

Victoria Nuland in Colombia: Is Washington plotting another coup?

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Following high-level security talks held in Colombia last week, Washington's Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Victoria Nuland, alleged that "foreign actors" are attempting to subvert that country's upcoming elections. She vowed that the US military and intelligence apparatus would work with its Colombian counterparts to assure "a free and fair election here; a Colombian election for Colombians."

"We must safeguard it against outside actors interested in manipulating elections, as they have tried to do in other parts of the world," Nuland told reporters.

Polls have placed Senator Gustavo Petro, a former member of the M-19 guerrilla movement, which traded the "armed struggle" for bourgeois politics, as the clear front-runner in the presidential race. Approval ratings for incumbent President Iván Duque, Washington's closest ally in the region, and for his far-right party stand in the low teens.

Accompanied by Pentagon and US intelligence officials, Nuland was in Bogota for the US-Colombia High-Level Strategic Security Dialogue, a mechanism created in 2012 to better coordinate the actions of Colombia's right-wing government with the counterrevolutionary operations of US imperialism in the Western hemisphere.

While Nuland did not directly name the "malign external actors" who are supposedly plotting to interfere with Colombian votes by "propagating lies and stories that are not of Colombian origin," she and her aides, along with Duque's far-right regime in Bogota, left no room for doubt that their target was Russia.

Just days before Nuland set off for Colombia, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Brian Nichols, who was part of the mission to Bogota, told a US Congressional panel that Russian "efforts to destabilize our hemisphere or to inject conflict from Ukraine to the Western Hemisphere [are] unacceptable, and we will work with our partners throughout the hemisphere to prevent that."

Nichols' warning followed a statement by Russian Vice Chancellor Sergei Ryabkov that Moscow would not rule out deployment of military assets to Cuba and Venezuela if the

US and NATO continued their buildup on Russia's western borders.

Washington's efforts to line up Latin American governments against Russia over the Ukraine crisis have yielded spotty results. Argentine President Alberto Fernandez traveled to Moscow at the beginning of this month for meetings with President Vladimir Putin, while Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro embraced Putin at the Kremlin on February 16, the very day that US intelligence sources had claimed Russia would invade Ukraine. Bolsonaro used the occasion to declare Brazil "in solidarity" with Russia.

In Colombia, however, Washington's anti-Russia campaign has been greeted with open arms. It dovetails with the anti-Russian propaganda of the Duque government itself, which claimed implausibly that the mass strikes and protests that swept the country last spring had been fueled by Russian social media propaganda.

More recently, Duque's Minister of Defense, Diego Molano, charged—without providing a shred of evidence—that the Venezuelan National Armed Forces (FAN) were being mobilized on Colombia's border "with the support and technical assistance of Russia and Iran."

In an interview with Colombia's BluRadio, Nuland echoed the false charges of the Duque government. "We are concerned that the Russians seem to be increasingly active in these border regions and these are the same border regions where we are seeing violent actors, we are seeing drug trafficking, we are seeing criminality, we are seeing money laundering these kinds of things," she said. "So what exactly is Russia doing there and, more importantly, what can the United States do together with Colombia to harden those borders and ensure that any negative activity remains on the Venezuelan side?"

Aside for the completely unsubstantiated character of the fantastic charge that Russia has any presence whatsoever on the Colombia-Venezuela border, the claim that sealing this frontier would protect Colombia from "negative activity" spilling over from Venezuela is preposterous.

Colombia is responsible for an estimated 70 percent of the world's cocaine supply, and top government officials are deeply involved in drug trafficking. Just days before Nuland's arrival in Bogota, a top Colombian Army general was relieved of his command for connections to traffickers, while the former commander of the armed forces, a close ally of Duque popularly known as "the godfather," was formally accused of using the military to protect the interests of a cocaine cartel.

Duque, besieged by crises and widely hated in his own country, appeared buoyed by his meetings with Nuland. He boasted that his government and Washington would be sharing "intelligence information, national security information, where any foreign influence, or attempted influence, can be identified in our electoral process."

In the immediate wake of these talks, Duque flew to Europe where he presented the same narrative about election interference before the European Parliament and held meetings at the Brussels headquarters of NATO. He vowed that Colombia, the only Latin American country to be named a "global partner" of the US-led alliance, would defend Ukraine's right to join NATO, blindly following its patron Washington down the path to World War III.

The United States is an unlikely guarantor of election integrity in Latin America, and Under Secretary Nuland an equally improbable champion of democracy. The CIA has interfered in countless Latin American elections and engineered coups throughout the continent to overthrow elected governments out of favor with US imperialism.

As for Nuland, she is infamous for her role in preparing the 2014 fascist-led coup that overthrew the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich Ukraine, installing a pro-Western regime.

In 2013, Nuland bragged that Washington had "invested over \$5 billion" in the Ukrainian opposition, and in 2014, she was recorded on a telephone call with the US ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, selecting the head of a post-coup government and discussing US collaboration with neo-fascist forces like the Svoboda party.

Nuland's mission to Bogota and unsubstantiated claims of Russian election meddling—recycling similarly fabricated claims of the Democratic Party about the 2016 election in the US—has all the earmarks of an operation along the lines of the one she organized in Ukraine.

It provides Duque and the Colombian right Washington's validation of a pretext for abrogating the presidential election set for this May and preventing the victory of Gustavo Petro.

Petro, the former mayor of Bogota, has done everything in his power to prove his reliability to Colombia's ruling elite, eschewing any association with socialism and leftism and

running as the anti-corruption, pro-ecology candidate. Nonetheless, his victory would call into question Colombia's unconditional diplomatic and military alignment with US imperialism in Latin America.

Under Plan Colombia, inaugurated under the Democratic administration of President Bill Clinton in 1999, the US poured some \$10 billion into Colombia between 2000 and 2016 to fund a brutal counterinsurgency campaign waged in the name of a "war on drugs." These vast sums secured the allegiance of the Colombian military and successive right-wing governments to Washington. They also bought the Pentagon access to bases on Colombian soil and the use of the country as a launching pad for coup attempts against the government of neighboring Venezuela.

US imperialism will hardly be indifferent to these arrangements being upended by the votes of the Colombian people.

While in Colombia, Nuland handed over a check for \$8 million to the Colombian National Police, supposedly to finance "human rights" training. Established in the 1950s, the National Police has operated under the direction of the Colombian Defense Ministry as a counterinsurgency force to combat left-wing guerrillas and social opposition. During the mass protests and strikes last year, it was responsible for the killing of scores of workers and youth, and the torture, beating, sexual assault and extra-legal imprisonment of many more.

Nuland hailed this repressive force as "the backbone of our cooperation to strengthen Colombia's democracy," protecting its "citizens from all forms of malign influence and activity."

This tribute echoes the language used in the days when Washington extolled the torture regimes of Pinochet in Chile, Videla in Argentina and Médici in Brazil as bastions of the "Free World" against the "malign influence" of socialism.

The threat that, as US imperialism prepares for world war, Washington will resurrect the methods of fascist-military coups in Latin America is very real.

The only answer to this danger lies in the building of a mass political movement of the Colombian working class, independent of all the bourgeois parties, including Petro and his Historic Pact coalition, and unified with workers across Latin America and internationally in the fight for socialism.



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