

I want to begin by thanking CSIS and especially Moises Rendon, and his team for hosting this event.

The Rio Treaty, known as TIAR in Spanish, has become an important tool for the Interim Government of Venezuela in its international campaign against Maduro and his criminal regime. Venezuela denounced the TIAR under the presidency of the late Hugo Chavez in 2012 claiming that it was an imperialist instrument for the United States.

On June 23, 2019 the National Assembly of Venezuela approved our reincorporation to the treaty. Since then we have convened the Meeting of Consultation of Foreign Ministers, and implemented two resolutions aimed at eroding Maduro's support base.

Despite these diplomatic achievements, we cannot escape reality: Maduro remains in power, and his regime shows little signs of abandoning its dictatorial ways.

This treaty was conceived in a different era. At that time the world was settling from World War II, and conflicts were fought by States in the battlefields. Economies were smaller, the world was far less connected and the most important technological advancements in the field of communications, namely the telephone, radio and television, were very difficult to access and controlled by a few companies in each country.

We now live in an era of conflicts between states and nonstate actors and there are new technologies. The globalization of criminal enterprises like drug cartels, have allowed the rise of organizations that rival the world's largest corporations. We can say the same about terrorist organizations which have activities not limited by state borders.

Terrorist groups such as the FARC, the ELN, and Hezbollah, which have proven to be worthy adversaries for regional and global powers, are operating in Venezuela. Furthermore, we live in a world where a small group of people with access to the internet technology can weaponize public opinion and influence the masses at a very little cost.

There is evidence of a global disinformation war that is more efficient than traditional propaganda. The world has seen a proliferation of fake sites, user accounts or content that targets the public with divisive messages.

Last Sunday, Moisés Naim wrote in the Spanish newspaper El Pais: "We have seen how Russian hackers, or sponsored by Russia, have learned to sow confusion in other societies, to create doubts about what or who to believe, to deepen the differences and conflicts that already exists or invent new ones, to promote some political actors and destroy the reputation of others.

All this they can do - and they do - not only in their neighboring countries, but in any country in the world. Hackers and Russian bots have intervened in Catalonia, Brexit, Germany, France, Estonia, Georgia, and Ukraine.

But it is not only the advanced use of what the Russian government calls "political technologies." They also have the ability to use cyber weapons to attack the electrical networks, telecommunications, transportation or financial infrastructure of another country."

A few days ago, Lara Jakes, New York Times diplomatic correspondent wrote that "watching political unrest explode across South America this fall, officials at the State Department noticed an eerily similar pattern in antigovernment protests that otherwise had little in common.

In Chile, nearly 10 percent of all tweets supporting protests in late October originated with Twitter accounts that had a high certainty of being linked to Russia. In Bolivia, immediately after President Evo Morales resigned on Nov. 10, the number of tweets associated with those type of accounts spiked to more than 1 1000 a day, up from fewer than five. And in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and Chile over one 30-day period, Russia-linked accounts posted strikingly similar messages within 90 minutes of one another."

An analysis by the Atlantic Council done in the first quarter of 2019 showed that Russia Today in Spanish, garnered nearly 100 million visits in one month.

These outlets not only spreads misinformation, but mobilize public opinion to destabilize regional governments. In one month, Russia had access to one tenth of the population of the region and provided them with news and entertainment. The race to gain influence over Latin American, which was once fought through coups and revolutions, has now moved to social media, where anybody can be reached.

However Russia is not solely responsible for the social, and security issues of the region. They have tapped legitimate reasons of social unrest.

Maduro also deserves a large share of the blame. The massive output of migrants, with severe needs, to the region has put its already fragile social peace in crisis. Maduro's hope is that this will force his neighbors to focus on domestic policy instead of pushing for his ouster.

Perhaps as worrisomely is the means through which he ensures his regime's survival. He has allied himself with notorious drug cartels, criminal gangs, and terrorist groups, granting them safe haven in exchange for their help in the defense of the so-called revolution.

This has had serious repercussions for the people of Venezuela, specifically those who live in the border states and in the mineral rich areas south of the Orinoco River. There paramilitary groups extort farmers for protection from or worse, while criminal gangs fight an all-out war for the mineral resources which they exploit to finance their activities.

The TIAR does not take into account these new forms of war: the possibilities of attacking a country can assume forms that did not exist in 1947. Nor the possibility of a government, co-opted by an illegitimate ruler, coordinating with non-state actors to create the domestic and foreign conditions for its survival. In this context we conceive that the Maduro regime represents a credible threat to the Stability of the Region as stated in the Treaty.

The TIAR presents itself as a tool with the potential to channel multilateral solutions to this new kind of regional problems. However as with any tool, it needs to be updated to reflect the defense needs of the 21st century. This means being creative about the actions we take to deal with the unprecedented issues we face. We need to be open to new ideas, and to think outside the box. The cost of not doing so is far too great, a hemisphere in constant crisis and the resources of one of the richest regions in the world, funding, criminal gangs, terrorist groups and destabilizing movements.