



Journalist Anya Parampil on Julian Assange & United States Intervention in Latin America

This transcript may not be 100% accurate due to audio quality or other factors.

Zain Raza (ZR): It's Zain Raza. And welcome back to our program, the source, where we interview investigative journalists, whistleblowers and policy experts. Today, I will be talking to Anya Parampil an investigative reporter for the Gray Zone Project. The Gray Zone Project is an independent news website that does not take money from corporations. Anya glad to have you on the program.

Anya Parampil (AP): My pleasure. Good to be with you.

ZR: I want to begin with Julian Assange. Prosecutors in Sweden have dropped the case, the rape case against him, citing that the evidence has substantially weakened since the originally alleged rape against him. Now the focus is going solely on his extradition to the US, the case is scheduled to begin in February. What is your assessment of this case and what implications does it have on democracy?
[00:00:48][23.3]

AP: It has horrible implications for democracy. I am in complete agreement with WikiLeaks co-founder Kristin Hrafnsson who said that Assange's case, as it stands right now, needs to be resolved as quickly as possible. And if it indeed goes through to the extradition level and he is sent to the United States, it will mean the death of any semblance of press freedom in the United States and the UK. I think Assange is the most prolific and important journalist of our time. I'm completely horrified by the silence in the US press corps. His colleagues here in the States have instead, and the vast majority of them have helped support this narrative, that he somehow is a Russian plant who helped change the outcome of the 2016 election, rather than reflect on some of the mistakes made by Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in the 2016 race against Trump. And in doing that, members of the press here in the States have supported the most blatant attack on press freedom that I have seen in my life, and I would say even decades before, I can't think of anything so horrific.

Think about the fact that 60 doctors recently sent a letter to the British Home Secretary declaring Assange to be at risk of death over the conditions in which the UK government is keeping him. The most stunning aspect for me is the silence. That all of this can be happening right before our eyes. The UN Rapporteur on Torture can issue a report, as he did in November, saying Assange could die due to the arbitrariness of his conditions, and also the the awful treatment he's been getting in prison. His parents are saying that he could die at any moment. So I just really don't understand how this isn't the number one issue for all journalists, even in the corporate press.

I think after the election of Donald Trump there was this panic in the US elite press corps saying that Trump was attacking press freedom, that he was calling CNN fake news and therefore journalists in the United States were at risk. I think those people are completely infantile, especially when we see,

again, the fact that they've been silent as Assange, someone who to this day. We often publish articles at the Gray Zone about Latin America, about China and we always find that doing a search of WikiLeaks cables is so valuable for the work that we do. Still to this day, WikiLeaks adds another layer to reporting that we and other journalists do. And so I'm eternally grateful to Assange and WikiLeaks. And I hope that this case comes to a resolution soon and that we see Assange free on the outside, unlike we've seen him for several years now.

ZR: I want to switch gears and talk about a topic that is no longer making the headlines, at least when it comes to German media outlets. Earlier this year, you visited Venezuela during the crisis. Talk about your on ground observations there. And how do you compare the coverage of the media that you were seeing in the US?

AP: I was in Venezuela twice this year. I spent two months out of the year in Venezuela reporting from the ground. Since the Trump administration implemented this coup attempt recognizing Juan Guaido, a previously unknown lawmaker as president of the country and then pressuring its allies such as Germany and other European states to do the same. I went to Venezuela in February and I was also there in July. And what I found is that, while the US media and I would imagine German media as well, has woven a narrative of dictatorship and authoritarianism, versus a democratic movement in support of Juan Guaido, a dictator [Maduro] who for some reason just can't manage his economy. He [Maduro] doesn't care about his people to the point that they're starving in the street and eating dogs. Not only did I find that the gravity, the severity of the humanitarian crisis, which does exist and is the intended result of US financial sanction policy, it was greatly exaggerated by U.S. media. Venezuelans were not eating zoo animals or even begging in the streets to the level that I've seen in some U.S. cities.

But most importantly, the context missing from Western media's coverage of the humanitarian crisis and the suffering in Venezuela is again the fact that this is the intended policy, the intended result, an outcome of U.S. financial sanctions. I was in Venezuela, actually, for the Ministerial Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was held in Caracas over the summer. And during that meeting, I sat in a pretty small room with diplomats from all over the world, foreign ministers, delegates representing their countries at the United Nations who came together. And these included, actually, officials from China and Russia, who, even though we're not part of the original Non-Aligned Movement, are observing members today. And they sat in a room and one by one, denounced the impact of U.S. sanctions on their countries. We're talking about leaders from Syria, The Democratic People's Republic of North Korea, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, etc. All spoke about the impact of sanctions, and the Iranian foreign minister, Javad Zarif – that's when he actually coined that term – he held up his phone and he said to the other diplomats in the room, please stop using the word “sanctions”, they're not sanctions, this is nothing but “financial terrorism”. He said, look up the result of terrorism on the Internet. You'll see it's political violence implemented in order to achieve some sort of political result. And that is very clearly what the US government is doing with sanctions. He said, they're trying to terrorize our populations into rising up and changing the governments. And US politicians have admitted to this in the past. I believe it was Secretary of State Mike Pompeo who said something along the lines of sanctions on Iran are designed to strangle the economy and force the people to rise up. He probably didn't mean to say that, because the thing about the Trump administration is that they always say the quiet part out loud. But I think that was useful, at least for people like us and the public, and understanding what exactly these sanctions are designed to do.

And when I was in Venezuela I actually also had the chance to interview people who had lined up in the public square, “*Plaza Bolívar*” in Caracas, to sign a letter denouncing US intervention in their country. Thousands of people. And they did this all throughout the country and all of them, each of them, what they told me was that they understand that they are a target of US imperialism, because

they have built a model in Venezuela, a democratic socialist model, which was successful for many years and actually celebrated for many of the advancements in economic and social mobility that it saw during the Chavez years before the crash in oil prices. And they said we're being punished for being a sovereign and independent state. And please tell the US people and the people of the world that we love you. We see you as brothers, but please tell your governments to stop attacking us and let us live in peace and as independent sovereign people as they should have the right to do. And that is the singular, most powerful message that I got from from the people there.

And then something else; when we talk about Venezuela, I'm sure you hear this all the time in Germany, too: it's a narco-dictatorship, there's drug running or drug dealers at the high levels of government, and yet I also spent some time this year in Honduras where the current President Juan Hernandez is actually named as a co-conspirator in a case in the United States against his brother, Tony Hernandez, who was charged with running millions of dollars worth of cocaine and weapons into the United States. He was found guilty in a U.S. court in New York City, I believe in September or October, just a few weeks ago. And again, the president of Honduras is named as a co-conspirator in this multi-million dollar drug case. And we never hear his name in U.S. media. We never hear about a narco-dictatorship in Honduras. We never hear about the fact that former Mexican president, an ally of the United States and Enrique Peña Nieto, was also found to be receiving money from drug dealers through the El Chapo case trial in the United States.

So for some reason, there's all this naked evidence of U.S. allies or, for example, Álvaro Uribe, the former president of Colombia, he was actually once named in Defense Intelligence Agency documents as one of the top drug dealers in all of Colombia. And yet none of these individuals - he was actually given a nice, comfortable job at Georgetown after leaving office in Colombia. These people are welcomed. They're friends of the United States, even though they're explicitly implicated in dealing drugs. I've never heard any evidence presented on that level regarding the Venezuelan government. And yet we hear all the time narco dictatorship, narco dictatorship. I didn't find any evidence of drug dealing or a dictatorship in Venezuela. So anyone who does have the opportunity to travel to the country and see it for themselves, I encourage them to do so, but definitely make an effort to look beyond just corporate media or even some state media headlines with regard to the situation there.

ZR: I want to pick up on that and dig a bit deeper as it's the same case in German mainstream media outlets that do not talk about US involvement in terms of staging or coordinating a coup or trying to overthrow a government. It is usually presented as an internal conflict in which internationally actors then take sides and they are usually presented as neutral actors but there are no concrete details of how the U.S. government is trying to overthrow a certain government. You provide a different perspective as you just did. So let's dig deeper into this. Talk about U.S. involvement in Venezuela since the Bush administration, and up until this point.

AP: Well, the United States has consistently attempted to overthrow the Bolivarian revolution, which began in 1998, when Hugo Chavez, a former military officer, was democratically elected to lead the country. He assumed office in 1999, and though he didn't initially define himself as a socialist, he did naturally start on this path of socializing the country's economy, particularly the oil industry. This was a main focus of his presidency for the first several years, and when he really took a fine tooth comb and began reading out some of the corrupt elements of the industry in the early 2000s, that's when we saw the United States really violently attempt to remove him from office. And that first came in the form of a coup attempt in 2002, where the military actually kidnaped Chavez, put him on a plane, flew him out of the country. And the coup, the putsch leaders actually recognized the head of the Chamber of Commerce, then Pedro Carmona as the president of the country. So that's just a very naked way of putting business, private enterprise, in charge of the country. He signed this incredibly draconian measure known as the Carmona decree, which essentially froze all democratic processes in the

country. It suspended the national assembly, did these things that a dictator would do, right? But we never heard that word, instead he was celebrated in Western media and presses: Venezuela's new face.

But remarkably, millions or hundreds of thousands of people, at least, across the country, and tens of thousands of people in Caracas swarmed the streets and demanded Chavez's return. There were protests. People were actually shot by security forces for demonstrating and trying to win their democracy back. But they were successful. And Chavez came back. The elite of the country were forced to bring him because the country would have fallen into complete chaos if they hadn't obeyed the people's will. And from that point on, the government was able to implement more policies. Eventually Chavez even tried to define Venezuela; he actually ran a national campaign, a referendum to define Venezuela as a 21st century socialist country. And during that period in 2007, the United States was shifting from a focus on the Middle East and looking back at Latin America. And that's when we saw some of the first student protests in 2007 against this measure to define Venezuela as 21st century socialism. This is when Juan Guaido first enters the political arena in Venezuela. He's part of this group of U.S. trained students. And there's actually a great report at The Nation, which talked about how some of the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and State Department officials who were working there at the time were speaking so proudly about these students that they said they'd trained in democracy promotion. And one of them said when we see them out in the streets, it's like watching one of our children or something like that graduate from university. That was one of the only times the opposition succeeded in defeating Chavezmo at the ballot box, when they were successful in blocking that referendum to define the country as socialist. But there was still no way for the opposition to effectively overthrow the rule of Chavezmo in the Bolivarian government. Then things start to get more violent after Chavez passes away in 2013. Since then, the opposition has led several violent campaigns, known as Guarimbas, as they did in Nicaragua. The right wing opposition there, they'll build blockades in the road, you'll see masked men in the streets wreaking havoc, encouraging violence. Pulling my friend and I'm sure someone you guys have hosted. Abby Martin did incredible reporting, I believe in 2017 from some of the Guarimbas where they documented how these masked men would drag truck drivers out of their vehicles and light them on fire, light trucks on fire.

That's when they killed Orlando Figueroa, a black Chavista, just for walking in an opposition neighborhood while wearing a red t-shirt and there have been several of these campaigns since Chavez's death because the opposition thought without Chavez, they would have this ability to easily overthrow the system. And yet it didn't work. It still did not work. And the real intensification of U.S. policy against Venezuela came in 2015 when U.S. President Barack Obama signed an executive order declaring Venezuela to be a national security threat to the United States. Although there was no clear reason given for what threat Venezuela posed me sitting here in Washington, for example, the measure was used as a justification from that point on to intensify financial sanctions. Again, terrorism, economic terrorism, as the Iranian foreign minister would say, and those reached new heights under Trump, who across the board has increased US reliance on economic warfare as a means through which to achieve its foreign policy objectives. But in the case of Trump, especially since he recognized Guaido as the president of Venezuela, these sanctions have been designed to cripple, completely cripple, the country's oil industry. And all of its access to the international market, it can't really go out and receive capital very easily just to fund its government. It's very difficult for it to get loans. And earlier this year, the State Department even published a fact sheet on Venezuela where it listed its so-called accomplishments with regard to Venezuela foreign policy. It actually said as one of its accomplishments that Guaido had established himself as interim president of the country, that oil output had been reduced, that there were oil tankers just abandoned off the coast in Venezuela, and it had this just long list, which Venezuelan U.N. ambassador Samuel Moncada described to me as a confessions list. He said, they're essentially listing everything that they've done, which again, there probably shouldn't be admitting publicly the favorite results of their policy, but because the Trump

administration doesn't always think things through, they just went ahead and threw this on the State Department Web site, and they actually deleted that page within 24 hours because they realized, oh, shoot, we shouldn't be admitting any of this. But I obtained a copy and it's forever posted online at the Gray Zone. You can read it there. But it essentially was a list of confessions. The US saying that it was starving Venezuela's economy and this was something great and something that it wanted to do, even though it just claims that sanctions don't target the people, they're only there to hurt officials. I interviewed Mark Weisbrot, who's the co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. He's the coauthor of that report which found that between the years 2016 and 2018, there were 40 000 excess deaths in Venezuela as a result of U.S. sanctions, because it had cut them off from the international food market, and they were not able to import medicine at a normal rate. And he told me this list, which the State Department put on its own site, is them admitting that they're killing Venezuelans. And that that these policies, if they remain in place, will only continue to kill Venezuelans. It's really something shocking again. Something that the media should be outraged about, especially all these people who claim to be caring so much about a humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Well, the solution is very simple. End the sanctions.

ZR: Let's run some counter arguments. I'm going to go point by point. I'll state each point specifically and just briefly, you can counter them. So these are the so-called standard arguments that are brought on the table. Let's start with the first one: Venezuela's Juan Guaido the so-called opposition leader is recognized by most international countries and even the Organization for American States, known as OAS.

AP: Whenever the United States says that the majority of the world recognizes Juan Guaido, it reveals very much about how the United States views the world. The best way that I always like to represent it is, I remember, I think it was the economist that had this map of the world, and it said, look at how the majority of the world's countries recognize Juan Guaido. But then Africa and Asia, vast swaths of the world, were completely blank and just removed. We just ignored them. Totally forgot they exist. I guess the United States doesn't consider those countries to be the world. The number that someone like Elliot Abrams, Trump's special representative on Venezuela gives is constantly changing, but it's somewhere between 50 and 60 countries, I believe, that the US claims recognizes Juan Guaido. And yet there are 193 countries in the United Nations. So I mentioned that conference, the Non-Aligned Meeting Movement conference, the meeting of the ministers and top diplomats, which I attended in July, and during that meeting, 120 countries which were gathered there voted on a resolution unanimously recognizing Maduro as the legitimate president of Venezuela, denouncing U.S. sanctions and targeted attempts to undermine and interfere in Venezuela's internal affairs. That's the majority of the world. The majority of the world is on the other side.

ZR: The next counter argument, Maduro bribes his own people with food aid and water, and that's why he stays in power. But he really does not have any public support.

AP: I'll just keep this one very short. I wish in the United States, that my elected officials bribed me with food and water and health care and education and housing and these things that we're supposed to have, which in the United States we don't really have access to, because we're just left to the forces of the market. Yet we're supposed to think ... it just sounds like that's actually what governing is. You give people something in return for their support. Again, I wish that people in the States were given food in order to encourage them to vote. Instead, we have record levels of child poverty, and children going without a meal every day. So I would rather have had the bribery thank you very much.

ZR: Add to that record levels of military spending. So the next counter point is Maduro has abysmal human rights record. He jails journalists and kills activists on the ground. What did you observe?

AP: I did not find in my experience any evidence that there was some sort of secret police force or jailing of journalists and political dissidents in Venezuela but I want to focus specifically on that report issued by Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights. She released a report in June which was widely anticipated. People were looking forward to seeing what she'd found, because she'd actually gone and visited Venezuela herself. And I have to say that the report was completely abysmal. It's been since used to, for example, justify US sanctions on the CLAP program, which is a food distribution program in Venezuela through which the government delivers food to six million households now twice a month. And she actually put in her human rights report that the CLAP program is used as a way to spy on the population and that it's not given to opposition families. This was a blatant lie, because I've seen and so have many other people. I'm not the only one who would say this, the distribution of the CLAP Program. People in the opposition actually participate in the distribution, they receive clap. But again, her own work was then used by the US government to justify sanctions targeting the food program. More than that, her report relied on, 80 % of her sources cited in that report were actually based outside of Venezuela, despite the fact that she went there and interviewed people herself, including the mother of Orlando Figueroa, that black Chavista I mentioned who was lynched and lit on fire by an angry right wing anti-government mob. And she completely ignored right wing violence, didn't mention Orlando's name once in her entire report, even though she looked into the eyes of his grieving mother, who was crying in front of her. So I think when we talk about human rights, that is just a perfect example of how human rights is actually something that's weaponized by the United States to target its enemies. And meanwhile, human rights abuses in Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador are completely ignored. If the United States cared about human rights - and this is just a basic point that we hear time and we can make time and time again, it's almost seems like a cliché - why are we strong allies with the Wahhabi kingdom of Saudi Arabia or the apartheid state of Israel? U.S. policy is not about human rights, and any abuses or problems in Venezuela should be left to the Venezuelan people to resolve and to work on themselves. That is what independent sovereign nations are supposed to be allowed to do.

ZR: So my last counterargument before we switched the topic, Maduro was responsible for poor economic planning, for example, not diversifying from oil, which led to the current discontent and thereby the uprising.

AP: It's true that Venezuela's economy relies heavily on oil, and that the social state relied heavily on high oil prices in order to function. But the reality is that is not something which began with the Maduro or even Chavez administrations. Venezuela was a petro-state for decades, stretching back to the 1950s. Their entire economy has been structured around the oil economy. And the reality is, under Maduro, the government actually did take steps to diversify the economy. I've seen especially how in the areas of food production the government has tried to encourage the citizens to kind of rethink the way, especially now because sanctions have cut them off from the international market, they produce food in their own country. They would like to increase their their own food sovereignty because that's definitely an issue. And as for mistakes the government made, I think it's normal for any government to make mistakes, but not the kind that would lead to the massive inflation that we see now, in the massive scale of suffering, that has to be the result of something unnatural, something on the outside. And it is. US sanctions are designed to do this. Also, the US weaponizes the dollar, and this is not unique to Venezuela, but in Zimbabwe, for example, to any country that resists the US hegemonic order, for some reason we see these high rates of inflation, we're just supposed to believe that the government is so incompetent that it can't manage its economy. But most governments actually are able to correct something like inflation after a few months or a year period. The reason that they can't in Venezuela is, again, because this is manipulation coming from the outside. It's the black market. I mean, Colombia does everything that it can to keep the border unstable and to keep room for black market forces to exchange goods. And again, even if we're going to say the government made mistakes here and there, the suffering and the hardship is on a scale that it just can't be the only

reason. Even if you're going to acknowledge someone's point there, they're going to have to look a little bit deeper to explain why things are this scale that they are.

ZR: Let's look at other countries in the region, Honduras and Bolivia. The latter making headlines. I want to focus first on Honduras. As the coverage on this issue, let alone the context behind it, is seldom known in Germany. This summer, on the 10th anniversary of the ouster of the Honduras President Manuel Zelaya, you interviewed him on the Gray Zone. Could you provide us some historical context to Honduras and his presidency and also tell our viewers what actually happened there?

AP: Yes. Jose Manuel Zelaya was ousted in a US-backed coup in 2009, shortly after Obama took office, promising hope and change. And Zelaya had been elected as kind of a center left candidate. But then throughout his presidency, started to make an effort to reach out to Chavez to join ALBA, the congregation of Latin American and Caribbean states, which Chavez established as kind of an alternative to the U.S. dominated regional bloc. And Zelaya actually spoke with me about how the U.S., under Bush and Obama, officials came to him and said, you're not allowed to do that. You can't build relations with Chávez. You can't go and ask to get oil from him because it's cheaper, you have to continue to spend money millions of dollars getting it from us. And something else Zelaya did was embark on a campaign to hold a constitutional reformation, rewrite the constitution in the country at a time when it was actually illegal to even bring that up as a point as a political or campaign promise. So all he did was put on the ballot, a referendum, saying, should we consider our ability to have a constitutional assembly, to rewrite our constitution? And that day, the day of that vote, was when the U.S. backed military, raided his home, kidnaped him at gunpoint and put him on a plane to Costa Rica. He was left on a runway in Costa Rica in his pajamas and walked off the runway and ran into some people who said, are you lost? And he said, I'm the president of Honduras. And they just dropped me here. And then he gives a press conference there in Costa Rica. But it was just an old fashioned military coup and it was carried out by the Obama administration, particularly Hillary Clinton, as the Secretary of State, wrote about in her [Hillary] book how she was instrumental in pushing for that coup. And for some reason deleted that section of her [Hillary] book. I think it's called "Tough Choices". But she deleted that chapter, removed it from her book in the paperback edition. So I guess she grew ashamed of her role in that coup.

Interestingly, the day following or the day of the coup, Obama went out to the press and said, what has happened in Honduras is a coup. Jose Manuel Zelaya remains the legitimate president of the country. We denounced this precedent. And he never said those words again, from that point on, Zelaya was out, Obama must have gotten the memo that he was responsible for it and that there was no turning back. I know some people joke that maybe he was shown the JFK assassination video, I've heard that joke made before, I'll just put it out there. But Obama changed his tune on the coup pretty quickly, and since then Honduras has been completely destroyed. I mean, you want to talk about a narco-dictatorship and a humanitarian crisis.

What I saw in Honduras was far more disturbing and dire than anything I witnessed in Venezuela. There's just complete destitution in the streets. Poverty has doubled. Extreme poverty has doubled since the coup. And human rights organizations have defined Honduras as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for environmental activists and human rights defenders. I interviewed the mother of Berta Cáceres, who has now kind of become a symbol of the movement. She was the anti capitalist, anti imperialist, environmentalist, indigenous activist of Honduras who did incredible work for decades, founding one of the major environmental groups in Honduras, to protect her land from international corporations, which raided the country following the coup. And she was killed in her home by masked men, paid paramilitary groups who were paid by the private corporation, which she was fighting, over a dam project in her hometown. And actually just this week, seven men were sentenced for her death. So there's been at least a semblance of justice. But we know that the true

perpetrators, the people that are truly responsible -- the corporations and by extension, the US administration which carried out this coup -- will never be held responsible.

At the same time in Honduras this year, 10 years since that coup, while we were there, there were protests against current President Juan Orlando Hernandez for his massive austerity program that he's implemented in the country. He was facing massive demonstrations from teachers and students. While we were there, we visited the campus of the Autonomous University of Honduras, UNAH, where students were actually on a massive strike. They were not going to class. They were protesting cuts on their education. They were saying that they didn't have equipment, for example, medical students didn't have proper equipment to carry out labs. They said that the quality of their classrooms, and just every aspect of their lives, had been completely destroyed as a result of austerity, and all Hernandez's cuts to education and while we were there Hernandez actually allowed the local police to enter the campus and fire upon students, shooting several of them. Fortunately, no one was killed. But we filed a report about that at the Gray Zone, and that's in spite of the fact that the university is an autonomous university. It's supposed to be completely independent from the state government forces. Police forces are not allowed on campus. So it was actually a violation of the campus's autonomy. Yet there was no coverage about any of this in Western media and the US media, I imagine in German media as well. If it were happening in Venezuela, I'm sure again, it would have been on the front page of the paper, but there were massive demonstrations against him. I saw it hire high school students fired upon with tear gas for protesting these same cuts to education spending. And even now, months later, after all of this unrest, after again, the president's brother was found guilty of running cocaine and guns to the United States. He's sitting there comfortably in the seat of power, because at the end of the day, the US controls the country, the largest military base in the region. The U.S. military base in the region is in Honduras just outside of Tegucigalpa. It's the base through which the United States ran its dirty wars of the eighties. It's it's this base of evil in the region, and they're never gonna let it go. And through that and through its cooperation with the Honduran military in the war on drugs, it completely controls the Honduran armed forces. And as long as that's the case, Juan Orlando Hernandez is safe, and any Democratic leader or someone who comes hoping to change the country is at risk because they'll be carried out at gunpoint. I should just make one more point. According to the Honduran constitution, it is illegal for a president to serve two consecutive terms in office. And yet that's exactly what Juan Orlando Hernandez has been allowed to do. The same Organization of American States which denounces Venezuela is actually creating the pretext for a military intervention there just turns a blind eye to the fact that Juan Orlando Hernandez, not only ran for a second term, but is carrying out, is living governing through his second term, even though that's constitutionally illegitimate. We're told that Evo Morales was a dictator because he ran for a fourth term, even though his country's Supreme Court ruled he was allowed to do so. And yet a blatant narco dictator is sitting in Honduras with the support of the United States. I find that to reveal everything you need to know about U.S. attitudes toward the region.

ZR: Moving to our last topic for today: Bolivia. There's a narrative floating in the coverage here which claims that Evo Morales's ousting was his own making due to his initiative to rewrite the constitution, ongoing corruption, mass discontent. What is your assessment of the sequence of events there and how much weight do these arguments carry?

AP: Again, the case in Bolivia, really, if we look at it properly, does tell us everything we need to know about the region, because we're told that the reason we need to support, for example, US regime change in Venezuela is because there is a dictatorship and the economy is terribly mismanaged. And yet in Bolivia, the economy was doing great, especially when you compare with other countries in the region. No one could say that Evo Morales was presiding over failed economic policies. In fact, I spoke with one official who told me the irony is the Bolivians were too confident in their economy. They thought that if they just things were going well, that the United States would never decide. Okay, let's come down there and carry out some crazy operation. And yet we were all shocked by how

quickly events turned in Bolivia. Evo Morales, not only was he allowed to seek that fourth term by the country's Supreme Court, which I want to stress again, because that is one of the great myths, is he ran too many times or he was being a dictator. Well his country, the Supreme Court like everywhere else, has the final say when it comes to the law of the land. And they sanctioned, allowed, his fourth run for office. But that question aside, he immediately recognized and acknowledged the OAS report into alleged irregularities in in the his re-election. Although, again, there's a great reported the Center for Economic and Policy Research, which actually looked at that OAS report and broke down how it was a manipulation of numbers and graphs and everything to make it seem as though there were irregularities. There was actually no proof of abuses or fraud in the election. But still, Evo said, fine, we'll have another election, we'll wipe the slate clean and we'll go forward from here. And then yet within hours, the head of his military, the head of his armed forces, was calling for him to resign and later that night, I believe it was Sunday, a few weeks ago, you had just absolutely horrific right wing fascists running inside of Evo's house and videotaping where he slept and where he kept his shoes and the treadmill where he ran. And Evo was on a plane to Mexico, I mean, that's how quickly things turned.

And what have we seen since then? Have we seen a restoration of democracy and peace? No. We've seen a woman, similarly to Juan Guido, who many people in the country didn't even know existed before this date, I mean, Añez declared herself president of the country while she marches down the street with military leaders and heavily armed guards. It's very clear who's keeping her in power. And most disturbingly, we've seen a coordinated campaign of violence and terror perpetrated against Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS) the party and movement represented by Evo Morales at the top, but which all throughout the country consisted of local officials, mayors and and movement leaders, union leaders who have been killed, kidnaped, brutalized in the street. My colleague and friend, Wyatt Reid has been down in Bolivia reporting for the Gray Zone, and he's documented some of the horrific cases of abuse against MAS leaders. One local leader he released, a video of you can find on his Twitter, was a woman who was kidnaped, and they cut her hair, they shaved her hair nearly bald and threw her out in the street. This was the campaign of terror that the military and armed forces unleashed en masse. And that is why if we look back to Evo's words, the day he resigned and decided to leave the country, he said, I am doing this to protect the people of MAS, because they are being kidnaped, their houses are being lit on fire.

What is that? What is that? And when a president is forced to resign because of violence being carried out against his party, that's nothing but a coup. We've seen horrific images of funeral processions being tear gassed and fired upon by police, coffins thrown about in the street, because of the armed forces terrorizing indigenous people for even just trying to honor and remember their dead. I think we don't even know the true scale of the violent and death campaign in Bolivia. They actually are trying to cleanse a movement, a political movement of working people. It's what happened in Honduras. I saw the effects of that nine years later after a coup. How that state had systematically gone in and said, all right, we want to kill these activists. These people have been making problems for us. These people have been standing up to private corporations and industry and capital. Let's get this list, this checklist and one by one, start weeding them off. In Bolivia the far right has been waiting to do that for 13 years and there should be an international outcry. Michelle Bachelet at the U.N. High Commission on Human Rights should be issuing reports on Bolivia or what about Chile, her own home country, for example, where demonstrators have been targeted with bullets in their eyes. Doctors, optometrists in Chile had actually issued a report saying that the security forces there were systematically targeting demonstrators, shooting them in their eyes. Yet Michelle Bachelet is not issuing a report on Chile, even though that's where she's from, and she was tortured by the Chilean dictatorship. And yet she doesn't bat an eye or shed a tear for the people of Chile, she doesn't bat an eye or shed a tear for the people of Bolivia, and neither does international media. What does that tell us about that? The human rights organizations, the journalists; it tells us that they don't actually care

about people. They pretend to care about the people of Venezuela because they exist to perpetrate and to further a narrative to help private capital, private industry come into these countries and pillage their land, kill people. And when it's happening before our eyes in other countries, they're completely silent. And so that's the silence that I'm trying to break at the Gray Zone. I know it's what you guys are trying to do through your work in Germany, so I'm very grateful for that. And I just think that we all have to stick together and stay in touch and make sure that we get this information out as much as possible.

ZR: To pick up on that, “acTVism” was founded on the principles of solutions and painting also a positive vision of the future, which we think is missing on the Left. What would your assessment be -- if we think about this interview that we just had: Assange and Bolivia and Venezuela -- it's a pretty dire image. It's horrific for many people who feel helpless. What would you say? What people and individuals could do, let's say, in Germany and the US tomorrow after watching this interview, to help make the world a better place and help these countries and the people over there.

AP: Well, when it comes to activism, I think one of the most in my lifetime, the most effective and incredible experience I ever had, was the fight over the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C. earlier this year. I was part of a group known as the Embassy Protection Collective, which stayed inside of Venezuela's embassy at the invitation of the internationally recognized Maduro government in order to prevent it from being seized by the U.S. government and turned over to the so called Guaido officials in Washington. And this standoff went on for about a month. But for 10 days, I was actually stuck inside the embassy because crazy right wing Venezuelans and the U.S. security services had blocked the doors and weren't allowing food or water inside. They cut off our electricity, they cut off our water, they use the same tactics they use against the Venezuelan people, against their own citizens -- not on U.S. soil [misspoke here, not for Nemo] -- but on Venezuelan soil in the embassy, for attempting to protect the grounds. I don't know how quick how closely you guys followed it in Germany, but it was it was an event through which we were told that even Elliott Abrams was really upset by what we were doing and so that felt really good. And the reason I brought that up is because I think it was the perfect example of direct action that was taken by several activist groups in D.C. They organized and said, what can we do in Washington, D.C.? What can we target with our bodies in order to stand up to this coup? And at that point, it was the embassy in Venezuela or the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C..

Now, for example, with the Bolivia coup, we were having rallies at the Organization of American States, the OAS, because this is a group which have not only enabled the coup in Bolivia, but was also instrumental in the war on Venezuela, and delegitimizing its government in its electoral processes. And now, again, is even considering a measure, a treaty, which is going to act as the pretext for a military intervention in Venezuela. In New York, I know an incredible group of activists there who every Thursday hold a rally outside of The New York Times for Julian Assange. And they pass out information there. And they've said that The New York Times is the perfect target for their their passion. And their number one issue, which is Assange. So wherever you are, I think you can find different targets, like these. In Germany, maybe you could help come up with some ideas of what those are. But I mean, I would imagine even there is an embassy fight to be had there or find ways to challenge these officials. They come to university campuses, they go to think tanks. They they're more accessible than you think. And they should be put on the spot. German officials should be put on the spot for their support of this coup, and especially German officials, because I believe that the European governments didn't actually want to go along with the Trump coup, because just from a pragmatic standpoint, these countries want to do business and have relations with Venezuela. And if that's the case, you can't do it with Guaido. He doesn't actually represent any government. So in Germany and in Europe especially, I think politicians should be pushed, because they have to at some point acknowledge the failure of this coup policy in Venezuela. And also sanctions. Sanctions, they think is the number one issue that all of us in the States and US-aligned countries should be focused

on, because we're not going to see mass invasions, I think, on the scale of Iraq or Afghanistan. Those days are gone. The United States is relying on financial terrorism and its domination of the international financial system in order to wage war. And a lot of us are ignorant to it because it doesn't catch the headlines. We don't see the war with our own eyes. But it's happening. Over a third, about a third of the world's population currently lives under some form of U.S. sanctions. That's according to the deputy foreign minister of Russia whom I interviewed during the Non-Aligned Movement, he said Russia's government's analysis estimates that about 30 percent of the world. Think about that for a second. Thirty percent of the world lives under some form of U.S. economic terrorism. And Germany, the U.K., France, Canada, all these states are complicit in that policy. And so it's up to us as citizens of these countries to make the point that sanctions are a form of warfare. We're seeing it on an unprecedented scale. And we need to make that the center of our anti-war organizing.

ZR: Anya Parampil, investigative journalist at the Gray Zone. Thank you for this insightful for discussion.

AP: Thanks for hosting me Zain.

ZR: And thank you guys for tuning in today. Don't forget to subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking on the subscribe button below. And to donate, especially at a time when independent journalism is under attack. That is all from the team in Munich. My name is Zain Raza. See you guys next time.

END