

Venezuela's crisis, US military's opportunity

- Anya on Judging Freedom

Anya Parampil joins Judge Andrew Napolitano's Judging Freedom to discuss the earthquakes in Venezuela

#Andrew Napolitano

Hi, everyone. Judge Andrew Napolitano here for Judging Freedom. Today is Friday, June 26th, 2026. Anya Parampil, who has not been with us since she recently gave birth to a beautiful baby boy, joins us now. Anya, thank you. Congratulations on the new addition to your family. Anything that occupies Max's time is probably a good thing for the world. Welcome here, my dear friend.

#Anya

Thank you, Judge. It's good to be back.

#Andrew Napolitano

Okay, so I want to talk to you about events in Latin America, both Venezuela and Colombia. We'll start with Venezuela. Do we know the magnitude of the deaths, the injuries, and the destruction caused by these two earthquakes in Venezuela in the past 96 hours?

#Anya

We absolutely do not. We just have initial estimates starting out with roughly 600 dead. Now estimates are putting that closer to 900, though official government statistics are still around 600, and they say thousands are missing. Other independent groups have touted this number—50,000 missing. That's because at this moment, in the epicenter of the destruction, which is La Guaira, the capital of La Guaira State, near the capital district of Caracas in Venezuela, there are reports of hundreds of buildings completely collapsed since these two earthquakes hit the country seconds apart. I mean, you had apparently one registering about a 7.2 earthquake.

On the Richter scale, the other a 7.5 coming immediately after. These are earthquakes that haven't been seen in Venezuela for over a century. Though I will note that La Guaira, the city that we are discussing right now, is under the rubble, it was the site of another horrific event in 1999, when a massive storm poured so much water onto the coast that there was a huge landslide. The mountains

pushed tens of thousands of people into the sea in that moment in 1999. So this is a place that has dealt with tragedy and natural disasters before, but nothing on the scale of destruction in terms of the building collapse and the widespread destruction—an infrastructure catastrophe.

And the issue right now is that because U.S. sanctions have prevented Venezuela from purchasing the heavy lifting equipment needed for this kind of disaster response, for days, people were trapped under the rubble. Venezuela actually did not have the trucks and the equipment needed to rescue people, and so those early hours are so important in missions like this because there may still be people that are alive that could be saved if rubble is properly moved. Unfortunately, that couldn't happen. It's only today that we see these trucks coming in from El Salvador, from Mexico, from Colombia and Ecuador, that this real work of cleanup has begun.

It's pretty much been stalled up to now, with rescue workers complaining that they don't have the ability to move the rubble. And again, these U.S. sanctions clearly cut off Venezuela from purchasing these trucks. Now you have people in the opposition in the United States saying that this is proof of the incompetence of the government, as if this government is just so ridiculous that they wouldn't have these kinds of trucks and supplies on demand. There are plenty of independent experts and studies that demonstrate that sanctions are responsible for cutting Venezuela off from these supplies. So how many people died simply because we didn't allow them to have the trucks that are now arriving at this point?

#Andrew Napolitano

All right. So you took the next question out of my mouth, which is the geopolitical dimension to this. There's a map showing the epicenter of the earthquake. You can see the blue is the ocean and the green is the land, and you can see where the earthquake happened, where the earthquake struck. You can also see, if you look carefully, to the right of that epicenter is Caracas. You can see it if you look carefully. That, of course, is the capital. So after the United States kidnapped President Maduro and his wife from their bedroom in the middle of the night—this was months ago, this is January now—they still didn't lift the sanctions? No.

#Anya

They have lifted some specialized sanctions to allow for business contracts and oil deals the way the U.S. government sees fit. But there wasn't a blanket lifting of sanctions, no. On top of that, there are billions of dollars, I think roughly \$30 billion of just Venezuelan assets frozen in accounts in the United States and abroad that we've basically stolen since recognizing a shadow government there, that we haven't given back to the government. The IMF has announced a plan to release some frozen Venezuelan assets in order to go toward disaster relief. You can assume that that, I mean, with the history of foreign aid groups in Venezuela, is usually a pretty corrupt game.

And that's just, I think, what we could expect to come from the contracts that the U.S. is dictating are going to be going to the players in the United States that our government would like to see happen. You have already an exposé at The Grayzone recently published by my husband, where we discussed how Mauricio Claver-Carone, a figure who's not even in the Trump administration, is pretty much acting as a private business negotiator when he calls himself the Jared Kushner of Latin America, pretty much cutting these deals. I'm sure he's going to step in and have a big role to play in this kind of aid response if the U.S. and its allies are going to be managing it and releasing assets under the Trump administration.

#Andrew Napolitano

I would argue that a sanction that prevents a country from buying life-saving equipment is a war crime. I mean, it's a little late to buy trucks and bulldozers now. Three days after the earthquake hit, they should have existed and been possessed by the government before that. According to President Trump, the United States was going to take care of Venezuela after we kidnapped its president.

#Any

And in some ways, I would say that we are, and not in a way that the Venezuelan people necessarily have a say in. And that is, now we're seeing the U.S. consolidating the advances its own military has made in terms of its presence in Venezuela since Maduro was ousted on January 23rd. SOUTHCOM and U.S. military forces have announced that they will be leading the aid response on the ground in Venezuela. So what you have is a de facto collapse of the state. The state is unable to respond to the crisis because it's paralyzed, because it doesn't even have control of its international assets, hasn't been allowed to buy proper machinery and equipment. And now the U.S. military comes in and sets up its aid and distribution.

It's a de facto regime change on the basis of a Chavista government in power. And what we have to remember, Judge, is that this line was already crossed following the ouster of Maduro on January 23rd. Since then, the United States conducted a U.S. military strike on sovereign Venezuelan territory, killing Nino Guerrero, the man that they claim is head of this group, Tren de Aragua, which you've covered, we've discussed on this show, was a U.S.-backed group that wasn't really functioning as a legitimate narco group, but for some reason became the favored bogeyman of the Trump administration and Marco Rubio in order to justify continued intervention in Venezuela and bombings off the coast of Venezuela that led up to Maduro's arrest.

And so now the U.S., having conducted that strike—already clearly a flagrant violation of Venezuelan sovereignty—is using this earthquake to increase its presence in Venezuela. And this is happening at a time, as you mentioned, when neighboring countries are also suddenly changing course from acting as independent Latin American nations to saying, look, we're just going to have our policies dictated by the State Department. And I'm talking about Colombia. I'm talking about Ecuador. These

are countries, Ecuador as well, that have already begun coordinating with U.S. military operations in their own territory. So this is something that is set, I think, to expand in the region beyond Venezuela's borders, perhaps even all the way up to Mexico.

#Andrew Napolitano

All right. Before we talk about Colombia and the presidential election, the outcome of which President Trump applauded, how crippled or how well is the post-Maduro government of Venezuela?

#Anya

Well, no one can deny that Delcy Rodríguez, Maduro's successor, is a capable woman. She's gone on international trips—her main one to, I'm sorry, excuse me, India. Her first major international trip was to India, which was kind of an interesting choice because it's a BRICS nation, but it's pretty much the most pro-US member of BRICS. And so she went there to basically meet with Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, Sergio Gore, the US ambassador to India, because a US visit would have maybe been too shocking at this stage in her presidency. And in some ways, through this relationship that she has forged with the United States, which she had forged prior to Maduro's ouster, she's able to make alliances with business leaders and apparently even now start making deals with the IMF, which is something that Nicolás Maduro and the Chávez governments before her weren't necessarily trying to do.

So she, in some ways, by liberalizing, opening up Venezuela's economy, might actually experience a temporary or even a long-term economic boost because Venezuela has been under sanctions all these years. If the U.S. is now saying, okay, we're going to play ball and invest, at this point, maybe Delcy Rodríguez is the person to negotiate and cut those deals. But there are also people, obviously, that are very upset with the fact that she has opened up to the U.S., is forging these relationships that seem to be, well, you know, forging ties with the very people who kidnapped her predecessors. So it's a tricky time for her. And personally, I'm waiting to see. But it's definitely fascinating.

#Andrew Napolitano

Are the Venezuelan people in lockstep with her or not? Is there a bitterness over the demise of President Maduro? I shouldn't say demise. The case against him is nonsense and could very well be dismissed. And he lucked out in the choice of a federal judge, because of any federal judge—I know most of them in that courthouse in lower Manhattan—who would dismiss this case, it would be this judge. But aside from that, we're not here to talk about the defects in the charges against him, but how she is received by the Venezuelan people—as a holdover or as a legitimate president? I think she's definitely seen as the legitimate president. There's nobody else that could fulfill her role at this point. I think that... What about this crazy lady that got the Nobel Peace Prize, that purported to give it to Trump?

#Anya

Yeah, I think that she's out of the picture. Maduro's removal pretty much killed the Venezuelan opposition in many ways, because now you have the Chavista government under Delcy doing a lot of the things that maybe the U.S. would have liked the opposition figures to do, but under the stewardship of Chavismo, which is the popular political project in the country. They can't get rid of it, and that is because—to answer your question—are the people with Delcy? Look, I haven't been in Venezuela this time, so I can't say. What I do know is that the movement of the Venezuelan people, the base of Chavismo, is independent from the state and the government. There are so many projects, namely their commune movement, which is, you know, the Venezuelan government has a judiciary branch, an executive branch, a legislative branch, and this communal government branch that has actually worked to fund farms that work independently and are focused on revitalizing agriculture and food sovereignty in the country. As long as the government is able to make money and able to support itself, and maybe even open up and benefit more from this relationship with the U.S., those projects will still, as far as we can see right now, function and be maintained, as well as many of the government projects that make Chavismo popular.

#Andrew Napolitano

Let me just interrupt you for a minute. If you look at your screen, CNN is reporting over 900 dead as rescuers race to find quake victims. Rescuers are without modern construction equipment due to the sanctions not removed, imposed by Marco Rubio and company.

#Anya

Precisely. And so whether the people are with Delcy will be determined by future elections or the situation on the ground. I do see a lot of people outside of Venezuela online rushing to denounce her as a traitor and wanting to get passionate, call names at this point. But I think that the reality of states that are functioning under these conditions is far more complex than people like us on the outside could believe. And I do see reporters in Venezuela who are drawing attention to the fact that, despite what some people might see as questionable decisions being made by the government in Caracas, there is still a very strong movement in support of Chavismo and the projects that it actually provides on the ground. And so, to answer your question, I don't think the overall political project...

#Andrew Napolitano

Yesterday, as I was ending—as her husband Max and I were ending our interview because of another commitment I had—he said on the show that there was massive cheating in Colombia by supporters of the person who claims he's the newly elected president, who, of course, had the endorsement of President Trump. What can you tell us about this, Anya?

#Anya

I was just watching a clip of President Trump before joining your show where he was discussing the victory of the Colombian presidential election candidate, uh, Abelardo de la Espriella. He goes by Abelardo, but he was basically this unknown candidate that wasn't registering much in the polls. And then Trump endorsed him, and he won miraculously. And Gustavo Petro, the incumbent, uh, has alleged massive voter fraud, says that Israel meddled in the elections. And for some reason, this president-elect is vowing to deepen ties with Israel, perhaps even visit Israel, I believe. And this follows another pattern in the region where whenever the far right in Latin America takes over, for example, in Argentina, they immediately run and go kiss the wall in Jerusalem. And, you know, why that happens.

#Andrew Napolitano

What is the logic there? What is the connection? Is it financial? What could it be?

#Anya

It is absolutely financial. In Argentina, there is a history of a Jewish group supporting Milei. I mean, the Chabad Lubavitch cult there is pretty strong, influential. And some of these very Zionist groups own land and mining rights all throughout the country. So there is that base in Argentina. In Colombia, it also comes down to the warped ideals of Christian Zionism and evangelical Christianity that have spread throughout Latin America. That's what drives it in places like Brazil as well.

But it really comes down to what appears to be some sort of odd international political alliance. Even in the last two or three days, Israel has announced that they are sending troops, medical, and aid teams to Venezuela, which is a country that under Chávez broke relations with Israel. So this is a catastrophe. This is a difficult moment in Venezuela's history. It's hard to sit here and say that Chávez or Maduro absolutely would not have accepted aid from Israel at this time because we don't know. But it's an interesting question to ask. Absolutely, I think it is.

#Andrew Napolitano

Back to Colombia, and Chris just put a picture of him up. He looks like a very young man. Is he qualified by intellect, temperament, or experience to be the president of a country, or is he just some unknown that Trump plucked out of nowhere?

#Anya

I'm sure that he didn't come from nowhere. I would like to know the true story of how he rose to such prominence overnight, but I can just say, based on the fact that he bragged about lighting firecrackers on kittens and watching them scream, he's not someone that I would elect to run.

#Andrew Napolitano

Does the Colombian government, the incumbent Colombian government, recognize him as the legitimate victor, or does the government itself say this election was pulled off by fraud?

#Anya

Petro is refusing to acknowledge the vote, the results. Where it goes from here, I don't know, just simply because I don't follow Colombia as closely as Venezuela. But I would assume that even if there was some massive fraud, it won't matter and that this figure will take over in Colombia. We've seen this happen so many times before in Latin America, in Honduras, in Bolivia, where fraudulent votes, blatantly fraudulent votes, come in and put in these pro-U.S. candidates.

And it usually takes prolonged popular action on behalf of the people—protests and organizing. In Honduras, they organized an entirely new political party to challenge a fraudulent regime. In Bolivia, the peasants and farmers actually took up arms and threatened an armed military revolt and strike against the military dictatorship in Bolivia in order to defeat that regime. So in Colombia, I assume that it will actually just, you know, power will change and that the U.S. will increase its militarism and presence in the country, just like it's doing in Venezuela as we speak.

#Andrew Napolitano

Wow. So the United States—one last question back to Venezuela, if I might, Anya. The United States under Donald Trump will use this tragedy of two earthquakes in two minutes, with no construction equipment around to save the lives of those buried, as an instrument to plant American troops permanently on the ground in that country.

#Anya

Without question. And when the state is as incapacitated as it is, again, this provides the U.S. military with an opportunity to start building its own infrastructure to operate on the ground in Venezuela. This happened to an extent in Turkey and Syria, actually. You may remember in 2023, there was a double earthquake that struck Syria, very similar to the one that we just saw in Venezuela. And because by then, after years of civil war, the Syrian state was so weak and incapacitated and unable to respond.

All of these shadow infrastructure, government infrastructure, regime change groups that the U.S. and its allies had established in the region, such as the White Helmets, which we've covered extensively at The Grayzone, stepped in. And so by the time the government fell months later in Damascus, it was as if the slow regime change takeover had already happened. It was like a cancer

kind of took over part of the country, and because of this earthquake, kicked the state out. And so I think that, considering the U.S. military was already, again, striking, killing people on Venezuelan sovereign soil, this will only escalate from here. And, you know.

I've always argued, and one of the main points that I argue in my book about the Venezuelan corporate coup, is that it makes sense for the U.S. and Venezuela to be allies. From the Venezuelan perspective, it doesn't make sense for your best allies, your best friends, to be China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey. It should be the United States. It shouldn't have happened like this. It shouldn't have happened under the threat of a gun, with the kidnapping of the president. Now, with this crisis of the earthquake, we could have just gotten along, had some sort of shared vision of development. But maybe that's a fantasy. I don't know.

#Andrew Napolitano

Anya Parampil, a pleasure to chat with you. As I said before we came on air, I was ecstatic when you reached out and said you wanted to come on and discuss this. I hope you'll come back and visit us on a regular basis.

#Anya

Sure. My pleasure, Judge. Nice to talk to you again.

#Andrew Napolitano

Thank you. All the best. And coming up later today, if you're watching us live, in 34 minutes at 4 o'clock Eastern, the Intelligence Community Roundtable with Larry Johnson and Ray McGovern. Judge Napolitano for Judging Freedom.