

US escalates threats against Venezuela

Bill Van Auken
1 February 2019

A little more than a week after the US-orchestrated coup began in Venezuela with the self-proclamation of right-wing politician Juan Guaidó as “interim president,” tensions within the country continue to rise and the threat of a direct US military intervention has escalated.

Washington’s immediate recognition of Guaidó, whose action was coordinated with US officials beforehand, and its subsequent dismissal of the government of President Nicolas Maduro—elected in 2018 in a poll boycotted by the right-wing opposition—as “illegitimate,” have been followed by punishing sanctions against Venezuela’s oil industry as well as repeated threats of US intervention.

Valero, the second-largest US importer of Venezuelan crude, announced on Thursday that it was stopping all purchases of the country’s oil because of the US sanctions, which block all revenues from Venezuelan oil exports from flowing back to the country. A company executive acknowledged that there were still “some holes to fill in our supply plan,” but that the sweeping US sanctions—described by some analysts as the “nuclear option” —made continued business impossible.

The purpose of the sanctions is to crater the already crisis-ridden Venezuelan economy in order to create the conditions for a military coup or US intervention. The impact will be felt by millions of workers and impoverished layers of the population in a further acceleration of skyrocketing inflation, the scarcity of basic goods, a further slashing of social programs and more layoffs and shutdowns.

Venezuelan President Maduro issued a video statement Wednesday directed to the people of the United States, charging that a “campaign has been prepared to justify a coup d’etat in Venezuela that has been set, financed and actively supported by the Trump administration.”

“As they cannot invent that Venezuela and Maduro have weapons of mass destruction ... they now invent lies every day, false news, to justify an aggression against our country,” he continued.

He urged the people of the United States to “not allow another war like Vietnam in Latin America,” warning that if the US intervened militarily, “they will have a much worse Vietnam than you could imagine.”

Speculation that the US is preparing to use military force was sparked Monday by US National Security Adviser John Bolton’s appearance at a press briefing announcing the US oil

sanctions carrying a yellow notepad on which the words were written, “5,000 troops to Colombia.”

Colombia, which borders Venezuela, has a right-wing government which constitutes Washington’s closest ally in South America. The only country on the continent designated a “global partner” of NATO, Colombia has provided the US military with virtually unrestricted access to its military bases.

In December of last year, during precisely the same period in which Guaidó was visiting Colombia, Brazil and Washington to coordinate the coming coup, US Navy Admiral Craig Faller, the chief of US Southcom, the Pentagon’s command overseeing operations in Latin America, was also in Bogota for discussions with the country’s president and top military brass.

The threat of a US military intervention has been raised continuously by the Trump administration, with the US president threatening a “military option” for Venezuela in 2017 and then repeatedly raising the possibility with both his military and intelligence chiefs as well as selected Latin American heads of state.

Since the launching of the coup operations with Guaidó’s swearing himself in as “interim president,” Trump and his top aides have repeatedly declared that “all options are on the table,” while threatening unspecified dire consequences should the Venezuela government seek to suppress the coup.

Among the schemes floated by US officials is the opening of a “humanitarian corridor” into Venezuela for the ostensible purpose of sending in food, medicine and medical supplies. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced last week that the US was appropriating a paltry \$20 million for that purpose, but Washington is also attempting to shift all assets and bank accounts that it can lay hold of into the hands of Guaidó.

The patent hypocrisy of Washington’s supposed “humanitarian” concerns is underscored by the absence of any such proposal for a “corridor” for food and medicine into Yemen where at least 14 million people are on the brink of starvation as the result of a US-backed Saudi bombing campaign and blockade of the impoverished Arab country.

The Trump administration’s newly appointed special envoy for Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, the veteran US war criminal who played a leading role in defending the near-genocidal repression by US-backed dictatorships in Central America and in organizing the illegal CIA “contra” terrorist war against Nicaragua, floated the “humanitarian corridor” proposal

Wednesday, declaring that “it is something we are looking at.”

Mauricio Claver-Carone, the right-wing anti-Castro activist elevated to the position of senior director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council, was somewhat more explicit, telling reporters that Washington was looking for “the best peaceful way” to deliver aid to Venezuela, but was “exploring many options” and would not rule out military intervention to open up a “corridor.”

On Thursday, Guaidó and his supporters unveiled their “Country Plan” for Venezuela which could have been—and in all likelihood was—drafted by the US State Department and the Republican Party. The “interim president” proclaimed that its main emphasis was “No more social control, no more depending on subsidies,” an end to “regulation” and the “lifting of controls that strangle national production.”

The plan listed among its aims “reinserting the country into the concert of free nations of the world,” i.e., restoring the unfettered domination of US imperialism over Venezuela.

It called for “re-establishing the mechanisms of the market and economic freedoms which permit society to organize itself in an autonomous manner to solve its problems,” a formulation that means the unrestricted exploitation of Venezuela by both domestic and foreign capital.

It promises to “promote international investments within a regulatory framework that generates confidence and effective protection of private property.”

It further calls for all state-owned enterprises to be opened up to private investment “especially in the provision of social services” and for attracting “in a significant manner, private national and international capital” to take over PDVSA, the state-owned oil corporation.

Thursday also saw a demonstration of PDVSA workers outside the company’s headquarters in Caracas in opposition to the US oil sanctions. The president of the state-owned company, Manuel Quevedo, an army major general, denounced Washington for its “shameless theft” of PDVSA’s US-based subsidiary Citgo and charged that Guaidó and the right-wing opposition “wants to sell off all of the resources of the Venezuelan people and has offered 50 percent of the oil industry to the United States.”

Quevedo added that in its coup operation in Venezuela, Washington was following “the same script as in Libya.”

US officials have made no secret that control over Venezuelan oil, and its denial to Russia and China, which both have major investments in PDVSA, are the driving force of the coup. In a Fox News interview on Monday, Bolton declared that if Washington’s regime change operation succeeds, “It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela.”

Maduro has called for the opening up of “dialogue” with both the right-wing opposition and the Trump administration, while also supporting the call by Mexico and Uruguay for the

convening of an international conference to seek a mediated resolution of the Venezuelan crisis. Guaidó, acting on the orders of the State Department, has ruled out any such negotiated settlement.

At the same time, the Venezuelan president has made visits to military bases and sought to shore up his support within the armed forces command. The military top brass has served as the principal pillar of so-called “Bolivarian Socialism,” which combined social welfare measures funded by now dwindling oil revenues with unprecedented profits for finance capital and the fostering of a whole new capitalist ruling layer, the *boliburguesia*, which enriched itself from government contracts, financial speculation and corruption.

The Maduro government has reportedly reached out to Venezuelan businesses, offering concessions on foreign exchange regulations and import controls that would boost profits. These attempts at winning support have apparently provided little result, as the predominant layers of the capitalist ruling class are banking on regime change.

The government is not able, however, to make any appeal to the Venezuelan working class, which is overwhelmingly opposed to imperialist intervention, but has grown increasingly hostile to the Maduro government, which has imposed the full burden of the country’s deep economic crisis on workers while carrying out repressive measures against strikes and protests.

For his part, Guaidó is viewed with suspicion and contempt by Venezuelan workers, who recognize him as a representative of the old right-wing parties of the country’s ruling oligarchy, which seek to suppress the working class and the oppressed layers of Venezuelan society. Far from “democracy” and “freedom,” these layers promise a bloody dictatorship along the lines established by Pinochet in Chile and Videla in Argentina. Revealingly, the latest rally called Wednesday by Guaidó was in a wealthy district in eastern Caracas and attended by a small crowd composed largely of wealthy reactionaries.

Mass rallies have been called for Saturday in Caracas by both Guaidó and the Maduro government, setting the stage for a potential confrontation.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact