

Tensions rise between US, Russia and China over Venezuelan coup

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US President Donald Trump told reporters at the White House Wednesday that “Russia has to get out” of Venezuela. Asked how Washington would enforce this demand, he responded, “We’ll see. All options are open.”

Trump delivered his ultimatum during a White House photo op with Fabiana Rosales, the wife of right-wing opposition leader Juan Guaidó, who, with US backing, proclaimed himself “interim president” of Venezuela in January, calling upon the military to overthrow the existing government of President Nicolas Maduro.

Rosales, referred to by Trump administration officials as Venezuela’s “first lady,” is conducting an international tour aimed at drumming up support for the US-orchestrated regime change operation, which has flagged noticeably since the fiasco suffered last month with the failure of a cynical attempt to force trucks carrying supposed humanitarian aid across the Colombian-Venezuelan border.

Both Guaidó and his US patrons had predicted that the provocation would trigger a rising by the Venezuelan armed forces against Maduro. With a handful of right-wing opposition supporters and gang members turning out for the “humanitarian” hoax, security forces easily contained the attack.

The latest US provocation has centered upon the arrival in Venezuela over the weekend of two Russian aircraft carrying approximately 100 military personnel. An Antonov An-124 cargo jet and an Ilyushin II-62 passenger plane landed on Saturday at the Maiquetía airport outside of Caracas.

The arrival of the relative handful of Russian military personnel triggered a flurry of denunciations from top Trump administration officials, who have been orchestrating the bid to bring down the Venezuelan government.

White House national security adviser John Bolton declared that the US “will not tolerate hostile foreign

military powers meddling” within the Western Hemisphere.

Earlier this month, Bolton invoked the Monroe Doctrine as the foundation of US policy in Venezuela. This 19th century declaration of US foreign policy initially was directed at opposing any attempts by the empires of Europe to recolonize newly independent republics in Latin America. In the 20th century, it was invoked by successive US governments as a license for US imperialism to use military force to impose its will throughout the hemisphere, resulting in some 50 direct armed interventions and the imposition of fascist-military dictatorships over much of South and Central America.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, meanwhile, told his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, in a March 25 telephone conversation, that Washington would “not stand idly by as Russia exacerbates tensions in Venezuela,” according to a spokesman for the State Department.

The State Department called the arrival of the Russian troops a “reckless escalation” of tensions in Venezuela, adding that “The continued insertion of Russian military personnel to support the illegitimate regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela risks prolonging the suffering of the Venezuelan people...”

What hypocrisy! Washington has imposed an ever-escalating wave of sanctions that have gravely exacerbated the intense crisis of the country’s economy, with Venezuelan working people paying the price. A Trump administration official briefing reporters last Friday boasted: “The effect of the sanctions is continuing and cumulative. It’s sort of like in Star Wars when Darth Vader constricts somebody’s throat, that’s what we are doing to the regime economically.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry quoted Lavrov as having responded to Pompeo by charging that “Washington’s attempts to organize a coup in Venezuela and threats

against its legitimate government are in violation of the UN Charter and undisguised interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state.”

The Russian Foreign Ministry said that the arrival of the Russian troops was in fulfillment of an “agreement on military technical cooperation” signed between Moscow and Caracas in 2001.

“As in colonial times 200 years ago, the US continues to regard Latin America as a zone for its exclusive interests, its own ‘backyard’ and they directly demand that it should obey the US without a word, and that other countries should steer clear of the region,” Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Tuesday. “[D]oes the US think that people are waiting for it to bring democracy to them on the wings of its bombers? This question can be answered by Iraqis, Libyans and Serbs.”

Meanwhile, a US official speaking to Reuters expressed concern that the Russian military personnel who arrived on Saturday included a team of specialists in cybersecurity.

This concern coincides with a new series of electricity blackouts that began on Monday, affecting much of Caracas and at least 16 states. The Maduro government has blamed the outages on sabotage, including cyber-attacks on the power system’s computerized infrastructure.

Meanwhile the Venezuelan situation has also ratcheted up tensions between Washington and Beijing, with the US forcing the cancelation of a 60th anniversary meeting of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), which was set to begin on March 26 in Chengdu.

The Trump administration had demanded that the IDB accept a representative named by its puppet Guaidó as Venezuela’s representative at the meeting. China refused to issue a visa to Washington’s man, Ricardo Hausmann, a Harvard economist and former minister in the government of Venezuelan President Carlos Andrés Pérez, which oversaw the massacre of some 3,000 workers and youth in the suppression of the popular 1989 revolt known as the *caracazo*. Hausmann has publicly called for the US to invade Venezuela along with a “coalition of the willing.”

A spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry defended Beijing’s action on Tuesday, declaring that “Guaidó himself is not a president elected through legal procedures and thus lacks legitimacy,” adding that “changing Venezuela’s representative at the IDB won’t help solve the Venezuelan issue.”

In response to a question about US denunciations of the Russian military presence in Venezuela, the Chinese spokesman stated: “First of all, countries in the Western Hemisphere, including Latin American countries, are all independent and sovereign states. They have the right to determine their own foreign policy and their way to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation with countries of their own choosing.”

He added, in a pointed criticism of US imperialist policy, “Latin American affairs are not a certain country’s exclusive business, nor is Latin America a certain country’s backyard.”

The heated exchanges between Washington, on the one hand, and Moscow and Beijing, on the other, expose the geo-strategic interests that underlie US imperialism’s regime change operation in Venezuela. Both Russia and China have established extensive economic and political ties with Venezuela, which boasts the largest proven oil reserves on the planet.

China has invested upwards of \$50 billion in Venezuela over the past decade in loan agreements repaid with oil exports. Russia’s total investments in the country are estimated at close to \$25 billion, including in the exploitation of a significant share of the country’s oil fields.

Washington views the Venezuelan crisis through the prism of the “great power” conflicts with “revisionist” states that it laid out in the Trump administration’s National Security Strategy and the Pentagon’s strategy document elaborated at the end of 2017.

US imperialism is determined to wrest control of Venezuela’s vast oil resources for the US-based energy monopolies and deny them to its global rivals, particularly China and Russia. To that end, it is prepared to starve the Venezuelan people and turn Latin America into a battlefield in a third world war.



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