

Washington escalates coup provocations in Venezuela

By Bill Van Auken
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US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is set to appear at a closed-door session of the United Nations Security Council Saturday morning to discuss the political crisis in Venezuela. The move comes after Washington declared the presidency of Nicolas Maduro “illegitimate” and recognized the self-proclaimed “interim president” Juan Guaidó of the right-wing, US-funded Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party as the government of South America’s most oil-rich country.

The turn to the Security Council, where Russia and China, which both have extensive economic and political ties to Caracas and are certain to veto any resolution backing what amounts to a US-orchestrated coup, has all the earmarks of a propaganda gesture, aimed at making a show of appeal for UN support in order to pave the way for a unilateral US intervention.

Washington has laid the groundwork for a confrontation with the Maduro government by announcing that it will defy Maduro’s decision to break diplomatic relations with the US and his order that all US diplomatic personnel leave the country by Sunday. While the Trump administration on Thursday ordered all “non-essential personnel” to evacuate the country, leading US diplomats are to remain in place, effectively being used as pawns in an unprecedented provocation that could turn into the pretext for a US military intervention.

Both a White House spokesman and Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who plays an influential role in the Trump administration’s Latin American policy, issued warnings of a “swift and decisive response” if the Venezuelan government attempts to enforce its expulsion order.

Maduro reiterated the demand Thursday, announcing that Venezuela is closing down its embassy in Washington as well as its consulates, withdrawing all of its diplomats from the US.

Pompeo appeared Thursday before the 35-nation Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, delivering a thuggish speech, referring to “the now defunct Maduro regime” and demanding that all OAS member states “align themselves with democracy and respect for the rule of law” by recognizing the unelected president backed by Washington.

It is noteworthy that the same Pompeo never made an appeal for other countries to support “democracy and respect for the rule of law” in relation to Saudi Arabia as the criminality of its ruling monarchy was on display with the gruesome murder and dismemberment of the US-based Saudi exile journalist Jamal Khashoggi. On the contrary, he and Trump rallied to the support

of the regime’s dictatorial ruler and author of the assassination, Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman.

Washington has claimed that Maduro is an “illegitimate” president based upon concerns over a May 2018 election that was boycotted by a section of his right-wing opposition and saw a record low turnout, reflecting the broad popular disgust for both the ruling party and its rightist opponents. Yet, there was no such concern when the Egyptian dictator Gen. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi recorded a 97 percent majority in a March 2018 election that was held under conditions in which tens of thousands of his political opponents were jailed and being tortured.

Asked by a reporter about these glaring discrepancies, National Security Adviser John Bolton responded by saying that the question was “full of fallacies,” adding, “The fact is Venezuela is in our hemisphere. I think we have a special responsibility here...” In other words, Yankee imperialism is reasserting its domination of its “own backyard,” once again resorting to the method of coups and military interventions to assert its hegemony and roll back the rising influence of both China and Russia in Venezuela, as well as the wider continent.

Pompeo proclaimed that the United States was “ready to provide humanitarian assistance” to the people of Venezuela in the form of food and medicine, announcing a grand total of \$20 million, less than a pittance compared to the tens of billions of dollars that US sanctions have sucked out of the Venezuelan economy, and two hundred and fifty times less than the \$5 billion Trump is demanding for a border wall, which the administration routinely describes as an insignificant figure.

The token amount will do nothing to alleviate the desperate crisis facing the masses of Venezuelan workers and poor. The conditions they confront are the product of the global crisis of capitalism, the sanctions imposed by Washington and the policies of the Maduro government, which has defended foreign capital along with Venezuela’s capitalist ruling class, paying off the foreign debt, while imposing severe austerity on the working masses.

The so-called humanitarian aid is rather just one more provocation, with Washington saying it intends to funnel the money through the Venezuelan National Assembly, bypassing the government, and providing a slush fund for Guaidó.

Meanwhile, Bolton stated Thursday that the US administration was “focusing on ... disconnecting the illegitimate Maduro regime from the sources of his revenues” and diverting those revenues to

the “legitimate government” of the US puppet Guaidó.

Bolton added that the process was “very complicated.” It could involve US expropriation of Venezuelan assets in the US, including the refineries of Citgo, a subsidiary of the state-owned oil company, and stopping payments for Venezuelan oil. The ultimate aim is to reassert unfettered control by the US oil conglomerates over Venezuela’s proven oil reserves, the largest on the planet.

Pompeo obtained far less than a ringing endorsement from the OAS, with less than half of its member states voting for recognition of Guaidó, with six supporting Maduro and the rest either declaring that Venezuela faces a humanitarian crisis or abstaining.

While most of Washington’s allies have swung into line behind the Guaidó coup, Russia, which has major investments in Venezuela’s oil industry and has established ties with the Venezuelan military, denounced Washington’s recognition of Guaidó as a “very dirty and criminal game.”

“That the United States and some other countries have recognized the self-proclaimed president shows that they played a direct role in the crisis in Venezuela,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a press conference in Algiers. He added that the attempt to set up a rival government could lead only to “chaos and instability.”

China, which has extended major loans to Venezuela in exchange for oil, issued a somewhat more cautious statement opposing foreign intervention in the country’s affairs.

Among the strongest statements of support for the Maduro government against the US-orchestrated coup came from the Turkish government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Washington’s ostensible NATO ally. Erdogan declared his solidarity with Maduro and compared the machinations in Caracas to the US-backed coup attempt against his own government in July 2016. Venezuela has exported gold to Turkey in defiance of US sanctions.

The events in Venezuela have established irrefutably that there exists no constituency within the US ruling establishment that opposes the return to US coups in Latin America or the riding roughshod over the sovereign rights of other nations. On the contrary, the corporate media has poured out unadulterated propaganda for the coup and fulsome praise for Venezuela’s supposed “democratic” savior, the State Department-groomed and funded right-wing non-entity, Guaidó.

The *Wall Street Journal* presented the unelected Guaidó’s self-proclamation as “interim president” in charge of Venezuela as the act of the entire nation reclaiming its “democracy,” while hinting strongly at the potential for a more direct US intervention. “It’s tempting to think the U.S. should send in troops, a la Panama in 1989, to assist the rebellion,” the *Journal* commented. “But Venezuelans have to win their freedom themselves, and if they do they are likely to prize it all the more.” And should they fail to “win their freedom” according to Washington’s dictates and interests? Clearly, as Trump and his aides have repeatedly declared, “all options are on the table.”

None of the media makes any mention of the millions of dollars in funding by the National Endowment for Democracy and

USAID poured into Guaidó’s Voluntad Popular party.

Meanwhile, Democrats, who have waged a protracted campaign against the Trump administration based upon alleged Russian “meddling” in 2016 US election, have rushed to support the moves of the White House to overturn the Venezuelan president. Senator Bob Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, joined with Rubio in issuing a joint statement supporting Guaidó.

The greatest euphoria over the events in Venezuela came from Wall Street, with a 40 percent rally for Venezuelan bonds. The events, according to Reuters, gave “investors and traders a rare shot at a windfall on the oil-rich nation’s vast pool of defaulted bonds.” Clearly, the financiers’ bet is that the installation of a US puppet in Caracas will mean that measures will be taken to extract interest from the oppressed and hungry Venezuelan working class—including through a major bloodletting—while prioritizing US claims over those of Russia and China.

Venezuela’s Minister of Defense Vladimir Padrino appeared on Thursday with the entire high command of the country’s military, declaring that the country was confronting a coup against the “institutions and democracy” of Venezuela, and warning of a “civil war or confrontation between brothers.” The assembled generals and admirals declared their support for Maduro.

Washington’s coup attempt depends ultimately upon winning the support of elements within the Venezuelan military, whose senior officers have played a decisive role within the governments of both Maduro and his predecessor, Hugo Chávez, a former lieutenant colonel and abortive coup leader.

Guaidó and his supporters have repeatedly called for the military to intervene against Maduro, as have leading US officials, while the Venezuelan National Assembly passed legislation offering an unconditional amnesty to military officers who revolt against the government.

Failing to provoke such a military uprising against the Maduro government, US imperialism is left with the options of ever more decimating sanctions, including a blockade of Venezuelan oil exports, and direct military intervention.

The only way out of the desperate crisis created by capitalism in Venezuela and the threat of US military intervention lies in the mobilization of the Venezuelan working class, independently of the capitalist government of Maduro and its trade union stooges. What is required is the organization of workers’ assemblies to expropriate foreign and domestic capitalist interests and establish workers’ control over the country’s vast oil wealth. This struggle must be united with that of the workers of the entire hemisphere to put an end to capitalism.

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