

Amid mounting coup threats in Venezuela, Maduro begs Trump for dialog

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Venezuelan security forces and intelligence agents suppressed an abortive revolt by elements of the country's National Guard in the pre-dawn hours Monday, arresting 27 soldiers led by a sergeant.

The action unfolded in the midst of mounting pressure by US imperialism and Latin America's right-wing governments—led by Brazil's new president, the fascistic former army captain Jair Bolsonaro, and the reactionary president of Argentina, Mauricio Macri—to force the ouster of Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro.

This has included thinly veiled as well as open appeals to the Venezuelan military to overthrow the Maduro government.

In a tweet this week Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who exercises major influence over the Trump administration's Latin America policy, stated: "We must support those members of military in #Venezuela who have announced they will defend the constitution and recognize Guaidó as legitimate interim President."

The reference was to Juan Guaidó, the relatively political unknown who has been elevated to the presidency of the Venezuelan National Assembly.

A member of the right-wing Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, which has been funded with tens of millions of dollars from the US State Department and National Endowment for Democracy, Guaidó has been anointed as the sole legitimate leader of Venezuela by Latin America's rightist regimes. The Trump White House is reportedly considering recognizing him as Venezuela's president.

Guaidó has himself called upon the Venezuelan military to intervene, charging that Maduro's inauguration to a second term as president earlier this month was illegitimate, interfered with the armed forces' "chain of command" and calling for the army

to "reestablish democracy."

The right-wing opposition to which Guaidó belongs knows that it lacks the broad base of political support needed to oust Maduro by political means and therefore appeals to the military. The military command has served as a principal pillar of so-called "Bolivarian Socialism" introduced by Maduro's late predecessor Hugo Chavez, himself a former army officer, who gained national prominence by leading his own abortive coup in 1992.

Guaidó and the National Assembly have called for a mass demonstration on Wednesday in Caracas to demand Maduro's downfall. Meanwhile the ruling PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela) has called its own demonstration for the same day, which marks the anniversary of the 1958 overthrow of the repressive Venezuelan dictatorship of Gen. Marcos Pérez Jiménez.

The argument that Maduro's second term is illegitimate is based upon last May's election, which was boycotted by most of the right-wing opposition, which knew that it would lose. While the vote saw a record-low turnout, reflecting the disgust and hatred of Venezuelan working people for both the government and its right-wing opponents, Maduro was elected with three times the votes of his nearest rival. This represented just 28 percent of Venezuela's eligible voters, but still two points more than the 26 percent of eligible voters who cast their ballots for Donald Trump in 2016.

While small and isolated, the military revolt Monday was significant. Its leader, who identified himself as Sgt. Alexander Bandres Figueroa, stated in a video, "You asked to take to the streets to defend the constitution, well here we are. ... You wanted us to light the fuse, so we did. We need your support."

He went on to say that his mother was dying of

cancer—in a country where access to medicine and decent medical care has become out of reach for much of the population—and that he and his men were facing the same conditions as the rest of the population.

The mutinous troops overpowered their commander and then took two army trucks and raided a police station in the Petare neighborhood of Caracas, where they seized arms. They then took over a security post in the Cotiza section of Caracas, where they issued their call for a revolt and were subsequently captured by security forces.

The clash touched off protests in Cotiza, where residents, hearing shots fired, took to the streets, to be met with tear gas. Protesters in this poorer neighborhood, which would have once been a base of support for *chavismo*, chanted, “The government is going to fall” and denounced the fact that the neighborhood’s water service had been cut off for a year, and that other basic utilities were constantly being cut off.

The protest, triggered by the clash within the security forces, was similar to many thousands of such demonstrations that have taken place across Venezuela as the working class suffers the effects of the country’s economic crisis, punishing US sanctions and an “adjustment” program implemented by the Maduro government to place the full burden of the crisis on the backs of the working class, while protecting the interests of foreign capital and the financial oligarchy in Venezuela itself.

The Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict (OVCS) issued its annual report last week, recording 12,700 protests in 2018—an average of 35 a day—in Venezuela. The figures represented a 35 percent increase over 2017, when the right-wing opposition organized protests aimed at toppling the Maduro government. The bulk of last year’s protests were led not by the opposition, but by the working class and the poor in response to sharply deteriorating social conditions.

In the face of threats from sections of the military, upon which his government depends, sanctions and ever-escalating pressure from Washington and its right-wing Latin American allies, on the one hand, and a threat of social upheaval from the Venezuela working class, on the other, President Maduro has directed a call to Donald Trump to reach some form of

accommodation.

Maduro used an interview with a Fox News reporter to deliver the message, which appealed to Trump for a “frank, direct, face-to-face dialog.” Such a meeting, he insisted, would show Trump that “we are people with whom you can talk, negotiate, understand and agree.”

This pathetic plea to imperialism only underscores the class character of the Maduro government, which for all its “Bolivarian” and “21st Century Socialist” rhetoric, is a capitalist regime that ruthlessly defends private property and the profit interests of the financiers, corrupt government officials and military commanders that are its most important constituencies.

Its effect will doubtless be to fuel Washington’s drive for regime change, which is bound up with US imperialism’s determination to assert unrestrained domination over Venezuela’s oil reserves—the largest on the planet— and to counter the influence of Russia and China, which have established close economic and political ties with the Maduro government.

The only way out of Venezuela’s desperate crisis lies in the independent mobilization of the Venezuelan working class in opposition to the government, the ruling PSUV and their trade union stooges, as well as to the right-wing opposition, whose rise to power through a military coup would signal a bloodbath against the country’s workers and impoverished masses.



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