

Pentagon ordered to draft military plans to counter Russia and China in Venezuela

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The Pentagon has been ordered to draw up military plans “aimed at deterring Russian, Cuban and Chinese influence” in Venezuela, CNN reported late Monday.

According to the cable news network, a Defense Department official confirmed that the planning was ordered at a White House meeting last week by national security adviser John Bolton, who has coordinated the US-orchestrated regime change operation in Venezuela. It is being carried out by the Pentagon’s Joint Staff, which is in charge of preparing future military operations, together with the US Southern Command, which oversees all US military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

While CNN cited Pentagon officials as stating that the US military has “no appetite ... for using military force,” Trump administration officials continue to insist that “all options are on the table.”

It has been nearly three months since Juan Guaidó, previously a virtually unknown figure in the right-wing, US-funded Voluntad Popular party, swore himself in as “interim president” and was immediately recognized by Washington as the “legitimate” government of Venezuela, with right-wing governments in Latin America and major Western European powers following suit.

This international recognition was combined with increasingly draconian US economic sanctions, tantamount to a state of war, targeting Venezuela’s oil and mining exports, its banking sector and, most recently, ships and cargo companies transporting Venezuelan oil. This was followed by an abortive attempt to force a small column of trucks carrying an insignificant amount of USAID food supplies across the border with Colombia. All of it has failed to produce the desired results: the overthrow of the government of President Nicolas Maduro by the

Venezuelan military.

With the waning of Guaidó and his bourgeois-led opposition against Maduro, Washington appears to be turning toward more directly aggressive means of effecting regime change. It is also justifying its escalation against Venezuela in the name of countering the influence in the country and the broader region, particularly of China, which has become the largest investor in Latin America—lending \$62 billion to Venezuela over the past decade, \$42 billion to Brazil, \$18 billion to Argentina, and \$17 billion to Ecuador—but also of Russia.

This was the main theme of a three-day tour of Latin America by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who visited Chile, Paraguay and Peru, ending it up with a belligerent speech Sunday in the Colombian border town of Cucuta—the site of the “aid” provocation in February.

In the course of the trip, Pompeo repeated the administration’s refrain that “all options are on the table,” threatening US military intervention. At the same time, he denounced Beijing’s role in Latin America, charging that it “injects corrosive capital into the economic bloodstream,” presumably unlike the healthy capital flowing in lesser amounts from the United States. He charged that China was “bankrolling the Maduro regime” and called China’s role in Latin America “nefarious.”

China’s ambassador to Chile, Xu Bu, told a Chilean newspaper that Pompeo had “lost his mind.”

The Chinese Foreign Ministry’s spokesman, Lu Kang, denounced Pompeo’s “groundless allegations,” adding that Washington “has long been treating Latin America as its backyard, where it would resort to willful use of pressure, threat or even subversion.”

Pompeo also slammed Russia for its continued

support for the Maduro government. The country's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, responded: "Venezuela is on everyone's lips. Their regime-change blitz has failed. But the Americans are not giving up their aim to topple the legitimate president."

Most absurdly, Pompeo claimed that Iran was playing a major role in propping up the Maduro government and that it was funneling money into Latin America to support Hezbollah and supposed acts of "terrorism" throughout the region, none of which he could name.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Seyyed Abbas Mousavi responded by declaring Pompeo's claims "ridiculous." He went on to charge Washington with "blatant" meddling in Venezuela's internal affairs and acts of "economic terrorism" aimed at forcing the Venezuelan population to "either riot against their legitimate government or face starvation."

"The US under Trump seeks to turn Latin America into its backyard, just like the way it was in the 19th century," he said. "However, the nations of the world, particularly the people of Latin America, have woken up and the wheel of time will not move backwards."

The threat of US military intervention in Venezuela was made all the more apparent by the exposure of a closed-door conference convened by the US state-connected think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) on April 10, with the explicit title, "Assessing the Use of Military Force in Venezuela."

Samuel Moncada, the Venezuelan ambassador to the United Nations, called attention to the conference, which was first disclosed by journalist Max Blumenthal on the website thegrayzone.com, warning that the secret meeting would take its place in "the shameful history of US wars in the world."

A list of the attendees at the meeting obtained by Blumenthal included Adm. Kurt Tidd, who until last year was the chief of SOUTHCOM, current and former members of the National Security Council and USAID, representatives, including military attaches, from the Brazilian and Colombian embassies in Washington and right-wing Venezuela exiles designated as Guaidó's representatives in the US. Also present was Roger Noriega, of the right-wing American Enterprise Institute, who played a significant role under the Reagan administration in the illegal operation to fund the CIA-organized "contra" war against Nicaragua in

the 1980s. He went on to oversee the coup against Haiti's elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2004. Since then, Noriega has been a rabid advocate of regime change in Venezuela.

The threat of military intervention in Venezuela is bound up with the global drive of US imperialism toward world war as it attempts to reverse the erosion of its global economic hegemony by military means.



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