

US coup bid pushes Venezuela closer to invasion or civil war

Bill Van Auken
26 January 2019

The US-orchestrated regime change operation continued to escalate tensions in Venezuela Friday, pushing the country closer to civil war or an outright US invasion.

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó, a leader of the right-wing Voluntad Popular party and president of the country's National Assembly, who proclaimed himself the country's "interim president" Wednesday with immediate backing from Washington, spoke simultaneously on Friday at different locations in Caracas .

Maduro, speaking at a press conference in the Miraflores presidential palace, declared that his government was confronting "an advancing coup d'état promoted and financed by the United States of North America." He charged that Guaidó was a puppet of Washington, who was incapable of taking any decisions without orders from the State Department.

He revealed that on the eve of the right-wing politician's self-proclamation as the "president," Guaidó had met with two leading representatives of the government, including Diosdado Cabello, an ex-military officer and leader of the ruling PSUV party, who is widely seen as a rival of Maduro's within the *chavista* camp, to discuss initiation of a dialogue.

Guaidó had denied that any such meeting had taken place, but the government Friday released a videotape showing him and Cabello entering the meeting site.

Maduro reiterated the appeal for a dialogue, both with the United States and Guaidó, while insisting that his announcement of a break in diplomatic relations with Washington would not stop Venezuela from selling oil to the US, which accounts for 75 percent of the cash Venezuela gets for crude shipments.

US officials are reportedly discussing sanctions on the oil sector, which would have the effect of "making the economy scream," the term used by the Nixon administration during the economic destabilization operations against Chile in advance of the fascist-military coup of 1973.

For his part, Guaidó spoke at a rally in eastern Caracas, ruling out any dialogue with the present government, vowing that anti-government demonstrations would be called next week and calling for the military to support him and overthrow Maduro.

This is the main concern of the Venezuelan right and its US backers, but as yet, the military high command, which has been a pillar of the governments of Maduro and his predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez, heading a large share of ministries as well as controlling the most lucrative state agencies, has shown no sign of

deserting the government.

Washington, meanwhile, has escalated its offensive against the Maduro government. National Security Adviser John Bolton announced that the US will divert all assets held by the Venezuelan government in the US to the so-called "interim government" of Guaidó. This includes bank deposits as well as the properties held by Citgo, the US-based refining affiliate of the Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA.

The financial analysis firm S&P Global Platts cited sources close to the right-wing opposition in Venezuela as stating that Guaidó was preparing to name a new board of directors for Citgo and to send his representatives to take over the company's headquarters in Houston. Goldman Sachs reported that the corporate coup would be carried out in conjunction with the proclamation of a new National Law on Hydrocarbons, which would open up Venezuela's oil reserves to more direct and comprehensive foreign exploitation.

That this is to be one of the first actions of the US-backed "interim president" is hardly an accident. The restoration of domination by US-based energy conglomerates over Venezuela's oil reserves, the largest in the world, has been a strategic objective pursued by Washington under both Democratic and Republican administrations over the past two decades.

Meanwhile, the Bank of England, acting in compliance with demands from Washington, has stymied an attempt by the Venezuelan government to withdraw \$1.2 billion in gold reserves from its coffers.

The other principal goal of the US-orchestrated coup is the rolling back of influence in Latin America by China and Russia, both of which have established close economic, political and military ties with Caracas. The regime change operation thus dovetails with the announced shift in US strategy toward "great power" conflict and carries with it the danger of a confrontation in the Americas between the world's largest nuclear powers.

While the various capitalist governments and the corporate media outlets that are supporting and lionizing Guaidó all claim that his victory over Maduro would usher in a renaissance of Venezuelan "democracy," the reality is that the right-wing opposition that he represents has never enjoyed broad popular support in Venezuela and has no commitment whatsoever to the democratic rights of the broad masses of working people. On the contrary, their rise to power would almost certainly be accompanied by a repressive bloodbath and the institution of

dictatorial forms of rule required to impose the dictates of Washington and international finance capital.

In an unmistakable signal of Washington's real intentions in Venezuela, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo Friday named Elliot Abrams as the administration's special envoy on Venezuela. Abrams, a right-wing veteran of the Reagan and Bush administrations, is the personification of the criminal, deceitful and thuggish character of US imperialism's policies globally and, above all, in Latin America.

He was best known for defending the US-backed dictatorships in Central America in the 1980s and covering up for their bloody massacres, torture and assassinations. During the same period, he played a central role in creating a covert and illegal network for funding the terrorist "Contra" forces organized by the CIA to attack Nicaragua. He was convicted of lying to Congress about the illegal operation, but pardoned by President George H.W. Bush.

Washington has set the stage for a bloody settling of accounts in Venezuela by defying the Venezuelan government's order to withdraw all of its diplomatic personnel from the country within 72 hours, a deadline that expires on Sunday. While the State Department has ordered the evacuation of all "non-essential" personnel from the country, it has left in place a skeleton crew of diplomats as bait for a potential military intervention.

Bolton on Friday said that the Trump administration has developed plans to defend the embassy, but gave no details. Trump and his aides have repeatedly stated that "all options are on the table" in terms of military intervention in Venezuela. The *Washington Post* reported Friday that the Pentagon is refusing to comment on any operations regarding Venezuela or the position of any naval ships in the country's vicinity, referring all questions to the National Security Council, which also has declined comment.

The ongoing coup in Venezuela is by no means the first such attempt by Washington. In 2002, the CIA and the Pentagon backed an abortive military coup staged by sections of the military and the ruling financial circles, together with the AFL-CIO-connected union federation, which removed President Hugo Chávez from office for 48 hours while installing Pedro Carmona, the president of the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce, as "interim president."

There were no credible allegations then that Chávez's presidency was "illegitimate"—he had been re-elected two years earlier with a 60 percent majority. Yet the coup and the arrest of Venezuela's elected president were portrayed in Washington as a triumph for "democracy."

The *New York Times* saluted this "democratic" coup, writing in truly Orwellian fashion that with the military overthrow of an elected president, "Venezuelan democracy is no longer threatened by a would-be dictator." After masses took to the streets in opposition to the coup, Carmona and his military henchmen were forced to retreat and Chávez was restored to the presidential palace.

The *Times* has weighed in once again in support of the ongoing Venezuelan coup with an editorial titled "Between Mr. Maduro and a Hard Place." Reflecting the rightward shift of the erstwhile "liberal" political establishment for which the newspaper serves as a mouthpiece, the word "democracy" does not appear in the piece.

Rather, it is concerned with more practical matters of executing a successful regime change operation. Its principal concern is "how to pry Mr. Maduro out without a blood bath," while acknowledging that the recognition of a rival US-backed president raises "terrifying prospects of carnage, especially should the military stand by Mr. Maduro," which it so far has.

Nonetheless, the *Times* editorial board solidarizes itself with the imperialist intervention, writing, "The Trump administration is right to support Mr. Guaidó," while counseling that, given the long and bloody record of CIA coups and US-backed dictatorships in the region, Washington "must be seen as participating in a broad coalition of South American and other democratic nations..."

In other words, another "coalition of the willing" to mask the fact that in Venezuela's case—as in Iraq's 16 years ago—"democracy" is spelled "OIL."

The *Washington Post* published a similar editorial backing the anointment of the State Department stooge Guaidó as president. It described the 35-year-old right-wing politician as "a young and dynamic new leader," while the *Times* had hailed him as a "fresh young leader."

The *Post* lays out scenarios for direct US military intervention. "Unless the lives of Americans are endangered and there is no other recourse, military intervention would be folly."

Of course, the Trump administration's defiance of the Venezuelan government's order to close the US embassy in Caracas lays the groundwork for precisely such a claim that "lives of Americans are endangered."

It should be recalled that the last two US invasions in the Americas—Panama in December 1989 and Grenada in October 1983—were carried out on the pretext of protecting American lives.

The *Post* goes on to suggest, "A multilateral operation to deliver humanitarian supplies to Venezuela or to its borders, in cooperation with the National Assembly, is one possibility" for installing Guaidó in power. It concludes that the main hope for regime change is for "the military to defy its commanders and support" Guaidó, i.e., carry out a coup.

These views largely dovetail with those of the Democratic Party leadership, which, having waged a bitter campaign against the Trump administration over alleged Russian "meddling," has jumped to support the White House in its real and deadly meddling in the affairs of Venezuela.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact