

Colombia-Venezuela Ties and the Reopening of Shared Border

written by Ezba Walayat | January 17, 2023



Introduction

There is a great importance of bilateral relationship between the neighboring countries due to the shared concerns and security challenges. But, the relations between Colombia and Venezuela have remained strained for a number of years due to multiple factors including mutual accusations and an increase in the number of migrants from Venezuela who cross the shared border as a result of socio-economic and political crisis in the country. It is one of the major interstate conflicts in Latin America which resulted in greatest humanitarian crisis along the both sides of Colombia-Venezuela border. With a length of more than 2,000 kilometers, the border between the two countries served as a point for organized crime and guerrilla movements, notably on the Colombian side. Additionally, clashes between armed groups including the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have also taken place along the border. Recently, the two countries have formally announced to fully reopen the border after a diplomatic conflict of three years.



Background

During the former Colombian President Ivan Duque's term, the leaders of Colombia and Venezuela have accused one another of involvement and interference across the border to support terrorism and create instability in their respective country. The ties were completely disintegrated between the two countries by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in early 2019. As a response, Venezuela's President Maduro said in a speech "Patience is exhausted, I cannot bare it anymore, and we cannot keep putting up with Colombian territory being used for attacks against Venezuela. For that reason, I have decided to break all political and diplomatic relations with Colombia's fascist government." On the other hand, Colombian diplomatic staff and ambassadors were also asked to leave Venezuela immediately after the announcement.

The ties started to improve when the Colombian President Gustavo Petro assumed office in August 2022, he pledged to rebuild ties with Venezuela and it was witnessed in the same month when two countries agreed to restore full diplomatic relations. Formal border opening was declared and for the first time in 9 years Colombian President made an official visit to Venezuela.

Prospects of Colombia-Venezuela Ties

According to the estimates by the Chamber of Venezuelan-Colombian Economic Integration, the reopening of border to vehicular traffic will result in a major increase in commercial trade, from \$406 million last year to \$1.2 billion this year. As a result of complete restoration of the border, the Venezuelan government predicts an increase of \$4 billion in economic activity within a year. The improved ties will help to attain peace and security along the border which was deteriorated significantly in both the countries, since the diplomatic ties cut in 2019. This resulted in state clashes with armed groups which brought on forced and voluntary displacement of people as well as lucrative trade in people and goods as a consequence of armed groups competition. There is a hope for peace with armed groups along the border, if both countries make serious efforts and deal with the issues at negotiation table for the sake of people, country and

regional stability. Until now, approximately seven million Venezuelans have left their country due to the deteriorating economic conditions and the vast majority of them travelled to Colombia. The formal opening of the border will aid in preventing the mistreatment of refugees and migrants. In addition, it will help with the effective management and administration of the migrant issue, enabling people with better economic opportunities in order to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing. Additionally, there will not be any fear of crossing the border illegally, which in the past made people exposed to killing, torture and forced recruitment by the armed groups.



Conclusion

Both Colombia and Venezuela have suffered greatly as a result of broken ties at all levels. Now it is the time that the two neighbors take the opportunity and act quickly to reduce the potential of escalating violence and instability along the border. For that matter, there is a need of greater action to avoid border miscommunications for avoiding fatal consequences. The border should be jointly monitored and controlled by Colombia and Venezuela, it can be done by developing a framework that effectively assist in resolving situations related to the shared border. The international community must take steps to settle the influx of Venezuelan migrants and refugees. In addition, humanitarian relief must be given to the people of two countries as they have suffered greatly because of social, political and economic crisis.