Canada ever more deeply implicated in US-engineered coup attempt in Venezuela

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If we look independent enough, we can do things for you that even the CIA cannot do.—former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

As the political crisis in Venezuela deepens, the leading role that Canada and the Trudeau government are playing in the ongoing US-orchestrated coup becomes ever more evident. Like its US counterpart, Canadian imperialism covets Venezuela's vast oil resources and is determined to prevent Russia, China, and other "strategic rivals" from expanding their influence in the Americas, even if this naked pursuit of predatory interests threatens to unleash a bloody conflagration.

On February 25, US Vice President Mike Pence was invited to address a meeting in Bogotá of the Lima Group, a coalition of US allies in the region co-founded and led by Canada. In a bellicose speech, Pence vowed "there is no turning back" in Venezuela and reiterated US President Donald Trump's threat that "all options are on the table"—a code name for military action—in forcing Nicolás Maduro and his bourgeois nationalist regime from power.

Following Pence's speech, the Lima Group, which consists of Canada and thirteen Latin American countries, issued a statement reiterating its support for the self-declared interim president Juan Guaidó and supporting Pence's demand that the Venezuelan military complete the US-led coup by switching its allegiance from Maduro, the country's elected president, to the would-be US puppet ruler.

Only two group members, Mexico and Uruguay, refused to support the statement. But Canada is working behind the scenes, apparently with some success, to prevail on Mexico to abandon its current stance of urging a mediated settlement between Maduro and Venezuela's right-wing, pro-US opposition.

Speaking on behalf of the Lima Group, Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister Chrystia Freeland said, "We reiterated our conviction that the transition to democracy must be conducted by the Venezuelans themselves, peacefully, within the framework of the constitution, in accordance with international law and supported by political and diplomatic means, without the use of force."

This is a subterfuge. By ruling out military intervention, at this point, Canada only seeks to distance itself from the Trump administration's bellicose threats, the better to support the US-led regime-change operation; and all the while laying the political groundwork for a naval blockade or outright invasion should the escalating economic sanctions—themselves an act of aggression tantamount to war—prove insufficient.

Established in 2017 with the ostensible purpose of brokering a "peaceful" resolution to the growing social-political crisis in Venezuela, the Lima Group's real objective—and this is epitomized by Canada's role within it—is to provide the US imperialist intrigues in the country with a "humanitarian" and "democratic" façade.

As the radical journalist Yves Engler noted in a recent comment on Canada's role in the US-orchestrated coup in Venezuela, former Liberal Prime Minister Jean Chrétien once made a revealing comment that points to how Canadian imperialism aids and abets its US allies. Chrétien told US President Bill Clinton, "Keeping some distance will be good for both of us. If we look as though we're the fifty-first state of the United States, there's nothing we can do for you internationally, just as the governor of a state can't do anything for you internationally. But if we look independent enough, we can do things for you that even the CIA cannot do."

Pence's intervention at the Bogotá meeting underscored that while the US is not formally a member of the Lima Group, Canada and its Latin American allies are working in tandem with it. In fact, the Lima Group is directly involved in the US war plans, as shown by last week's meeting in Florida between the head of the Colombian armed forces, Maj. Gen. Luis Navarro Jiménez, and leaders of the Pentagon's Southern Command.

Like the US, Canada blamed the Maduro regime for the violence that took place during last month's US-staged provocation at the Venezuelan-Colombian border over the purported "humanitarian aid" convoy. Freeland and Minister of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau immediately issued a statement demanding that "the perpetrators" of this "unacceptable violation of basic humanitarian principles and human decency … be brought to justice." With the aim of legitimizing the overthrow of Venezuela's elected president and justifying future military action, Canada has already petitioned the International Criminal Court to investigate the

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Maduro regime.

However, the attempt of the US, Canada and the Venezuelan opposition to whip up a propaganda furore over the "aid" convoy quickly unraveled. Last weekend even the *New York Times* had to concede that it was forces loyal to the Venezuelan opposition who set the "aid" truck fire in a calculated provocation.

Like the Trump administration, Canada is using the Venezuelan government's blocking of the Trojan Horse "aid convoy" to justify imposing harsher sanctions against officials in the Venezuelan government. Freeland said that Canada has "put many of the senior leaders in the Maduro regime on our sanctions list" and is now "discussing with our partners ways that that sanctions list can be expanded in order to have even more bite."

Since 2018, several Venezuelan officials have been targeted by US and Canadian sanctions. Needless to say, such actions are not taken against regimes aligned with Ottawa and Washington that have far worse records of human rights abuses, such as the al-Sisi dictatorship in Egypt or the Saudi absolutist monarchy.

Pence's demand that the member states of the Lima Group transfer ownership of any Venezuelan assets within their borders, including those of the state-owned oil company PDVSA, to the Guaidó-led "interim government" is an idea jointly developed by the Washington Inter-American Dialogue think-tank and the Canadian Centre for International Governance Innovation, based in Waterloo, Ontario.

The current attempt to oust the Maduro regime is the culmination of a longstanding US imperialist destabilization campaign, including a failed US-orchestrated coup against Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez, in 2002.

A Canadian Press report published at the end of January revealed that Canadian diplomats worked systematically over several months with their Latin American counterparts in Caracas to prepare the current regime-change operation, pressing Maduro's right-wing opponents to set aside their differences and mount a joint challenge to the government. "The turning point," said the Canadian Press, "came Jan. 4, when the Lima Group … rejected the legitimacy of Maduro's May 2018 election victory and his looming January 10 inauguration, while recognizing the 'legitimately elected' National Assembly." The report cited an unnamed Canadian official as saying the opposition "were really looking for international support of some kind, to be able to hold onto a reason as to why they should unite, and push somebody like Juan Guaidó."

One day prior to Maduro's inauguration, Freeland spoke to Guaidó, the newly-elected National Assembly speaker, by telephone to urge him to challenge the elected Venezuelan president.

Like Washington, Canadian imperialism is determined to install a client regime in Venezuela so as to advance its predatory ambitions in Latin America and counter the growing presence of Russia and China in the region.

Canadian financial and mining companies are very active in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), a region that possesses some 25 percent of the world's forests and an estimated 35 percent of the globe's potential hydroelectricity, as well as 85 percent of all known reserves of lithium and a third of copper, bauxite and silver. The region is also rich in coal, oil, gas and uranium, and underwater oil reserves are regularly being discovered along its coast lines.

In their 2016 book *Blood of extraction: Canadian imperialism in Latin America*, Todd Gordon and Jeffrey Webber detail the expansion of Canadian capital in the LAC and the outright criminal actions of Canadian companies to secure access to the region's resources and vast pool of cheap labour.

In 1990, Canadian capital in Latin America, in the form of cumulative Foreign Direct Investment or FDI, stood at C$2.58 billion. By 2000 it had risen to C$25.3 billion, an increase of 800 percent, and by 2013 to C$59.4 billion, an increase of 134 percent from 2000, and 2,198 percent from 1990. From 2007 to 2012, Canada was the second largest external source of FDI in the LAC region, trailing only the US.

LAC countries account for over half of Canadian mining assets held abroad, some C$72.4 billion. There were only two Canadian mines in operation in the region in 1990. By 2012, that number had jumped to eighty, with another 48 in the development or feasibility stage. The operating mines generated combined revenues of C$19.3 billion in 2012 for Canadian companies. In 2014, 62 percent of all producing mines in the region were owned by companies headquartered in Canada.

Behind a smokescreen of bogus "humanitarian" rhetoric, it is these multi-billion dollar investments and the hopes of still greater loot and plunder that are driving Canada's government to play a leading role in the US-led regime change operation in Venezuela, the country that is home to the world's largest proven oil reserves. The Trudeau government and Canadian big business are determined to grab the biggest slice of the pie possible in Latin America, even if it means subjecting the region's long-suffering workers and toilers to dictatorship and war.

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