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### USIP Publishes New Book "International Mediation in Venezuela"

For Immediate Release

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(Washington)—In a new volume, "International Mediation in Venezuela" from the United States Institute of Peace, authors Jennifer McCoy and Francisco Diez analyze the two-year effort of the Carter Center and the international community to prevent violent conflict and preserve democratic processes in Venezuela between 2002 and 2004.

From their perspective as facilitators of the intervention and as representatives of the Carter Center, the authors present an insider account of mediation at the national and international level, identifying lessons learned. The book includes an analysis of subsequent political developments and the decrease in international involvement through 2010.

"We identify and analyze both the limitations and contributions of the international role in the Venezuelan conflict through our own critical self-reflection and through the lens of conflict resolution and political theory and practice," said McCoy and Diez.

Describing the historical roots and nature of the conflict, they provide insight to the main domestic actors and examine missed opportunities and the unintended consequences of many interventions. The volume analyzes the Carter Center's interventions at the elite level as facilitators, with the Organization of American States, of multiple negotiations; the peacebuilding initiatives that the Center promoted together with the United Nations Development Program and many Venezuelans; and the involvement of the international community.

This case study serves as a source of experience for practitioners in similar situations, a scholarly evaluation of conflict prevention efforts in the Venezuelan context, and a rich ground for theory building in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and international relations.

## About the Authors

**Jennifer McCoy** is director of the Carter Center's Americas Program and professor of political science at Georgia State University in Atlanta. She has led the Carter Center's election-monitoring missions in Venezuela since 1998 and its mediation of Venezuela's political conflict in 2002-04. She is coeditor of *The Unraveling of Venezuelan Representative Democracy* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

**Francisco Diez** is an Argentine mediator and has worked as a private consultant, maintaining a working relationship with the Carter Center since 1991. He served as the Carter Center's field representative in Caracas from 2002 to 2004 and the Carter Center's representative in Latin America from 2007 to 2009. He has also been a member of several international electoral observation missions and is coauthor of *Tools for Working in Mediation* (Editorial Paidós, 1999).

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### *International Mediation in Venezuela*

October 2011

United States Institute of Peace Press

320 pp. • 6 x 9

\$24.95 (paper) • ISBN: 978-1-60127-068-9

Photos included.

## About the United States Institute of Peace

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan conflict management center created by Congress to prevent and mitigate international conflict without resorting to violence. USIP saves lives, increases the government's ability to deal with conflicts before they escalate, reduces government costs, and enhances national security. USIP is headquartered in Washington, DC. To learn more visit [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org).

# “International Mediation in Venezuela”

## Questions and Answers with the Authors

### **What was the situation in Venezuela at the start of the Carter Center’s intervention?**

The Carter Center began its work in Venezuela in July 2002 at the invitation of the Venezuelan government to help facilitate a national dialogue following a failed coup. It found a society deeply divided and a potentially violent social and political crisis threatening governability of the country. The roots of the crisis lay in the long-term social and political exclusion of large sectors of the population, the struggle for political control and redistribution of national resources and the concomitant clash of development strategies, and the confrontational style and strategy of the Chavista movement led by President Chavez.

### **What did the Carter Center aim to achieve in Venezuela?**

The Carter Center’s initial aim was to foster a dialogue seeking reconciliation and the restoration of functioning, trusted political institutions in Venezuela. Its ultimate aim was to prevent escalation of the conflict into violence, as it saw warning signs and increasingly feared this possibility over the course of the next months. We initially believed we could reach an agreement with Venezuelan actors on the design for a longer-term national dialogue with national and international verification mechanisms, and a short-term truce between government and media. For the longer-term dialogue, we hoped to build an international coalition to provide technical and financial assistance to the dialogue, and incentive and disincentives to encourage compliance by the actors with any agreements reached.

### **The ultimate goal of preventing violence was achieved by the intervention, but the underlying issues producing polarization and new forms of political exclusion were not resolved. What explains the mixed results of such an unusual international intervention?**

The explanation is found at several levels:

- First, although new opportunities for international influence arose from post-Cold War democracy norms, there are structural constraints on how much influence international actors can have on a resource-rich state. This helps explain both the ability of international third-party actors to prevent violence and promote electoral democratic practices in Venezuela and the limits of the same actors to sustain an international intervention capable of addressing the underlying disputes and influence the course of domestic events once the express invitation for their involvement had been withdrawn.
- Second, the competing perceptions and values of the opposing sides in Venezuela made it necessary for the mediators to attempt to sufficiently change those perceptions to alter the calculus of each side and open spaces for negotiation. The mediators were able to take advantage of only some of the opportunities for changing perceptions, however, due to the personalities of the mediators themselves, the personal relationships among the actors and the mediators, the nature of the mediators’ respective organizations, and the mediators’ own real-time analyses, which led them to miss certain opportunities.

- Third, a sustained peacebuilding initiative at the societal level was fundamental to transforming the Venezuelan conflict, but organizational and resource constraints on the part of the Carter Center and the UNDP prevented them from providing sufficient, enduring support.

**While the international community was heavily involved in the Venezuelan conflict between the 2002 coup and the 2004 recall referendum, it scaled back its involvement dramatically following the referendum despite continued political polarization and a growing concentration of power in the hands of the executive and ruling party. What explains this withdrawal from the Venezuelan situation?**

Several factors discussed in this book explain the withdrawal from the Venezuelan context:

- First, the OAS and the Carter Center could no longer play a facilitating or mediating role when one party to the conflict—the opposition—lost its confidence in and withdrew its invitation to them, attributing the outcome of the recall referendum at least in part to the international actors' incompetence and even alleging their collusion in electoral fraud.
- Second the gradual nature of the concentration of executive power and the ambiguity of its democratic character impeded international reaction.
- Venezuela's significant petroleum revenues and the related commercial interests of foreign governments both reduced the leverage of those international actors who might otherwise have made international loans and aid conditional upon domestic political reform, and influenced the actions of foreign governments benefiting from commercial relationships with Venezuela an discounted Venezuelan oil.
- Finally, the traditional notions of sovereignty and nonintervention, historically strong in the Western Hemisphere, came to play a role in the international community's withdrawal from Venezuela in two ways. First, neighboring Latin governments remained reticent to comment on, much less intervene in, the internal affairs of a fellow government. Second the Chavez government played up the sovereignty card in its calls for South-South alliances and in its constant warnings against U.S. imperialism and alleged invasion and assassination plots, particularly in the wake of U.S. approval of the 2002 coup and after 2004.

**What lessons does this case yield for practitioners?**

For conflict resolution practitioners operating as a third party in political conflicts, the Venezuelan case yields three lessons. The first explores the chain of hypotheses that we used to look at the perceptions and interactions between the parties; the second underlines the importance of personal relationships among the parties and between the parties and the third party; and the third concerns the level of expectations created by the third party.

## Praise for “International Mediation in Venezuela”

“All too often, our understanding of conflict dynamics in a given region is from 80,000 feet up and we thus miss the local texture of relationships that matter on the ground, as well as the non-linear events that can both benefit or plague peacebuilding. This book is the opposite—it is a cliff-hanger, telling the story of the role of international third parties intervening in the Venezuelan conflict (2002–2004) from the perspective of two of the third party actors. The narrative is rich in close-up detail, the kind that is almost never seen in public and reveals the “theory-in-use” of the parties, telling the story of the sense they made, and at the second order level, how the sense-making impacted the peacebuilding process itself. For this reason, it is a hearty and substantive contribution to our collective understanding of peacebuilding and an excellent resource for practitioners and researchers working at the international level to untangle the knots of protracted conflicts.”

—**Sara Cobb**, School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University

“This is a superb, indispensable, and courageous book about the mediation of international actors in national conflicts. Superb, because it meets the highest standard of scholarship in its analysis of theoretical and practical issues involved in the resolution of conflict and the prevention of violence. Indispensable, because in a world fractured by political strife it offers invaluable instructive experiences and concrete proposals useful for a range of circumstances. And brave, because in the highly polarized context of Venezuelan politics, where political debate has become locked in Manichean extremes, this book dares to confront tough questions by presenting careful arguments. This account provides a fascinating analysis of Venezuelan political processes and analyzes the Carter Center’s role, a subject of acrimonious debate in Venezuela. Far from a provincial case study, it is a book of major importance for the study of global politics.”

—**Fernando Coronil**, Presidential Professor of Anthropology, The Graduate Center, City University of New York

*“International Mediation in Venezuela* is a fascinating account of the interactions between the evolving government of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, the changing constellations of the political opposition to Chávez from 2002 through 2004, and the international efforts to mediate between them, especially those of the Carter Center and the Organization of American States. It is written from the perspectives of Jennifer McCoy and Francisco Diez, senior advisers to the Carter Center, who worked closely with former president Carter in a period of dangerous polarization.

Theoretically and practically informed by the growing experience of international efforts at conflict resolution, self-aware and self-critical as participant observers, McCoy and Diez illuminate the personal, institutional, political, and cultural obstacles to defusing Venezuela’s internal confrontation. They provide a balanced appraisal of the skills of Hugo Chávez as a political actor, and of the misjudgments of the Venezuelan opposition in seeking to constrain him. A worthwhile study, useful for understanding Venezuela and for building the craft of third-party conflict management.”

—**Abraham F. Lowenthal**, professor of international relations, University of Southern California

“Between 2002 and 2004 we Venezuelans lived dangerously. Our society was torn by a frantic political polarization that seemed to drive it toward a bloody confrontation. That, however, did not happen. Why? More than seven years later, this book provides details of unpublished or forgotten events, provided by the Carter Center, which for more than two and a half years played facilitation, mediation, and international electoral observation roles. It is a singular narrative, reconstructed by McCoy and Diez, extracting theoretical and practical lessons to help people who, like them, dedicate their lives to build peace on this planet. For those who lived those days, reading this book means continuing the dialogue with these peacemakers and with ourselves in the struggle for a better country.”

— **Margarita López Maya**, historian and political analyst, senior researcher of Universidad Central de Venezuela

“This is an interesting and analytically sharp manuscript that sheds considerable light on the complicated and challenging political situation in Venezuela. The authors provide a highly detailed insiders account of external interventions by the Carter Center and the Organization of American States to promote a path towards reconciliation between sharply polarized political forces.”

— **Michael Shifter**, president, Inter-American Dialogue

“In this lucidly documented and deeply reflective case study of the Carter Center’s work to help transform conflict and prevent possible civil war in the troubled country of Venezuela, Jennifer McCoy and Francisco Diez offer a valuable set of lessons for theorists and practitioners alike. Usually we have the account of a diplomat or a third-person account by an academic, but in this case the diplomats are academics and so we have the rare privilege of hearing theory and practice seamlessly interwoven. Highly recommended!”

— **William Ury**, Harvard University and co-author of *Getting to Yes* and author of *The Third Side*

“For almost two years between 2002 and 2004, following an abortive coup that almost dislodged Hugo Chavez from the Venezuelan presidency, the Carter Center based in Atlanta worked with the Organization of American States and the UNDP to prevent deadly conflict and to promote political dialogue. This thorough and insightful account combines gripping first hand testimony with the thoughtful analysis of the lessons to be learned. The authors display a deep understanding of the complexities of this deeply divisive period in Venezuelan politics. At the same time they remain steadfast in their commitment to democratic reconciliation, and they are also realistic about the limits of external mediation in such disputes.”

— **Laurence Whitehead**, Nuffield College, Oxford