

Washington engineers right-wing coup in Venezuela

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The US recognition of Juan Guaidó as the self-proclaimed and unelected “interim president” of Venezuela marks the initiation of a right-wing coup engineered in Washington.

Guaidó swore himself in Wednesday before a mass anti-government rally in Caracas. Virtually simultaneously, Donald Trump tweeted: “The citizens of Venezuela have suffered for too long at the hands of the illegitimate Maduro regime. Today, I have officially recognized the President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaido, as the Interim President of Venezuela.”

This attempt at regime change by tweet has been supported by a number of right-wing governments in Latin America, including that of the fascistic former army officer, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who was inaugurated at the beginning of the year. Canada also quickly fell into line behind Washington’s conspiracy, while the Macron government in France has reportedly begun discussions within the European Union aimed at drumming up support for Washington’s puppet.

Russia, Turkey and Mexico reiterated their recognition of Nicolás Maduro as Venezuela’s constitutionally elected president, as did Cuba and Bolivia.

Washington’s recognition of Guaidó as president constitutes a naked intervention by US imperialism with the aim of achieving its own predatory aims in Venezuela, which boasts the world’s largest proven oil reserves. At the same time, it is aimed at rolling back the influence in the hemisphere of Russia and China, which have both established close economic and political ties with Caracas.

This regime change operation has been two decades in the making, from the abortive 2002 CIA-orchestrated coup against Maduro’s late predecessor, Hugo Chávez, under George W. Bush, through the imposition of sanctions by the Obama administration and its designation of Venezuela as an “extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.”

By in effect throwing US support to a rival government, the Trump administration is seeking to create the conditions for a military coup or even civil war within Venezuela as well as a US military intervention from without.

Venezuelan President Maduro responded to the US intervention by breaking off diplomatic relations with Washington and ordering all US diplomatic personnel to leave the country within 72 hours. Guaidó, no doubt operating in close consultation with the State Department, countermanded Maduro’s decree, declaring that he, as “interim president,” was asking US officials in the country to

remain in place. The State Department has responded that it will ignore Maduro’s order, setting the stage for a confrontation that can be used as the pretext for US intervention.

In statements to reporters on Wednesday, Trump made it clear that military intervention is under active consideration. Asked by reporters whether he was contemplating sending US troops to Venezuela, he responded that “all options are on the table.”

A US official speaking not for attribution told reporters that if the Maduro government acted against Guaidó and his supporters, their “days will be numbered,” while media reports indicated that Washington is considering a naval blockade of Venezuela to stop its oil exports and the seizure of Venezuelan assets in the US on the supposed behalf of the “interim president.”

Maduro, for all of the rhetoric about “Bolivarian Socialism,” heads a capitalist government that defends private property in Venezuela and has imposed the full burden of the country’s deep-going economic crisis onto the backs of the Venezuelan working class, whose strikes and protests have been brutally repressed. Under Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez, private control of the country’s economy actually grew and the profits of the financial sector soared, as the government diverted vast social wealth to meet debt payments to Wall Street and the international banks.

Nonetheless, the claims from the Trump administration that this government is “illegitimate” and that Washington is standing for “democracy” are nothing short of obscene. This same administration, it should be noted, has no problem with the legitimacy of the murderous police state monarchy of Prince Mohamed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, the dictatorship of Gen. Sisi in Egypt or the various similar regimes that constitute Washington’s principal allies in the Middle East.

On less specious grounds than Washington is using to declare Maduro an “usurper,” any government in the world could claim that Trump’s own government—elected with less popular votes than those of his opponent and opposed by the majority of the American people—is “illegitimate” and should be overthrown.

Moreover, any regime that emerges from the US-backed operation in Venezuela will be a right-wing dictatorship of the banks, big business and foreign capital that will organize a bloodbath against the Venezuelan working class that will far eclipse the massacre carried out in 1989 against the *Caracazo*, the popular revolt of the country’s workers and poor against IMF austerity.

The principal pillar of the bourgeois nationalist government headed by Chávez and Maduro has been the military, with senior officers controlling key sectors of the government and the national economy. Washington is hoping that this will become the government's Achilles' Heel, with senior commanders persuaded to change sides and carry out a coup.

It was revealed last year that US officials repeatedly met between the fall of 2017 and the beginning of last year with a group of Venezuelan military officers seeking US support for the overthrow of Maduro. These contacts failed to reach fruition because Washington believed that the conspiracy was insufficiently prepared.

These calculations may now have changed. An isolated uprising by a group of national guardsmen who seized arms and police stations on Monday has been followed yesterday with a video statement from division Gen. Jesús Alberto Milano Mendoza, appearing together with other officers, declaring that the army should revolt against Maduro and that the high command should not serve as "the armed branch of the government for its personal benefit." Milano Mendoza had previously served as the chief of Chávez's presidential guard.

It is not just Trump and the CIA supporting the Venezuelan coup and the sharp lurch to the right in Latin America. This was made abundantly clear at the World Economic Forum which opened this week in the exclusive Swiss Alpine resort of Davos, bringing together global billionaire CEOs, bankers, hedge fund managers, celebrities and government leaders and officials.

Davos rolled out the red carpet for Jair Bolsonaro, the fascistic ex-army officer who was inaugurated as Brazil's president at the beginning of the year. Bolsonaro delivered a bizarre and stunningly short keynote speech to open the forum. Investors present were described as "excited" by the prospect of increased profits under a new government headed by an individual who has voiced his support for the former Brazilian military dictatorship and its murder and torture of left-wing opponents, and who has packed his government with generals and right-wing ideologues.

Bolsonaro cast himself as part of a continent-wide crusade for political reaction, declaring, "The left will not prevail in this region, which is good, I think, not only for South America, but also for the world." He received a positive response from the representatives of financial oligarchies and their respective governments that all feel themselves besieged by intensifying economic crisis and a resurgence of the struggle of the working class on an international scale. All of them are looking towards methods of dictatorship, authoritarianism, repression, censorship and outright fascism as a means of defending their wealth and rule.

Within the United States itself, despite the internecine political warfare in Washington, there are no disagreements about the unfolding Venezuelan coup. US Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin issued a statement Wednesday hailing the State Department stooge Guaidó and his supporters as "brave patriots who see a more hopeful and democratic future for the Venezuelan people."

And, on the day that Guaidó declared himself president, the *New York Times* published a glowing tribute to the right-wing political operative under the headline "As Venezuela crumbles, a new voice

of dissent emerges." It did not bother to inform its readership that this "new voice" is a paid mouthpiece for the US State Department.

The same newspaper, the erstwhile voice of bourgeois establishment liberalism in the US, praised the abortive CIA coup against Chávez in 2002, declaring that "Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened" after an elected president had been dragged from his office and arrested and a military-backed business association leader had been proclaimed president.

The unfolding coup in Venezuela has implications for the whole of Latin America and the entire planet. It is part of the shipwreck of the so-called "left turn" that began at the beginning of the millennium, the advent of a number of bourgeois nationalist governments that diverted a share of booming commodity revenues into modest social welfare programs and utilized a rising China to offset US influence in the region. Promoted by Pabloite and other pseudo-left tendencies internationally as a new form of socialism, this "Pink Tide" only served to politically disarm the working class in the face of the inevitable turn to reaction and repression.

Moreover, it is inseparable from a turn by the international bourgeoisie toward reaction and dictatorial forms of rule, from Trump's threat to impose a state of emergency, to Macron's embrace of Pétain, the emergence of the fascistic AfD as the main opposition party in Germany and the consolidation of the extreme right's grip over the government in Italy. Everywhere, the domination of a narrow financial oligarchy is incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

The political crisis in Venezuela can only be resolved in a progressive manner by the independent intervention of the working class. What is required is not the intervention of the military, but rather the arming of the masses. The resolution of the country's underlying economic crisis is possible only through the seizure of bourgeois property and the placing of Venezuela's vast oil wealth under popular control. Popular assemblies must be established to carry out such a program, while appealing to the workers and oppressed throughout the Americas for support.

The working class in the United States must oppose the reactionary intervention of the Trump administration and fight to unite its struggles with those of the workers in Venezuela and throughout Latin America against the common enemy, the capitalist system.



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