US escalates war threats, branding Venezuelan government a “foreign terrorist organization”

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The Trump administration has dramatically escalated its war threats against Venezuela this week, issuing a pseudo-legal finding that equates the country’s government with Al Qaeda and staging another provocative flight by a B-52 strategic bomber and accompanying fighter planes within miles of Venezuelan airspace.

With the largest US armada assembled in Latin American waters since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the Trump administration is poised to launch a new criminal war of aggression. US President Donald Trump has repeatedly declared that he has made up his mind on Venezuela but declined to elaborate on his supposed decision. Conflicting reports have suggested anything from a full-scale US war for regime change, to a decapitation operation to kill or capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, air strikes on Venezuelan infrastructure and government targets and even a bargain struck directly between Maduro and Donald Trump at the point of a gun.

Trump suggested the last possibility in remarks to reporters aboard Air Force One Tuesday. Asked whether he would hold talks with Maduro, the US president said, “I might talk to him, we’ll see. But we’re discussing that with ... the different staffs. We might talk with Venezuela.” Claiming that his goal was to “save lives,” he added in his typical mafioso fashion, “If we can do things the easy way, that’s fine. And if we have to do it the hard way, that’s fine too.” Whether any of this is genuine or merely a smokescreen for coming military action is unknown.

The U.S. State Department on Monday issued a formal ruling classifying the so-called “Cartel de los Soles” (Cartel of the Suns) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Washington claims that this non-existent cartel is both headed by President Maduro and controls all levels of the Venezuelan government.

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth (or “Secretary of War” as the Trump administration chooses to call him) celebrated the announcement, claiming that it opened up “a whole bunch of new options,” presumably including the “covert operations” publicly disclosed by the administration earlier this month along with US airstrikes and an outright invasion of Venezuela. The aim, Hegseth said, is “to control our backyard.”

At the same time, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued an ominous warning that civilian aircraft should “exercise extreme caution” because of “heightened state aircraft activity” in Venezuelan airspace. The effect was to tighten a US blockade against the South American country with a number of major airlines canceling flights. The measure confirms the threat that US actions could produce a spiraling military escalation.

US warships, including the world’s largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, and roughly a dozen more US naval vessels, with a combined force of some 15,000 US sailors and Marines, supplemented by multiple advanced fighter jets dispatched to Puerto Rico, have been deployed in southern Caribbean waters near Venezuela’s coast.

The Trump administration’s claim that this massive show of force has been mounted to stop “narco-terrorists” bent on inflicting hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths upon the American people is ludicrous on its face. The drug that is causing the overwhelming number of fatalities in the US is fentanyl, which comes through Mexico. What is trafficked from South America is cocaine, with only 8 percent of it moving through the southern Caribbean, and an even smaller share passing through Venezuela.

As for the “Cartel de los Soles,” this was a name first coined to describe a pair of high-ranking Venezuelan National Guard officers who were recruited by the CIA to facilitate drug shipments to the US in the early 1990s as part of a supposed sting operation against Colombian narcotraffickers. It is not even mentioned in any US or international reports on drug trafficking.

Meanwhile, Washington continues its murder spree against unarmed civilians in small boats who have been targeted with missile strikes in the southern Caribbean and eastern Pacific. Declared by UN officials to constitute extra-judicial executions and war crimes, these strikes have sunk at least 21 boats and killed some 83 individuals, including migrants and fishermen from Venezuela, Colombia and Ecuador.

This is not a law enforcement operation to stop drug trafficking. It is a criminal imperialist offensive aimed at securing resources, markets and strategic advantage for US capitalism and its transnational corporations, and it threatens to plunge the entire region into a catastrophic war.

The claim that Washington is acting to halt illicit narcotics trafficking is merely a fig leaf for aggression. The push to rebrand Venezuelan state interests as “narco?terrorism” is a political weapon. It criminalizes not only the country’s head of state—who has a $50 million US price on his head—but the Venezuelan security forces and all state institutions. It provides a pretext for

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military action and is designed to shift public opinion toward normalizing extrajudicial murders and regime?change operations.

Why this naked US aggression? Under conditions of a deepening US and global capitalist crisis, Washington and America's ruling oligarchy view control over Latin America's resources and the imposition of obedient client regimes as central to defending their waning global dominance. Venezuela's enormous oil reserves, the largest on the planet, make it a prime target.

This was made abundantly clear by a leading Republican member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Florida Congresswoman María Salazar, who stated in an interview on Fox News Monday that "we're about to go in" to Venezuela. A regime change war, she said, would be "very good news for the American economy," adding, "Venezuela for the American oil companies will be a field day because it will be more than a trillion dollars in economic activity."

This predatory aggression is further driven by Venezuela's increasing strategic ties with US imperialism's premier rival, China, which now accounts for 80 percent of the country's oil exports, thanks in large measure to Washington's stifling sanctions regime. China is not only buying Venezuelan oil but has taken the badly needed commodity as payment on some $60 billion in loans to the country. It has invested billions directly into Venezuela's oil sector, while also engaging in the limited sale of arms.

For its part, Russia has forged a "strategic partnership" with Venezuela, selling the country some $14.5 billion worth of arms, including advanced air defense systems such as the S-300VM. Meanwhile, Russia's state energy giant Rosneft has established joint ventures with Venezuela's national oil company (PDVSA) in the exploitation of several oil and gas fields. Hundreds of Russian personnel are present in the country.

A US attack on Venezuela would be aimed not at that country alone but at driving China and Russia out of the entire Western Hemisphere. The strategy of reversing the historic decline of US imperialism and the rise of China as South America's principal trading partner with Tomahawk missiles and smart bombs is patently berserk, but it is driven by the logic of US imperialism's intractable crisis. A US war would not only destabilize the entire region but would have global ramifications stretching from Ukraine to the South China Sea.

Those among the petty-bourgeois nationalist circles in Latin America who believe that either Beijing or Moscow will come to Venezuela's defense, however, should consider the recent vote on the UN Security Council ratifying Trump's colonialist project for completing the Gaza genocide in which both countries abstained. The fate of entire nations and peoples has become bargaining chips in the drive toward a third world war with no crime too terrible to contemplate.

At home, the same US ruling class that is rushing toward a disastrous military adventure in Latin America is implementing police state measures to suppress dissent and protect its profits. The conflation of "narco?terrorism" with migration and internal "enemies" paves the way for the use of a war to expand military powers, carry out mass detentions and abolish democratic rights. It is the working class that will be forced to pay the price for the US capitalist crisis in blood and social repression as the Trump administration prepares to invoke the Alien Enemies Act and to deploy troops in major US cities.

No faction of the bourgeoisie—neither Democrats nor Republicans—will oppose imperialist war. The differences between the two capitalist parties have centered largely on foreign policy. The Democratic Party agrees with large portions of Trump's economic policies and has relentlessly facilitated Trump's attack on the working class. The Democrats have centered their opposition to Trump on what they see as his conciliation with Russia, particularly in relation to Ukraine. Whatever qualms raised by sections of the party as to the legality of the missile strikes in the Caribbean or the administration's riding roughshod over Congress's war powers, the Democratic leadership will acquiesce to an attack on Venezuela insofar as it advances the global confrontation of US imperialism with Russia and China.

The struggle against US aggression cannot be advanced through reliance upon capitalist politicians in the US, bourgeois nationalist regimes like that of Maduro in Venezuela or Washington's geo-strategic rivals in Beijing and Moscow; it must be rooted in the class struggle and the fight to unite workers across borders against imperialism and capitalist exploitation.

The working class must advance its own independent political program to oppose imperialist war, defend democratic rights and expropriate the oligarchy, placing the commanding heights of the economy under workers' control and ending capitalist exploitation and global plunder.

Such a movement must organize rank?and?file committees within workplaces and build international ties to coordinate strikes and political action against war, repression and austerity.

The working class must demand an immediate end to the threatening US military deployments and covert operations against Venezuela. All warships, aircraft and troops must be withdrawn from the southern Caribbean and the wanton murder of civilians brought to an end now.

The choice is stark: Either workers unite internationally to overthrow the capitalist system that breeds wars and social barbarism, or the ruling classes will drag the world into a new epoch of imperialist carnage.

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