

Washington issues ultimatum to Venezuela over “humanitarian aid” ploy

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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo issued an ultimatum to the Venezuelan government of President Nicolas Maduro on Wednesday, demanding that it throw open its borders to a US-orchestrated scheme to deliver “humanitarian aid.” Washington’s aim is either to provoke a fissure within the country’s armed forces or set the stage for a US-led military intervention.

“The Venezuelan people desperately need humanitarian aid,” Pompeo tweeted. “The US & other countries are trying to help, but #Venezuela’s military under Maduro’s orders is blocking aid with trucks and shipping tankers. The Maduro regime must LET THE AID REACH THE STARVING PEOPLE.”

The sudden concern for the “starving people” of Venezuela comes from a US government that has systematically worked to strangle the Venezuelan economy, imposing a financial blockade in August 2017 and an oil embargo last week. The embargo aims to block all sales to and from the state-owned energy company PDVSA, threatening the country with the loss of its main source of foreign exchange and its ability to import food and medicine.

Washington’s intention is unmistakable. It seeks to starve the Venezuelan population into submission, render the country ungovernable and carry through a regime-change operation to install a right-wing puppet government.

To that end, the US government sponsored a political coup launched on January 23 with Juan Guaidó’s self-swearing in as “interim president,” a stunt worked out in advance with the Trump administration. Washington immediately recognized Guaidó, an operative of the extreme right, US-funded Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, who had been suddenly elevated to the presidency of the opposition-controlled National Assembly on the eve of the coup. The Trump administration at the same time declared the Maduro

government “illegitimate.”

The right-wing governments of Latin America, along with Canada and the major European powers, have followed suit in what amounts to a criminal and predatory scramble for control over Venezuela’s oil reserves, the largest of any country on the planet.

Guaidó and the Venezuelan right, working in close collaboration with the CIA and the State Department, have launched a noisy public campaign over the aid promised by Washington (\$20 million), Canada (US\$40 million) and the European Union (US\$5 million), demanding the opening of a “humanitarian corridor” and declaring that supplies are on the verge of arriving in the Colombian border city of Cúcuta and must be brought into Venezuela under the right-wing opposition’s control, without hindrance.

The main target of this propaganda campaign is the Venezuelan military, which constitutes a key pillar of the Maduro government and has thus far failed to desert it.

The Twitter account of the National Assembly led by Guaidó has kept as its lead message: “Now is the time, soldier of the fatherland! Are you going to deny humanitarian aid to your mother?”

Guaidó, meanwhile, tweeted on Wednesday that “in the coming hours, we will give the scope and possibilities of the humanitarian aid, to the National Armed Forces I say: let this aid in because it is for your families too.”

The Venezuelan military’s reaction to this campaign has been to block the major bridge linking Cúcuta in Colombia with Urena in Venezuela, parking a tanker truck and two large containers across the bridge’s three lanes.

The pretense that truckloads of food and medicine brought to the Colombian-Venezuelan border will reverse the profound economic and social crisis prevailing in Venezuela is absurd. The aid, whenever it may arrive, is a classic Trojan Horse, directed not at alleviating the

suffering of the Venezuelan people but at provoking either a military coup or an armed confrontation.

Both the Red Cross and Caritas, the Catholic Church-affiliated aid group, have refused to participate in any operation involving the US “humanitarian corridor,” citing their principles of neutrality and independence.

The foreign ministers of both Colombia and Brazil, the two countries that border Venezuela where the US has proposed to open up its “humanitarian corridors,” were in Washington Tuesday for discussions with Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton. The latter appeared at a press conference last week carrying a notepad with the words “5,000 troops to Colombia” written on it.

Undoubtedly, the preferred US option is to provoke a social, economic and political crisis in Venezuela of such magnitude that the military changes sides, overthrowing Maduro and lining up behind a US puppet regime. Failing to achieve this outcome, however, as Trump has repeatedly stated, the option of a US military intervention remains “on the table.”

The US president reiterated his recognition of the “legitimate government” of Guaidó in his State of the Union address Tuesday, to applause from both Republicans and Democrats, whose principal leaders have endorsed the US coup attempt.

The American corporate media, meanwhile, has fallen into line behind Washington’s regime-change operation in the same manner as it did in advance of the US wars in Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. On cue from the State Department, the White House and the CIA, it is broadcasting reports on hunger in Venezuela and casting Maduro as a villain for failing to throw his borders open to the US “aid.”

Maduro, who heads a bourgeois government that defends private property and the interests of both domestic and foreign finance capital, has appealed to the Pope to mediate between his government and the US-backed right-wing opposition. It has welcomed the intervention of a “contact group” organized by Uruguay and Mexico, with the participation of Bolivia, Ecuador, Costa Rica and eight members of the European Union (Spain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden and the UK), which is convening in Montevideo today to seek a peaceful way out of the crisis.

For its part, however, the right-wing opposition led by Guaidó, acting on orders from Washington, has rejected any “dialogue” or negotiated settlement, demanding unconditional regime-change and counting on US military

might to achieve it.

Underlying this intransigence is the determination of US imperialism to assert its hegemony over the most oil-rich country in the world and to roll back the influence of China and Russia, which both have extensive economic and military ties with Caracas.

The threat of Venezuela becoming a flashpoint for a major confrontation between the world’s principal nuclear-armed powers is real and growing. The *New York Times* published an editorial Wednesday generally supporting the overthrow of the Maduro government, but expressing the nervousness that exists within sections of the US ruling establishment over the extremely bellicose policy being pursued against Venezuela.

“In part because of the Trump administration’s all-in support for regime-change, the crisis has become a dangerous global power struggle,” the *Times* warned. “That’s the last thing Venezuelans need.”

Citing the ties between Caracas and Moscow and Beijing, the *Times* states, “It is very much in American and Western interests to free Venezuela from such unholy alliances through negotiations between supporters of Mr. Guaidó and Mr. Maduro.”

And should such negotiations not be forthcoming? Clearly, there is ample reason for concern within ruling layers over another US war for regime-change, given the abject and bloody failure of previous such military adventures in Iraq and Libya to achieve any tangible gains for US imperialist interests. But in the end, the American ruling class as a whole is embarked on a course in Venezuela that can only produce a bloodbath and the imposition of the kind of dictatorship that was brought to power by the CIA and the Pentagon in Chile, Argentina and elsewhere in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, combined with the threat of a far wider war.

The working class in the United States, Europe and internationally must reject the “humanitarian” and “democratic” pretensions of both Washington and the European powers with contempt and unite with the working class of Venezuela and Latin America as a whole in a struggle against imperialist intervention and capitalism.



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