

US officials met with Venezuelan military to discuss coup plot

By Alexander Fangmann
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On Saturday, the *New York Times* reported on secret meetings held by the Trump administration with elements of the Venezuelan armed forces on the possibility of a military coup to depose the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

The *Times*' article is based upon interviews with 11 anonymous "current and former American officials" as well as a former Venezuelan "commander." It details a series of at least three meetings which "began last fall and continued this year." Though the meetings are said to have been held abroad, that is outside of the United States, the location of the meetings does not appear in the report.

According to the *Times*' account, the Venezuelan military officer's faction reached out to the US government following Trump's announcement in August of last year that he would not rule out a "military option" to the crisis in Venezuela, having reportedly pressed top officials, including former National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, about the possibility of invading. Understanding Trump's statement as an unambiguous invitation by the American president to dissident elements within the Venezuelan military, the officer said, "It was the commander in chief saying this now," and "I'm not going to doubt it when this was the messenger."

Having made contact with the Trump administration through the US embassy in a "European country," the first meeting occurred last fall. According to another *Times* source, described as a senior administration official, the Venezuelans arrived at the meeting without any worked out plans, having apparently hoped for the Americans to provide one.

A *Washington Post* article published on the same day as the *Times* piece quoted another official familiar

with the talks who said, "we had very little confidence in the ability of these people to do anything, no idea at all about who they represented, and to what extent they had not exposed themselves already." However, the *Times*' source says a US envoy, said to be a career diplomat, was instructed to attend the meeting "purely on listening mode."

Understanding that they would need to solidify their plans in order to receive further US support, the anti-*chavista* faction within the military finally came to the conclusion that for a coup to succeed, they would need to detain a number of senior Venezuelan officials, including Maduro, simultaneously, which would require extensive and secure communication in order to coordinate. At the second meeting, sometime last year, the group asked for encrypted radios, but was ultimately turned down by the Trump administration. A third meeting early this year was said to have ended similarly, with no promises made by the Trump administration.

Nevertheless, around the time of this meeting, before a trip to Latin America to drum up support for ousting Maduro, Tillerson invoked the Monroe Doctrine and made the statement, "In the history of Venezuela and South American countries, it is often times that the military is the agent of change when things are so bad, and the leadership can no longer serve the people."

According to the *Times* article, the group which met with US officials represented one of three "distinct" groups in the Venezuelan military opposed to the Maduro government, and apparently had 300 to 400 members at its high point before a recent crackdown in the Venezuelan military and government that occurred in the wake of a drone assassination attempt cut that number in half.

While the *Times* piece paints a portrait of the coup

plotters as some kind of democratic resistance to an authoritarian Maduro, they are nothing of the sort. Even the *Times* was forced to acknowledge that the commander who served as their source is on the US government's sanctions list of corrupt Venezuelan officials.

Indeed, the top layers of the Venezuelan military have been some of the biggest beneficiaries of the rule of Maduro and the late Hugo Chávez, who himself came from the military and installed officers throughout the Venezuelan government. Comprising a large portion of the *boliburgesia*, sections of the military have enriched themselves immensely, even while the working class has seen its living standards plummet as a result of the economic crisis.

The right-wing Venezuelan opposition, which already enjoys close ties to the US government, is widely hated. Despite Maduro's own low approval ratings, the Venezuelan right-wing parties of the Broad Front (Frente Amplio), formerly known as the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), have been unable to garner any widespread support for their far right policies.

The publication of the report in the *Times* is an expression of deep crisis within the US ruling establishment and Washington's foreign policy in the Americas and internationally. It makes clear that the long history of US imperialist meddling throughout the region is far from over. This has included interventions by the ostensible Democratic Party opposition to Trump, including the Honduran coup of 2009 supported by then-president Barack Obama. This is to say nothing of previous US "meddling," such as the coups against Guatemala's Jacobo Árbenz in 1954, Brazil's João Goulart in 1964 or Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973.

Notably, the *New York Times* itself strongly supported the abortive 2002 military coup against Hugo Chávez, which was carried out by elements of the military high command linked to the same right-wing opposition parties that have been involved in the current plots and who have developed close links to the US. That coup attempt resulted in Chávez's removal from power for almost two days, as well as the deaths of at least 19 people from confrontations between supporters of Chávez and the right-wing opposition.

Just last week, Republican US senator Marco Rubio ratcheted up the threats against Venezuela, saying in an

interview with Univision 23 in Miami that "there is a very strong argument that can be made at this time that Venezuela and the Maduro regime has become a threat to the region and even to the United States," which would justify US military intervention.

The US government's eagerness to plot yet another coup in Latin America exposes the gross hypocrisy of the claims of Russian "meddling" promoted by substantial sections of the American bourgeoisie and media.

On the same day as the *Times* report on the secret meetings, the *Washington Post* published an editorial entitled "We're running out of time to deter Russia," lamenting that the campaign against Russian meddling has not led to any substantial progress in the larger geopolitical strategy of isolating Russia or punishing it for Moscow's intervention in Syria, which upended US plans for regime change in that country.

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