

Threat of a US-led military intervention in Venezuela grows as Guaidó's coalition splits

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As the December 6 legislative elections approach in Venezuela, the Trump administration is escalating its threats of military aggression to overthrow the government of President Nicolas Maduro and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

This danger has been increased by the deepening domestic political crisis in the US in the lead-up to the November presidential elections. Meanwhile, appeals by Maduro for a rapprochement with Washington and the Venezuelan right have only emboldened imperialism.

Divisions within Venezuela's US-backed right-wing opposition, moreover, have only made the situation more explosive. Juan Guaidó—recognized as the “interim president” by Washington, the European Union and their allies—could lose control of his main political platform, the National Assembly, after the December elections.

While Guaidó is boycotting the elections, Maduro has raised the stakes in this regard by announcing that the PSUV-controlled National Constituent Assembly—created in 2017 to sideline the opposition-controlled National Assembly—would cease to operate next year.

Exasperated by the failure of Guaidó to instigate a military overthrow of Maduro, and fearful of growing mass opposition from below, Guaidó's coalition is breaking apart. Last weekend, the former vice-presidential candidate María Corina Machado broke with Guaidó for even negotiating with the Maduro government and not pursuing “a unity to oust Maduro and his regime in the shortest time possible through a national and international operation.” She has long been a creature of US intelligence and an advocate of a US military invasion.

Then, on Wednesday, former presidential candidate Henrique Capriles announced that his Justice First Party, one of the three larger opposition parties, will participate in the legislative elections, declaring: “We are not going to hand over the National Assembly to Maduro as a gift.”

Capriles is believed to have negotiated the pardoning of 110 opposition figures, some in prison and others in exile. This followed an initial pardoning of legislator Juan

Requesens, accused of participating in a failed drone assassination attempt against Maduro in August 2018.

Another figure pardoned was Freddy Guevara, an opposition politician who was granted asylum in the Chilean embassy in November 2017, shortly after he proclaimed the goal of “the Chilean arrangement with what happened to Allende and Chile's reconstruction afterwards,” i.e., a CIA-orchestrated coup to murder Maduro and install a fascist military dictatorship modeled on that of Augusto Pinochet.

Most media outlets claim that these pardons are nothing more than an appeal to sections of the opposition to participate in the December elections and undermine the efforts by Washington to delegitimize it. However, this assumes that Maduro is some implacable foe of US imperialism.

On the contrary, the Maduro government, as a representative of a section of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, which is entirely dependent on US and European markets and capital, has repeatedly sought a deal. Earlier this year, Maduro said to the *Washington Post* that “a bonanza could be waiting for U.S. oil companies” if Trump lifted sanctions and recognized his government.

Maduro—and Hugo Chávez before him—speaks for a faction of the ruling elite that hopes to use its suppression of the class struggle and close economic ties with other major economies like Russia, China and Iran, in order to secure concessions from US and European capital.

The pardons constitute the latest olive branch extended by Maduro to Washington as desperation grows in Caracas from the deepening economic and social crisis, worsened by US oil sanctions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The virus is spreading out of control across Venezuela. The government is reporting widespread “community transmission” and more than 1,000 new cases daily, reaching a total of 48,883 infections. The government has recognized 398 COVID-19 deaths, while sources tied to Guaidó claim the death toll is 778.

The health care system was already collapsing before the pandemic. US sanctions had deprived Venezuela of the

dollars needed for essential imports like medicines and medical equipment, adding to years of social austerity by the Maduro government and the migration of the majority of doctors, according to medical associations.

In response to growing class tensions, Caracas has turned increasingly to brutal repression and attacks against democratic rights to quell opposition from the working class.

Repressive operations involving agents of the Special Action Forces (FAES) was confirmed by the Attorney General Tarek William Saab himself when he charged two FAES officials with the killing of two journalists during a raid on a local station of Guacamaya TV in the Zulia state. While Saab sought to present the killers as rogues and “infiltrators,” there are numerous other reports of extrajudicial killings of journalists and protesters in slums.

All appeals to Washington, however, have only led to more aggressive preparations and actual attempts to overthrow Maduro via military intervention. The pandemic crisis has only increased US concerns that its geopolitical rivals, chiefly China, are increasing their influence in Latin America at the expense of US imperialism.

The Pentagon is currently overseeing the largest US military deployment in Latin America since the 1989 invasion of Panama, sending dozens of warships, helicopters, patrol aircraft and thousands of troops to the Caribbean in a supposed “anti-drug” mission after falsely claiming that Venezuela bore major responsibility for the flow of narcotics to the US.

On August 28, Rear Adm. Andrew Tiongson, the US Southern Command’s director of operations, said in a press conference that the deployment in the Caribbean seeks to oppose “criminal opportunists who have no regard for human life and are intent on making a profit off their poisonous and illicit trade.” This is nonsense. The bulk of drug trafficking from Latin America to the US passes through the territories of Colombia and Central America, ruled by right-wing governments aligned with Washington.

Tiongson then added cryptically: “And we, and we have also just, we want to always support what the Venezuelan people need, which is their right in their democratic government to be installed. So, we are watching that closely and, again, that is part of our fight, if you will.”

On August 17, Colombian president Iván Duque, Trump’s closest ally in the region, announced together with US National Security Adviser Robert O’Brien and Southern Command chief, Adm. Craig Faller, a \$5 billion “Colombia Grows” initiative, centered on opposing “drug trafficking.” Duque, whose government is facing a deep political crisis, specifically referred to “ending the usurpation of power in Venezuela.”

Since the announcement, Duque has bypassed opposition

in the Colombian Supreme Court and Congress to authorize the presence of US troops in the country, which was followed by the return of a team of US Security Force Assistance Brigades.

The US-financed Plan Colombia to support the Colombian ruling elite’s war against peasants, guerrillas and, ostensibly, drug cartels has resulted in a dramatic increase in cocaine trafficking, more than 7 million internally displaced people, countless massacres by the military and paramilitary forces, and an estimated 8 million hectares of land stolen from peasants and concentrated in the hands of landowners that constitute a major constituency of the Duque government.

Among other ominous signs of a foreign intervention, Adm. Remigio Ceballes, commander of the National Armed Forces of Venezuela, stated on August 22, that “International intelligence organizations allied with Venezuela have informed us that Colombia is preparing an aggression.” Then, La Política Online indicated that Mexican military sources have suggested that 9,500 US troops will be redeployed from Germany for operations in Latin America.

Support for US aggression against Venezuela is bipartisan. At a July 27 hearing US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo declared that “Our policy is not to negotiate anything but [Maduro’s] departure.” The ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Robert Menendez, replied, “There is bipartisan support for the policy toward Venezuela, but its focus has left millions of Venezuelans suffering.”

If anything, the Democrats are demanding a more aggressive confrontation globally against Russia and China. On Wednesday, Democratic Party presidential candidate Joe Biden told NBC that “Cuba along with Russia and China has contributed to the political impasse in Venezuela as well. What’s the president doing?” He added: “Nicolas Maduro has gotten stronger ... The country is no closer to a free election.”



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