

New York Times backs regime change war against Venezuela

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Over the past week, the Trump administration has given a series of conflicting signals over its intentions to wage war against Venezuela.

Speaking to reporters aboard Air Force One on November 14, President Donald Trump allowed that he'd "sort of made up my mind" on US military action against Venezuela, but declined to elaborate on the nature of this dubious decision.

Trump's remark came as the US military continued its campaign of what UN officials have described as "extra-judicial executions" of people in small boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The death toll from this murder spree has risen to at least 83 in missile strikes against 22 different vessels.

The US president spoke as the Pentagon announced the arrival of the USS Gerald R. Ford, the US Navy's largest aircraft carrier, and accompanying destroyers, in the Caribbean, joining an armada of at least eight other warships. This is the largest naval deployment in the region since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, including some 15,000 soldiers, sailors and Marines. Squadrons of F-18 fighter planes have been dispatched to Puerto Rico, within striking distance of Venezuela, and B-1 and B-52 bombers have staged provocative fly-bys off Venezuela's coast.

In an apparent attempt to lend pseudo-legal justification to a US war for the overthrow of the government of President Nicolas Maduro, Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced Sunday that the so-called "Cartel de los Soles" will be designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). He charged that the purported cartel had "corrupted Venezuela's military, intelligence, legislature, and judiciary," while both trafficking drugs and carrying out "terrorist violence."

There is no evidence that the Cartel de los Soles even exists. The name was coined by the Venezuelan media to describe a pair of senior national guard officers (soles, or suns are the insignia worn by generals) who facilitated a drug shipment to the US at the behest of the CIA in 1993 as part of a sting against a Colombian drug-trafficking organization. The use of the term now is meant to bolster Washington's attempts to brand Maduro as a "narco-terrorist," having placed a \$50 million price on his head.

Not long after Rubio's announcement, Trump told reporters in Florida: "We may be having some discussions with Maduro. We'll see how that turns out, but they [the Venezuelans] would like to talk."

Then, asked on Monday if he would rule out sending US ground troops into Venezuela, Trump said: 'No, I don't rule out that. I don't rule out anything. We just have to take care of Venezuela.'

Behind the administration's mixed messaging lies not only Trump's notoriously erratic decision making, but divisions over whether to escalate the current blood-letting into a full-scale war. Rubio, a

product of the reactionary exile and drug-fueled political environment of Miami, is known to support regime change. Others, including Richard Grenell, Trump's Special Presidential Envoy for Special Missions, who negotiated a prisoner exchange with Maduro at the beginning of the year, have called for a negotiated transition.

Undoubtedly, behind these divisions lie real material interests, including the conflicting profit motives of US-based oil conglomerates, including Chevron, which is operating in a joint venture with PDVSA, the Venezuelan state oil company. ExxonMobil, meanwhile, is collaborating with Guyana in offshore drilling in waters that Venezuela regards as its sovereign maritime territory.

US imperialism's aggression is aimed at laying unrestricted claim to Venezuela's oil reserves—the largest on the planet—and denying them to its strategic rivals, particularly China. While longing to bring back the days when the Rockefellers' Standard Oil split profits from Venezuelan wells with the notoriously repressive and corrupt dictator Gen. Marcos Pérez Jiménez, Washington's track record for seizing and exploiting such assets, in Iraq and Libya, is hardly promising. Executives of the big US oil companies may well fear that a US intervention, like those in the Middle East, would sow chaos, making profitable operations impossible.

With the massive armada parked off of Venezuela's coast, US policy appears to be on a knife's edge. Will the gangster Trump make Maduro "an offer he can't refuse," or will he make good on his threat last month to unleash "fire and fury" against Venezuela and its people? Significantly, Rubio's designation of the Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization was post-dated to November 24.

Within this context, it is highly significant that the *New York Times*, the so-called "newspaper of record" that sets the line for much of the corporate media, has published a full-throated cry for a regime change war. Titled "The Case for Overthrowing Maduro," the piece was drafted by Bret Stephens, a man who never met a US war of aggression that he didn't like.

He not only campaigned in support of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, but defended the "weapons of mass destruction" lies used to force it upon the American people for fully a decade after they had been promoted and amplified by the *Times* before being thoroughly debunked. More recently, Stephens has been a staunch supporter of Israel's war against Gaza. Denouncing the charge of genocide brought before the International Criminal Court as a "moral obscenity," he obscenely claimed that there was no evidence that Israel had set out to kill civilians.

The *Times* recruited Stephens in 2017. Explaining its decision to hire the right-wing columnist from the *Wall Street Journal*, the

newspaper claimed its aim was to encourage “debate from a wide range of viewpoints.” This was a lie. Stephens was brought in because he opposed Trump from the same essential standpoint as that of the *Times* and the Democratic Party establishment: foreign policy. Like them, the columnist supported Washington maintaining its role as the “world’s policeman,” opposing Trump’s “America First” appeals and demanding a more bellicose policy toward Russia.

It is this same thread that runs through the present support for a war for regime change in Venezuela. In his column, Stephens wastes little time justifying the Trump administration’s absurd pretext for war: countering narcotics-trafficking. Instead, he writes, “the larger challenge posed by Maduro’s regime” lies in its “close economic and strategic ties to China, Russia and Iran,” giving these countries a “foothold in the Americas.”

He continues by warning that if Trump fails to go to war, it “will be read, especially in Moscow and Beijing, as a telling signal of weakness that can only embolden them, just as President Biden’s withdrawal from Afghanistan did.” In other words, Venezuela is seen as a battlefield in an emerging third world war.

Demanding that Maduro surrender and flee the country, Stephens states, “Barring that, he deserves the Noriega treatment: capture and transfer to the U.S. to face charges, accompanied by the destruction of Venezuela’s air defenses and command-and-control capabilities, the seizure of its major military bases and arrest warrants for all senior officers...” That Venezuela is over ten times larger in both population and geographical area than Panama doesn’t seem to faze Stephens, anymore than that the US would be opening up yet another “forever war” whose costs in blood are incalculable.

He concludes his column with an apocryphal quote from Napoleon, apparently aimed at lending this hack piece for the US military-intelligence apparatus a bit of pseudo-intellectual gloss: “‘If you start to take Vienna, take Vienna,’ Napoleon is said to have told one of his generals. Same for Caracas, Mr. President.”

History shows that taking and occupying Vienna proved hardly the unalloyed success story that Stephens suggests. Moreover, while Napoleon represented a military dictatorship allied with the French banks, his armies brought in their wagon-trains what were then still progressive bourgeois property relations, which demanded the abolition of serfdom and made him anathema to feudal Europe. What do Trump’s forces bring outside of the reimposition of Yankee imperialism’s neo-colonial shackles over Latin America? The prospect of a US invasion of Venezuela touching off explosions throughout the most unequal region on the planet is ignored by the *Times* in its promotion of yet another imperialist war.

Bezos’s *Washington Post* promotes war for free markets and privatized oil

The *Times* is not alone in its promotion of a war for regime change against Venezuela. The *Washington Post*, owned by Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos, published on Tuesday a statement by far-right US puppet Maria Corina Machado laying out her “vision” for Venezuela after its conquest by US imperialism.

The *Post* accompanied this wretched quisling document with an editorial titled “This could be the light at the end of Venezuela’s tunnel.” It was seemingly dictated by Bezos, who earlier this year

addressed a missive to the *Post* staff instructing them that from now on they must be “writing every day in support and defense of two pillars: personal liberties and free markets.”

Clearly, it is the latter that takes precedence. The editorial praises Machado for putting “particular emphasis on the need to protect private property ownership as a fundamental right.” It continues: “To reawaken the economy, she proposes privatizing state-owned enterprises and ‘restoring the development of our oil and gas sectors to the ingenuity of free men and women,’” i.e., the CEOs of Chevron, ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips, etc. “Amen to all that,” states the editorial, no doubt echoing Bezos, who eyes Venezuela as a potential new market for Amazon.

The “light at the end of Venezuela’s tunnel” promoted by Bezos’s *Post* is to be provided by the explosions of Tomahawk cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs over Caracas. The editorial acknowledges that “there’s no guarantee that a post-Maduro Venezuela immediately becomes a thriving free-market democracy,” but gives no hint of what will come instead. The answer would hardly be palatable to the paper’s readers, encompassing another protracted US occupation and counterinsurgency war and the installation of a military dictatorship in service of Venezuela’s traditional oligarchy and the US banks and transnational corporations.

A US regime-change war against Venezuela, like Trump’s ongoing murder spree in the Caribbean, would be an entirely criminal enterprise. Those at the *Times* and the *Post* promoting such a war of aggression (or “crimes against peace,” as the international tribunal that tried the Nazis at Nuremberg put it) are complicit. They must be held accountable in the prisoners’ dock alongside Trump, Rubio, Hegseth, Miller and the other criminals in the White House and the Pentagon.

American workers must reject with contempt the lies of the war propagandists of the *Times* and the rest of the corporate media. They must expose the hypocritical pretensions of concern by both Democrats and Republicans for “democracy” and the wellbeing of the Venezuelan people, after decades of coup attempts and starving them by means of an economic blockade. It is the Venezuelan working class that will be the first victim of any US intervention.

Above all, the working class in the US must forge its unbreakable unity with the workers of Venezuela and the entire hemisphere in a common struggle against imperialist war based upon a socialist program to overthrow the capitalist profit system which is its source.



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