blowback that the US received, referred to as the “disposal problem”.

You basically train a bunch of guys - first of all you’d have the common Mujahideen who were just maybe traditional-minded people who hated the fact that there is universal schooling for women, who didn't like the Soviet Union, who hated the fact that the Red Army was committing abuses. But then you’d have foreign fighters pouring in. Foreign fighters not just like Osama bin Laden who was sort of the funder of the services bureau which became the basis for al-Qaeda. You had Omar Abdel-Rahman who was basically sent on a CIA flight to the services bureau center in Peshawar, Pakistan, sent over the border, because he was so popular among Saudi men and other foreign fighters who were interested in Wahhabi ideology.

And he arrived in New York City, I believe it was in 1994, on a CIA visa. And this is the person known as “The Blind Sheikh”. So when I was a teenager or in my early twenties, before bin Laden was really known as the boogeyman of America, it was the Blind Sheikh who was the face of evil. And what we did not know was that he had been a CIA asset all along. He enters New York and takes over something called the Al-Kifah Center, which was a literal al-Qaeda cell operating openly inside New York that had ferried men over to Afghanistan under the watch of the previous leader Abdullah Azzam who was killed.

And they continued even after the Afghan proxy war to work under the direct watch of the CIA to send men to support US proxy wars in Bosnia and in Chechnya.

And at the same time, this core group including someone named El Sayyid Nosair who became known as the assassin of Meir Kahane, the extremist Israeli rabbi. They were going and getting training and learning military training and even military secrets from an army officer who was embedded at the time at Fort Bragg at the JFK School of Special Warfare, named Ali Abdel Saoud Mohamed, who also happened to be an al-Qaeda operative. This is all exposed in Peter Lance's book about Ali Mohamed, but I wanted to bring this history back because it was so remarkable that Ali Mohamed while working under the watch of the CIA and FBI, essentially as an FBI and CIA asset, was also taking orders from Ayman Al-Zawahiri who was the right-hand man of bin Laden, the Egyptian founder of al-Jihad, spiriting documents out of Fort Bragg and giving them to people like El Sayyid Nosair.

This was on the public record at the time and you would see it in newsclips here and there that Nosair, after his house was raided after he killed Kahane, had all of these special documents. I actually managed to obtain these files because they became public. And he was taking classified documents about US ship movements. He was taking documents about how to use anti-tank and anti-aircraft rockets, and handing them to people who were working in an al-Qaeda cell in New York under the watch of the FBI and the CIA. And when they were put on trial, the Al-Kifah Center defendants, in a cooked-up case, because the US decided *We have a disposal problem, we need to contrive a case to get rid of them*, I interviewed one of the lawyers who defended them, Roger Stavis. He defended Nosair. And he told me that *Our defense throughout the whole trial was Afghanistan, Afghanistan, Afghanistan. And all I said was that these men had performed a critical and vital duty for the United States and the CIA, and the US has no right to put these figures on trial under an obscure civil war statute of sedition. These are not seditious people, he said, these are American patriots.*

And that was such an embarrassing argument, because he was essentially putting the CIA on trial. And the worst thing that Stavis did from the point of view of the government was to call Ali Abdel Saoud Mohamed to testify. This was someone they wanted to keep secret. So the prosecutor, Patrick Fitzgerald, someone who's very well-known in the US and sort of a revered figure, he actually, according to Peter Lance, advised Ali Mohamed to stay in California and not appear in trial because it was too embarrassing for the National Security State. And it was during that trial that Stavis managed to extract the first public acknowledgement by the US government that it armed and funded and trained the Mujahideen in Afghanistan to the tune of several billion dollars.

But again, this was a story and a history that was swept under the rug. And I think it's so critical. When we think of the scare after 9/11 and terror cells in our neighbourhood. In fact, there really were none, because this one was cleaned up. But the most important point is that this one could have only operated because it was performing a service through the services bureau to the CIA and America's National Security State. And I think that's where we need to point the finger for this crisis.

RJ: Of course, carrying on with the whole best-of-enemies theme, you end up again in 2001, in Afghanistan. You have then the Iraq war and the rise of ISIS. Can you talk a little bit about that?

MB: ISIS was something that the US referred to early on as “al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia” and that’s what it was known as, I guess. Their leader was Zarqawi. He was operating under a pseudonym actually. He was different from Ayman Al-Zawahiri for example who was really the operational shot caller of al-Qaeda at that point during the US occupation in that he was sort of from a criminal background. He was from a lower class background from near a refugee camp in Jordan. Zawahiri was a doctor from an elite family. He was a learned man. He had actually gone on a speaking tour in California. A lot of people don’t know this. And Ali Mohamed was his translator. So he even knew the US.

What he wanted to do was to mobilize all Muslims in Iraq for a resistance against the US occupation. And what Zarqawi wanted to do was to carry out shocking attacks against the Shia population and to polarize the situation to the point where the Sunnis would all, who were a minority in Iraq, who faced for the first time a situation where they weren’t in control, to bring them to al-Qaeda so that it would defend it. And so Zarqawi and his group started attacking mosques, Shia shrines, Shia pilgrims. The attacks on Shia were just absolutely disgusting. And the US for whatever reason was unable to stop them or kill them. In fact what the US did was it implemented the Salvador option where it brought a guy named James Steele into Iraq, who is a veteran of the El Salvador proxy war, who is a master of torture, a master of the most vicious counterinsurgency tactics. And he created essentially Shia death squads in Sunni areas and helped Zarqawi fulfill his vision of polarizing Iraqi society and forging these sectarian lines in the US, like Israeli tactics, like putting walls between Sunni and Shias and helped advance the sectarianism that allowed ISIS to fester in the Anbar province.

And then I talk about how, after Zarqawi was killed and ISIS fails in its first iteration, it begins to exploit what was taking place in Syria and sends an advance guard of some men from al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, under the watch of Mohamed Julani in to Raqqa which is a Syrian city in northeastern Syria. You know they enter northeastern Syria and they enter Raqqa with the help of the Free Syrian Army. In 2012, I believe it was, sorry 2013. The Free Syrian Army was like the Mujahedeen a CIA project, armed by the CIA, created by the CIA. And it was essentially a weapons farm for al-Qaeda and ISIS that had no real identity of its own. The Free Syrian Army, an al-Qaeda takeover, Raqqa, some of the revolutionary activists attempt to set up their little local councils that last about two weeks before the Islamic State is declared.

Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi, who is the new caliph of ISIS, who had built this vast security apparatus working with veterans of Saddam Hussein’s military intelligence apparatus, who had been purged due to de-Baath-ification. He sets up the Islamic State in Raqqa using al-Qaeda, or then known as Jabhat al-Nusra, as a Trojan horse. And what happens with the FSA? Half of them join ISIS and the other half join what’s left of Jabhat al-Nusra and go fight upfield against the Syrian government.

So the US by arming this arm-and-equip program, by basically doing what it did in Afghanistan in Syria, helped the Islamic State spread and capture this vast swath of territory across northeastern Syria. And it was a swath of territory that was protected by Turkey which was running a rat line over the border the same way that the Saudis and Pakistani intelligence did in Afghanistan through the Pakistani border. So we see a repeat of the same scenario and it leads to the rise of one of the most extreme and disturbing

Salafi jihadi factions. And the way we understood it in the West was not just the heart of evil but the heart of Islamic evil. And it fueled Islamophobia. The US public wasn't given this context about how it was formed in Iraq and how it benefited from US interventionism or obviously how its vision of Islam is something that is rejected by the Muslims who are forced to flee from it to places like Damascus.

But, we've got this really remarkable quote from Secretary of State John Kerry later on that I think told the whole story for me of how ISIS managed to hold on to its caliphate for so long and why Jabhat al-Nusra which in its current form as al-Qaeda's largest affiliate since 9/11 is known as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham is able to control the Idlib province. Kerry in 2016 was in a meeting with Syrian opposition activists, people who'd been backed by the US including the spokesman for the White Helmets, Raed al-Saleh, and somebody leaked this audio.

The activists are all badgering him and saying *Why can't you initiate an airstrike and take out Assad? Come on, where's the invasion you promised us?* And he admits at a certain point that the US was watching ISIS advance, essentially allowing it to advance, and that that advance was benefiting the US in its strategy to force Assad to the negotiating table to negotiate his own transition. And so that the boogeyman of ISIS, the more ferocious it was, the more atrocities it committed, the more disgusting it was with mass beheadings of conscripted Syrian soldiers and religious minorities, that was benefiting the US's goal to scare Assad to the negotiating table. It's also why Russia intervened. And Kerry admitted that. He said ISIS was advancing, Russia watched this, and they intervened. And *We couldn't do anything about it.* So, Russia, along with Iran and Hezbollah and the Syrian government, actually stopped the advance of ISIS on their own.

And this is another sort of forbidden topic in the US, which is to acknowledge that the Russian intervention in Syria, invited by the Syrian government, helped put to bed one of the worst chapters in a another US-fueled proxy war.

RJ: And of course Trump utilized all of this to his advantage against both his Republican opponents and Hillary Clinton during the election campaign.

MB: Yes. There was this mass shooting in Orlando that I was paying close attention to at the time but still didn't fully understand. It was carried out by a young man named Omar Mateen, who himself and his family was from Afghanistan, and he went and shot scores and scores of mostly Latinos at the Pulse nightclub, which was an LGBTQ nightclub, a gay nightclub, in Orlando, Florida. And most of the media in the US expected here was a repressed Muslim man who was secretly gay who wanted to lash out at gay people. Meanwhile the recordings of his phone calls with police negotiators after he entered the bar and started shooting everyone were public. And he was saying nothing about homosexuals or homosexuality and he was talking purely about ISIS. He was talking about someone he had met who had gone to fight with al-Qaeda in Aleppo. And he said, you know, *He was the first and I'm going to be the second one. This is for ISIS. Stop the Russian airstrikes in Syria.* That's what he kept saying again and again.

And so he'd essentially been propagandized online by ISIS, who's obviously a disturbed individual. But this was directly related to what was happening in Syria. And what was even more disturbing was to learn

soon after this killing that Omar Mateen had been not only driven almost crazy by rampant Islamophobia at his workplace, just harassed when he was a security guard at a local court by the other security guards and cops who would call him “Ali Baba” and ask when he’s flying out on his carpet.

But that he had also been provoked by a confidential FBI asset who attempted to trick Mateen into participating into a controlled terror plot. These are the kind of like fake terror plots or manufactured contrived plots that the FBI uses to entrap mentally disturbed Muslim men, and then they say *Well, he agreed to carry some bombs to a synagogue* or whatever, but it was the FBI asset who came up with the plot. Mateen had been going to work telling everyone *I got al-Qaeda on the line, I got bin Laden on the line, stop messing with me*, because he was being harassed in an islamophobic way. And so they approached him with this asset and he didn’t bite. He didn’t fall for the plot, but he eventually did snap, kill all these people.

And I write about this. One of the most bizarre rallies of the 2016 campaign after Donald Trump was milking this event for all its worth sending all right proxies like Milo Yiannopoulos down to the mosque in Orlando to demand the expulsion of Muslims. Trump himself declaring that he would deport the teen’s entire family and pass a Muslim ban, that there is a Hillary Clinton rally where Omar Mateen’s father somehow appears directly behind Hillary Clinton holding a Hillary Clinton sign and afterwards is interviewed on local news and said *I’m all for Hillary because she’s advancing our national security*. It seemed extremely strange. And in 2017 we learned that Seddique Mateen, the father of Omar Mateen, had been an FBI asset for over 20 years, ever since. This related directly to US involvement in Afghanistan.

So at every step of the way there are these fingerprints and I can’t figure out, no one can figure out exactly what they are, but it’s clear that something happened with Mateen and that we need to put this instance in a different context because he had been approached and had been in such close proximity with the FBI. I’m not saying this is an FBI false flag. What I’m saying is sometimes when they’re messing with these people’s lives, people who are already unstable, they snap and do things that really embody the term “blowback”. And of course Donald Trump - I think this is an unacknowledged chapter in why Trump was elected.

RJ: I have a quote here that I just got from Naked Capitalism from an interview with Michael Hudson. Just a short quote here, it says: “The American policy conclusion is that if you control the source of energy, which remains mainly oil and coal, then you control global GDP growth.” That is why Dick Cheney invaded Iraq to grab its oil. It is why Trump announced his intention to topple Venezuela to take its oil. Can you start by talking about what the situation is there right now? The latest reports of course that Trump is demanding Russia remove military personnel. Guaidó has his diplomatic immunity removed and there are legal proceedings against him.

MB: Yes. John Bolton who is Trump’s national security council director has come out and said pretty clearly that *We aim to carry out regime change in Venezuela in order to increase our own oil activities in the country*, and he said *This has been a benefit for American oil companies*. I mean he is not really hiding his game. He said this during an appearance on Fox News. But I think as with Iraq, there are other issues besides oil like geopolitics. Venezuela has been this engine of progressive change in Latin

America. It's really helped Cuba get out of this special economy it had been in ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It had helped what is known in South America and across Latin America as the "progressive wave", when you saw these progressive governments come in. And there's been this rollback where we've seen parliamentary coups with figures like Dilma Rousseff or Lula da Silva jailed on these kind of cooked-up corruption charges. The same with Rafael Correa, the progressive leader in Ecuador. The Kirchners in Argentina fell under similar kind of scrutiny. And then you have just a straight up coup attempt at the heart of the kind of progressive movement in Latin America. So there's geopolitics as well that are concerned here.

And what the US I think was threatening to do in the beginning was to use the threat of a military invasion to engineer a lightning coup. They thought that the government of Maduro who was elected with millions of votes in an election that actually was not fraudulent, where the three main opposition parties boycotted under US pressure. They thought that he would be out within a few weeks. They thought that the economy was so bad that Juan Guaidó would be in Miraflores Palace within days.

And it didn't work because number one they underestimated the government and its massive popular base. Something that I saw firsthand when I was in Caracas. There are just large fervid rallies every few days and you go in the barrios and people really support that government. And then they overestimated Juan Guaidó and the opposition, not realizing that he's from a party that has a 7 percent approval rating and is not even really popular within the opposition. So the coup moved through various phases. And one of the major phases was on February 23rd when the opposition attempted to ram through trucks stuffed with US aid on the Santander bridge between Colombia and Venezuela. They failed to get it through and wound up burning their own aid as I illustrated at the Grayzone. And so Guaidó then wanted to go on a tour of Europe and the US said *No, you have to stay in the country* and in their words *take advantage of the momentum*, according to a report by Bloomberg. And so Guaidó starts going around the country trying to whip people up, have massive rallies. And the rallies don't happen. The opposition presence in the street as I saw was very small.

And so you get to a situation in early March where there's a certain desperation. Russia is beginning to move some personnel in, China and Russia are speaking up at the UN Security Council. It's gonna be very hard to do some kind of military intervention as in Syria. So the only weapons left are sanctions and sabotage. On March 7th, Senator Marco Rubio who's this Miami-Cuban senator, a Republican, a big neocon pet project in Washington, who's been sort of the leading face of destabilising Venezuela, gets up at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and he says that *Venezuela is going to enter a period of suffering unlike any nation in modern history*. He actually said that. And then he called for widespread unrest. Which is a pretty disturbing thing for any senator to say about another society, but something that we're familiar with in Washington.

Five hours later, the hydro electric plant at the Guri dam collapsed and 21 states and Venezuela including Caracas lost their power and the blackouts continued for days. Venezuelans understood this as a kind of war to go with the economic war. Those who support the government are convinced that this this was the result of sabotage. And I've seen a decent amount of evidence to suggest it was with the burning of transmission lines. Then the blackouts return again later in March and people are mobilizing in the streets

just to maintain their daily lives. They see it as an act of resistance, particularly those who support the government. The opposition remains sort of immobilized and has not been able to exploit the blackout at all. And then US sanctions are coming in to basically prevent an economy that has hyper inflation, which is one of the worst things that can happen to an economy, from being able to recover. And I think that will succeed. They are going to contract this economy and make the lives of ordinary Venezuelans far, far worse.

However, again they've underestimated the government and it's been able to get oil shipments out through new clients like India. And so one of the most interesting things to see come out of Venezuela, which is a lot like what we saw in Syria, is kind of a new world order starting to come into focus where mid-level powers like Turkey as well as Russia and China and some African states are defying the US and supporting Venezuela, and Russia is supporting them directly, has really trumped the US and its threats of military intervention. So Venezuela to me is sort of the front line in the fight against empire right now.

RJ: Can you talk about the media and its whole reaction to the Venezuela situation? Here in Germany for example, when they don't call him a dictator, he's an autocrat. I'm talking about Maduro, and so on.

MB: I assume your media is almost identical to ours.

RJ: It's not much different, no.

MB: Yes. So your viewers will be really familiar with a media where correspondent after a correspondent kind of chooses to be stenographers of the National Security State. And they're also sort of competing with one another for who can write the story that most demonizes the Venezuelan government and sensationalize as an economic crisis and paints it as a humanitarian catastrophe in all of this narrative that aims to create space, political space for some kind of intervention.

RJ: Well, you were there and there was no humanitarian catastrophe. I mean, when I think about humanitarian catastrophe I think about Yemen and at one point there was like ten children dying a minute or something like that in 2017-18.

MB: Yes. If you went there [Rees] I think you would wonder in the back of your mind as I did, is it maybe going to be worse than I expect and like maybe the media's right. Let me just prepare myself. You kind of have to prepare yourself mentally for things to be as horrible as the media makes it out to be. Just so you can approach the situation realistically. And when I got there I was shocked. I mean I was really shocked. It was nothing like the media had made it out to be. It was a functional society. There was an economic crisis and it was horrible in that it's very difficult to pay for basic goods but people managed to get by and they would get by with debit cards. They would get by through the CLAP program which is basically a free government food program.

The extremely poor - I went to open air food markets where they would get food for well below market value. I stayed for a point - I stayed in all different neighborhoods - but I stayed for a point in an upscale neighborhood which was a base of the opposition. It's where Guaidó's mentor Leopoldo Lopez had been

mayor. There, you see women in the street with yoga mats like you're in Brooklyn or Berlin on a Sunday. You see people eating at sushi restaurants and hanging out at upscale cafes. You know, the humanitarian crisis, people say *Oh, Caracas is a bubble*. But I went to the poorest neighborhoods and people are not suffering a humanitarian crisis. It's an economic crisis and they reject that narrative. And then more than that they reject the idea that they can't feed themselves and defend themselves and that they need the US to come in and save them with aid. What they're facing now are sanctions that prevent the government from buying basic food and medicine, and that's what the sanctions aim to do.

So there's the hypocrisy of the humanitarian narrative is exposed by the sanctions. And we've seen so little reporting in our western media about the sanctions themselves. One of the most shocking things I've read about Venezuela was by Human Rights Watch, I think by their America's director José Miguel Vivanco, who was basically a straight up coup operative, at least he behaves like one, stating almost non sequitur that the sanctions only affect members of Maduro's inner circle and do not affect the general population. That's just simply not true because it's depriving the government of the ability to buy backup fuel at its power plants. It's depriving it of the ability to buy medicine. And much of the food that comes to Venezuela is imported, which puts them in a really disadvantageous position.

I was in Nicaragua the last year after the coup that struck that country, it was a soft coup, it was a little bit more like a color revolution than what we're seeing in Venezuela. But one weapon Nicaragua has is that it has 70 to 80 percent food sovereignty. It has a real strong rural base, an agricultural base, and people produce most of their food there. In Venezuela. You know it's a petro state, the agricultural economy is very weak, and they haven't been able to get people to move to the countryside and generate the kind of food sovereignty they need to defend against these sanctions. So that's another internal issue and it was a debate a lot of people were having is *How do we restructure society so that we can fight this war on our basic food supply*.

RJ: So I guess there's lots to be said about the responsibility of journalists. But I wanted to ask a question about response. You obviously consume the news as well and the responsibility of consumers of news how they do due diligence and what you do when you read the news and what you should be aware of and look for.

MB: One thing I do is just I examine as many sources as possible. So if you're following what's happening in Venezuela, go to [Venezuelanalysis\[.com\]](http://Venezuelanalysis.com) which is an independent English-language website that's run by some of the best reporters in Caracas. Many of them are Westerners who live there. And they are basically showing another side of the situation and producing really serious analyses that I think has been much more level-headed than what we see in for example the New York Times where I saw a correspondent last month predicting that the country would descend into a Mad Max law of the jungle and no such thing happened. You know you can look at MINT Press News which has a lot of good information on Venezuela. Telesur, yes it's state funded media, they are based in Caracas and Quito, but you need to see another side of the story, so Telesur English is really useful there.

And one thing you would get for example, just one little tidbit that I benefited from [Venezuelanalysis](http://Venezuelanalysis.com), was to look at this photograph, and these photographs that are being widely shared during the blackout in

Venezuela, of people who appeared to be going into a drainage ditch or in a river and they were said to be drinking from the sewage because they were so desperate. The electricity was out and they were unable to get their water pumped to their homes. And so they were drinking out of the sewage. And you think to yourself like OK, people are desperate but people aren't stupid enough to drink out of sewage like I don't know who does that. And it seems like an insult to poor people. Venezuelanalysis explained pretty clearly that this photograph was actually of people going to a fresh water spring that had freshwater coming out of pipes above a river, the Guaire river in Caracas. And they were drinking fresh water and filling each other's buckets up. It is actually a photograph that provided a portrait of the kind of solidarity that has helped Venezuela get through what might be a manufactured crisis.

And just to see lies like that stand in Western media with hardly any challenge is really frustrating. But you know if you're getting the other side of the story you know where to go for critical alternative analysis and reporting. I think it will help you understand what is really happening on the ground and what's going to happen next. And also being there for me was extremely beneficial, not everyone can be there. Even using Google Translate to translate Spanish articles, you just have to put in some serious diligence to break through this - it's like an iron curtain of corporate media lies on this issue. It's really shocking. Syria to me was I thought the press was doing the worst job it ever had. But now I think there's a strong competition with Venezuela.

RJ: Can you just mention the name of your book one last time and maybe where interested viewers could purchase it?

MB: It's called "The Management of Savagery", it's been published by Verso and you can get it at verso.com or you can go on Amazon or any independent bookseller. "The Management of Savagery".

RJ: I guess it's too early to be expecting a German-language version of that?

MB: Well, if there's any way you can help, the book does deal somewhat with German politics and the transformation of German politics and I think there's a lot that I learned from my trips in Germany about how Europe was changing. And, you know, how people can respond.

RJ: Max Blumenthal, thank you for joining us.

MB: Thanks so much for doing this.

RJ: And thank you for watching. Please don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel. Click on the bell if you'd like a notification when we release new material. And if you like what you just saw and would like to support us in our work, you can do so by the way of donation. All the information on how to donate can be found at acTVism.org. Thanks once again, and we'll see you next time.

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