

Washington and its puppet Guaidó implicated in armed attacks on Venezuela

Bill Van Auken
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A second group of mercenaries attempting to invade Venezuela was captured Monday afternoon as part of an abortive operation aimed at overthrowing the government of President Nicolas Maduro.

Local authorities in the town of Chuao, on the country's northern coast, reported that the group of armed men was subdued by the local population, including fishermen, who first detected the attempted landing. They were then turned over to security forces. At least two of those captured were identified as US citizens.

The events in Chuao followed the report that Venezuelan troops had blocked an incursion early Sunday by a small group of armed men who landed at Macuto in the state of Guaira, also on the northern coast and near the capital of Caracas. It reported that eight of the invaders were killed in the operation, and two captured. The country's interior minister, Nestor Reverol, stated that nine rifles, two AFAG machine guns and a Glock 9 millimeter pistol were captured along with six vehicles fitted with machine guns, a landing craft, satellite telephones, ammunition, identity cards and uniforms, including a helmet bearing the emblem of a US flag.

Venezuelan officials said that one of the two mercenaries captured in Macuto claimed to be an agent of the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

Speaking before an online summit of the 120-nation Non-Aligned Movement on Monday, Maduro charged that the mercenaries sent into Venezuela had been trained in Colombia and paid by the governments in Bogota and Washington. Their objective, he added, was to assassinate him in order to achieve US aims of regime change.

"The central objective was to kill the president of Venezuela, a terrorist attack in the midst of a pandemic," he stated.

Juan Guaidó, the right-wing politician who proclaimed himself "interim president" at the beginning of last year and was immediately recognized as the "legitimate" government of Venezuela, initially issued a statement denying any involvement in the events and dismissing the reports of armed incursions as a false-flag operation staged by the government.

His denials, however, were swiftly disproven with the posting of images on the Twitter account of US-based Venezuelan journalist Patricia Poleo—a virulent opponent of Maduro—of a

signed contract between Guaidó and Jordan Goudreau, who runs a Florida-based security contracting business, Silvercorp USA.

Goudreau, an ex-Green Beret who was deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, had started the business, according to the Associated Press, with the aim of selling school districts on the idea of deploying counter-terrorism agents inside schools, disguised as teachers.

In February 2019, Goudreau began his active involvement in US-backed provocations against Venezuela, providing security for a concert organized by British billionaire Richard Branson on the Venezuelan-Colombian border as part of a failed CIA operation aimed at forcing phony aid convoys into Venezuela.

Poleo also posted an audio recording of a conversation between Goudreau and Guaidó agreeing to sign the contract, in which Guaidó tells the US mercenary that Venezuela is confronting a humanitarian crisis and "we have to resolve the situation."

The 70-page contract guaranteed "strategic planning/advising; project leadership; equipment procurement; hiring of personnel; logistics consultation; project execution advisement" for at least 495 days, or until the fulfillment of the operation, all for a total fee of \$212,900,000, guaranteed by oil money seized by the US government.

In an interview with Poleo Monday, Goudreau confirmed the contract, but claimed that Guaidó and his collaborators failed to pay a retainer of \$1.5 million. "They kept promising week after week to pay," he said.

Asked if the operation playing out on Venezuelan shores was the one that had been envisioned in the contract, Goudreau replied, "This was the operation, this was it. An operation to overthrow the government of Maduro."

The ex-Green Beret said that other "cells" of armed opponents of the Venezuelan government had been activated across the country. There was no initial confirmation of this claim.

There is no question that the elements involved in the attempted invasion were trained at camps in Colombia that operated with the permission of the Colombian government and, in all probability, the collaboration of the US military and intelligence agencies.

The principal identified Venezuelan figures in the invasion plan have been accounted for. A photograph was released of the body of former Venezuelan National Guard Captain Robert Colina, alias Pantera, who issued a video in advance of the attempted invasion calling on members of the armed forces and police to join with the mercenaries.

Adolfo Baduel, the son of retired general Raúl Isaías Baduel, who was involved in previous military provocations, was among those captured. He was taped telling one of his captors that the two US citizens with whom he was captured told him that they worked for the head of security for US President Donald Trump.

An Associated Press article profiling Goudreau's role in what it described as a previous failed plot to invade Venezuela with 300 military defectors trained in Colombia reported that the ex-Green Beret had been introduced to Guaidó and his cohorts by Keith Schiller, the longtime bodyguard of President Trump, who served as director of Oval Office operations.

Another individual identified as among those captured during the incursions was Antonio Sequea, an ex-Venezuelan captain who appeared in a video calling for the military to stage a coup. Goudreau had described him as a leader of the operation.

Finally, there is Clíver Alcalá Cordones, a retired Venezuelan major general who had reportedly been involved in the plot to invade Venezuela before he turned himself in to US authorities in Colombia after being charged along with other Venezuelan officials with involvement in drug trafficking.

The abortive invasion plot has unfolded in the midst of an escalating campaign of aggression by US imperialism against Venezuela. Washington has tightened economic sanctions even as Venezuela confronts the threat of the coronavirus pandemic, with its health care system on the brink of collapse from the lack of medicine and medical equipment resulting from the US blockade. While the total number of confirmed cases has reached only 357, and total deaths 10, the return of thousands of workers who had migrated to Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Chile, where the rate of infection is much higher, threatens to ignite the pandemic in Venezuela as well.

At the same time, the Trump administration has launched a military operation directed against Venezuela, the largest in the hemisphere since the 1989 US invasion of Panama. The deployment of warships, AWACs planes and Special Operations troops has been staged on the pretext of combating drug trafficking, even though the amount of narcotics funneled through the country is infinitesimal compared to Colombia and the countries of Central America, ruled by Washington's right-wing allies.

While the Maduro government has thus far proved successful in combating the coronavirus, the social crisis and class struggle have only been intensified by the pandemic. According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflicts (OVCS), the number of demonstrations in the country during the month of March, in the midst of a nationwide quarantine imposed in

response to the coronavirus, reached 580. More than half of them were triggered by gas shortages and the cutoff of basic services. At least 133 of them were related to strikes and other labor struggles.

An even greater number of protests was reported in late April, with looting and confrontations with police and the military breaking out in a number of states.

The quarantine has seen ever wider layers of the population suffering hunger as food prices continue to soar beyond the reach of an average worker's wages, and those depending on the informal economy are deprived of a livelihood. The most extreme impact has been felt in the country's prison system, where inmates were largely dependent upon family members bringing them food. The coronavirus quarantine's cutoff of visits to the prison triggered prison rebellions driven by hunger in three major prisons, resulting in the deaths of 97 inmates. The Venezuelan government callously reported "neutralizing" the slain inmates.

While the conditions are emerging for revolutionary upheavals from below in Venezuela, there is no indication that social discontent is translating into any increased support for Guaidó and his right-wing cohorts, who represent the interests of Venezuela's traditional ruling oligarchy. Their contempt for the conditions of the masses found concrete expression in Guaidó's allotment of \$5,000 monthly stipends for his supporters in the National Assembly, paid for out of the money stolen by Washington from Venezuela.

The Venezuelan working class can find a way out of the present crisis only through a break with all sections of the country's ruling class, including the *boliburguesia*, the layer of government officials, contractors and financial speculators who have enriched themselves under the "Bolivarian socialist" governments of Hugo Chávez and Maduro. It can defend its essential rights and defeat imperialism only by means of its own independent struggle for socialism in unity with the struggles of workers throughout the Americas and internationally.



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