

Pompeo vows intervention against “riots” in Washington’s “own backyard”

Bill Van Auken
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Washington and the right-wing Latin American governments most closely aligned with US imperialist policy in the Western Hemisphere have announced a new series of sanctions against Cuba and Venezuela.

The measures followed a Latin America policy speech delivered by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Monday in which he sought to blame the mass popular upheavals that have swept the continent on Cuban and Venezuelan subversion.

The State Department announced on Monday that it had identified six ships owned by Venezuela’s state-run oil corporation PDVSA, which it said were “being used by the former [sic] Maduro regime to ship oil to Cuba.” Pompeo issued a statement claiming that the latest measures “block the efforts by the Cuban and former Maduro regimes to evade sanctions that are intended to prevent the theft of Venezuela’s natural resources for corrupt purposes.”

This unilateral US action came just one day after a group of right-wing Latin American governments joined with Washington in announcing sanctions aimed at 29 senior Venezuelan government officials and their families, subjecting them to a travel ban and barring them from making financial transactions in the respective countries.

The Trump administration was joined by the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic. Also present was a representative of Juan Guaidó, the US-financed, right-wing politician and self-proclaimed “interim president” of Venezuela, who serves as the puppet of US intervention. Guaidó’s political fortunes have been in perpetual decline since an abortive attempt to provoke a military coup last April.

These sanctions have a particularly ominous significance in that they were issued under the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR). The TIAR, or so-called Rio Pact, was a Cold War “hemispheric defense” agreement whose terms were dictated by Washington to the governments of Latin America in 1947. As one US official put it at the time, “The security of the United States is

synonymous with the security of the hemisphere.”

The pact provided the foundation for the development of the close alliance between the Pentagon and Latin America’s military in pursuit of a “national security” doctrine that gave rise to murderous dictatorships over much of the continent in the second half of the 20th century.

The dusting off of this treaty today in relation to Venezuela carries with it the implicit threat of military intervention to achieve Washington’s goal of regime change through the overthrow of the government headed by President Nicolas Maduro.

The policy of imperialist domination and aggression pursued by Washington was given clear expression in a speech delivered Monday at the University of Louisville in Kentucky by the Trump administration’s thuggish secretary of state, Pompeo.

A politically incoherent collection of lies and right-wing propaganda, Pompeo’s speech focused in large measure on the insurrectionary wave that has swept much of the continent over the past several months, while utterly falsifying its content. He claimed that the political developments in Latin America had been characterized by “a sharp turn towards democracy and capitalism” and “away from dictatorship and socialism,” presenting as his prime example Bolivia, where he said the people “are rebuilding their democracy even as we sit here today.”

The character of this US-backed “democracy,” founded on a right-wing military coup that ousted Bolivian President Evo Morales, was spelled out clearly in a report presented Tuesday by a fact-finding team of Argentine lawyers and human rights advocates. It described a “repressive system instituted by the de facto government that has caused dozens of deaths, hundreds of arbitrary detentions, thousands of wounded, innumerable cases of assaults and torture, rapes and other crimes against the physical, psychological and sexual wellbeing of the victims, who are men, women, children, the elderly and members of vulnerable groups.”

Adopting the police-state mentality of the right-wing governments that have been the target of the mass protests in

Latin America—including the US-backed coup regime in Bolivia—Pompeo claimed that Cuba had tried to “hijack legitimate democratic protests...in the region to drive them toward their ideological ends,” and that Colombia had “closed its borders to Venezuela out of concern that protesters from—terrorists from Venezuela might enter.”

He added that “we in the Trump administration will continue to support countries trying to prevent Cuba and Venezuela from hijacking those protests. And we’ll work with legitimate governments to prevent protests from morphing into riots and violence that don’t reflect the democratic will of the people.”

These “legitimate governments” consist of the continent’s most right-wing regimes and closest US allies. In addition to Bolivia, they include Chile, where millions have marched in the streets against the austerity measures of President Sebastián Piñera; Colombia, now facing its third general strike against the far-right administration of President Iván Duque; and Ecuador, where mass protests forced President Lenín Moreno to flee the capital.

In every case, these “legitimate governments” are examples of what Pompeo describes as a “turn towards democracy and capitalism,” which for the working class and oppressed masses of Latin America has meant a relentless assault on living standards, health care, education and basic rights, along with ever deepening social inequality. The millions who have taken to the streets to oppose these attacks have been met with ferocious police and military repression. Pompeo’s statement amounts to a warning that the Pentagon and the CIA are actively preparing to help put down revolutionary upheavals—described by the secretary of state as “riots”—in Latin America.

Pompeo continued: “And we’ll be vigilant too. Vigilant that new democratic leaders don’t exploit people’s frustrations to take power, to hijack the very democracy that got them there.” In other words, democracy is all well and good if it produces a government that bows to US diktats, but should it place in power anyone prepared to defy them, Washington reserves the “right” to pursue regime change.

Pompeo also spelled out US imperialism’s strategic concerns in Latin America, referring to “malign influences in the region” and “bad actors,” citing as an example a deal with Russia’s state-backed oil firm Rosneft to operate in Venezuela, which boasts the largest petroleum reserves of any country in the world, once the exclusive preserve of Standard Oil, Gulf and Shell.

He also warned against “predatory Chinese activities” in Latin America, by which he meant the dramatic rise in China’s economic influence in the region. Beijing has surpassed the US as its main creditor and is now the largest export market for South America and second largest after the

US for Latin America as a whole. Over the past decade, Chinese investment in the region has increased by more than 480 percent, while the total volume of trade between China and Latin America has risen roughly twenty-fold since 2000.

Pompeo closed his speech by declaring, “There remains an awful lot of work to do in our own backyard,” using a contemptuous phrase that is emblematic of Yankee imperialism’s regard of the countries south of its border as subjects and semi-colonies.

This “work” is part of a global attempt by US imperialism to offset the erosion of its previously hegemonic domination of the world capitalist economy by recourse to its continued military supremacy.

Asked last month about the mounting social protests in Latin America, Adm. Craig Faller, head of the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), told *USA Today*: “There’s a vicious circle of threats that affect the security of the United States that jeopardize peace and prosperity and democracy right here in our neighborhood. Right here. And that vicious circle is on young governments. These are young democracies, civil wars within our lifetime right here.”

For all of Pompeo’s talk of Latin America’s turn to “democracy and capitalism,” it is evident that ruling circles within the United States are viewing the developments in Latin America with increasing panic. They are concerned that the mass protests and strikes in Chile, Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador will be soon replicated within the United States itself, posing the unification of the working class across the Americas in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism.



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