

US issues new threats of war for oil against Venezuela

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President Trump, Vice President Pence and National Security Advisor John Bolton escalated threats to launch a war against Venezuela, as large pro- and anti-government demonstrations filled Venezuela's streets on Saturday.

In an interview with CBS's "Face the Nation" program that aired before the Super Bowl yesterday, Trump reiterated that military intervention "is an option." Pence assured a crowd of far-right Venezuelan exiles in Miami on Friday that "this is no time for dialogue, it is the moment for action, and the time has come to end the Maduro dictatorship once and for all... Those looking on should know this: all options are on the table."

Bolton, who helped author the playbook that was used to launch the 2003 invasion of Iraq, issued a blunt threat Friday that the US would kill or jail and torture Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro if he did not resign. Comparing Maduro to Nicolae Ceaușescu and Benito Mussolini—both of whom were killed—Bolton told right-wing radio host Hugh Hewitt: "The sooner he takes advantage of that [i.e., resignation], the sooner he's likely to have a nice quiet retirement on a pretty beach rather than being in some other beach area like Guantanamo."

Self-proclaimed "interim president" Juan Guaidó, the US and their allies in South America and Europe are preparing a new provocation aimed at forcing the Venezuelan military to abandon Maduro, with Guaidó announcing that the US will deliver aid at three locations along the Venezuelan border in the coming days.

While Maduro and the Venezuelan military leadership have said they will refuse the aid, the US hopes that images of crowds gathering to receive food and medication will either provoke the military to defect to the opposition and help distribute the aid or provide valuable propaganda footage justifying the need for a "humanitarian" intervention.

Over the weekend, hundreds of armed Colombian soldiers dressed in battle fatigues deployed to one of the three "aid distribution" centers, Cúcuta, on the Venezuela-Colombia border. Colombia's far-right President Iván Duque issued a statement proclaiming, "Few hours remain to the Venezuelan dictatorship." At a press conference last week announcing Washington's moves to topple Maduro, Bolton held under his arm a note pad with the words written in plain view: "5,000 troops to Colombia."

Guaidó also announced that one of the "aid" locations would be on the border with Brazil, which deployed troops to the border last year, while the third would be on an island in the Caribbean.

The stepped-up pressure produced an initial crack in the Venezuelan military, which remains the backbone of the Maduro government. Over the weekend, one Air Force general and a small group of mid-level Air Force officials defected and issued public statements calling on their colleagues to join them.

Germán Ferrer, a sitting Venezuelan legislator and United Socialist Party member who opposes Maduro, told the CBC that Maduro has disabled combat aircraft for fear the Air Force will turn on the government.

The US is imposing blanket sanctions on Venezuelan oil that amount to a blockade on oil exports. This act of economic war is intended to increase social misery.

Shannon O'Neil of the Council on Foreign Relations told a conference call of bankers, government officials and oil executives last week that the sanctions will lead to "more deprivation, even given the low base we're at, more among the population." The sanctions will force thousands to flee the country, she added: "You're going to see more refugees pouring into countries throughout the hemisphere and elsewhere around the world."

The Brookings Institution explained that the present stage of the coup operation is aimed at "building an off-ramp for the Maduro regime." In the parlance of US imperialism, countries whose leaders do not take the "off-ramp" are, like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Gaddafi in Libya and Assad in Syria, subject to a hailstorm of bombs and missiles from the air and US troops or proxy armies on the ground.

As the Council on Foreign Relations' O'Neil told the corporate conference call, "If it [sanctions] doesn't work in dislodging this regime, then there's not a lot left in the toolkit besides things like military intervention."

A military intervention in Venezuela—population 30 million—could kill hundreds of thousands or millions of people and transform Latin America into an imperialist slaughterhouse.

The geopolitical intelligence think tank Stratfor recently

noted, “A military intervention could quickly snowball into one of the largest worldwide military operations since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.”

Francisco Toro, a *Washington Post* columnist and anti-Maduro think tank analyst, told the Council on Foreign Relations gathering that a military intervention would lead to “a kind of Syrian civil war” and confrontation between nuclear-armed powers.

He said: “There is this definite threat that if a military operation takes any amount of time in Venezuela, that other countries then start to move in too. And you can imagine, easily, Brazil moving into the southeast, Colombia into the southwest. You can imagine Russia trying to defend its oil interests, because Russia has big oil investments in Venezuela. You can imagine China doing I don’t know what. And Cuba has already intelligence penetration into the Venezuelan armed forces.”

Maduro’s strategy is three-fold. First, he is seeking to present himself as palatable to US imperialism and open to negotiation with the far-right opposition. Second, he is using the threat of “another Vietnam” as bargaining leverage against a US military intervention. Third, he is violently crushing working class opposition over inflation, poverty and record levels of social inequality.

Maduro rejected the demand of several European imperialist powers that he announce by February 2 the holding of new presidential elections. As the deadline passed, European governments—including the UK, France, Spain, Austria, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany—officially joined the US in recognizing Guaidó as president.

Maduro will now participate in large military exercises scheduled to last from February 5 to February 10. His government has also reportedly armed tens of thousands of members of a civilian reserve force with World War Two-era bolt-action rifles in anticipation of a possible invasion.

Key to the government’s strategy is a ferocious military crackdown on working class demonstrations and food riots. While the military and police have maintained a more passive presence at “official” demonstrations held by the right-wing opposition, government forces have murdered dozens of workers and youth participating in demonstrations over lack of access to food, water and other basic necessities.

The Maduro regime has responded to *these* demonstrations, which largely take place at night in the slum areas, with midnight raids by death squads, “disappearing” working class opponents in an effort to terrorize the areas that once were bastions of support for Maduro’s predecessor, Hugo Chávez Frias. The corporate media does not report these crackdowns.

In this way, Maduro is attempting to prove to his opponents in the US and Europe—as well as his backers in Russia and China—that he remains the best option for ending instability and keeping the oil flowing.

At its roots, Washington’s intensifying efforts at regime-

change in Venezuela are part of a “pivot to Latin America” aimed at eradicating Chinese and Russian influence and transforming the whole Western Hemisphere into the exclusive cheap-labor and primary resource platform for US imperialism.

In November 2018, when Bolton announced the “Troika of Tyranny”—Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua—he was elaborating the strategic view that the US cannot successfully conduct operations against Russia in Eastern Europe, against China in South Asia, or against both Russia and China in Central Asia, without eliminating their presence in “America’s backyard” and freeing up the region’s resources for the US war machine. The establishment of a US-ruled “Fortress Americas” was a central foreign policy component of the “America First” movement in the early 1940s.

In a March 2018 document published by the US Army War College titled “The Strategic Relevance of Latin America in the US National Security Strategy,” the Army notes that in the aftermath of the fall of the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s, “most democratic societies in the Western Hemisphere” are “feckless and unconsolidated, thereby representing a threat to the national security of the United States by external actors (such as China and Russia) opposing US interests in the region.”

The strategy document indicated another reason for possible military operations in Venezuela: the need for the US military to test its operating capacities in heavily populated urban areas.

“Latin American megacities are also a laboratory for the US Army in cooperation with its strategic partners in addressing another important issue, or, perhaps, an old issue in the post-Cold War international system: how to fight a conventional war in an unconventional environment,” the document states. “Megacities are the new arena for conflicts in the 21st century. Therefore, the US Government and Army cannot afford to be caught off guard when called upon to exercise and accomplish its mission.”



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