

On eve of US-orchestrated border confrontation

Washington's "aid" provocation reportedly claims first victims in Venezuela

By Barry Grey
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A husband and wife were killed Friday morning and a dozen others injured, according to opposition sources, when Venezuelan troops fired on antigovernment protesters who sought to block a military convoy dispatched to reinforce a checkpoint near the country's border with Brazil.

No statement on the incident had been released by the government of Nicolás Maduro as of this writing.

The incident occurred in the southern village of Kumarakapay, an area inhabited by the indigenous Pemones people and lying on the main artery linking Venezuela and Brazil. It took place on the eve of Saturday's US-orchestrated operation aimed at provoking a clash between opposition forces, led by Washington's designated "interim president" Juan Guaidó, and forces loyal to the elected president, Maduro, on the pretense of bringing humanitarian aid into the country from neighboring Colombia and Brazil.

The right-wing governments of both countries have lined up behind Washington's attempt to carry out regime change against the bourgeois nationalist Maduro government.

Frustrated by its inability to break the Venezuelan military away from Maduro a month after giving the little-known official of the far-right Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, Guaidó, the go-ahead to declare himself "interim president," the Trump administration is aiming to provoke a confrontation between the Venezuelan military and opposition protesters that it can use to justify direct military intervention.

Friday's clash in southeastern Venezuela could be a small sample of bloody confrontations on either or both borders on Saturday that spark a civil war in the country, a military intervention by Venezuela's US-allied neighbors, by the US itself, or a combination of all three.

US imperialism has created an explosive crisis that has brought the entire region to the brink of catastrophe.

The context of Friday's incident is a buildup of US supplies in Brazilian and Colombian towns that border on Venezuela and the efforts of the opposition to mobilize hundreds if not thousands, particularly across the border from the Colombian town of Cúcuta, to physically confront government barriers and troops and forcibly bring medical supplies and food into Venezuela under the auspices of the antigovernment opposition. Guaidó has said he plans to mobilize a "humanitarian avalanche" at the borders.

Opposition leaders are convening in San Cristóbal, the biggest Venezuelan city near the Colombian border, to oversee the operation. Volunteers are to be bused to the four international bridges that connect bordering cities to Cúcuta to escort the aid across the border. Opposition leaders say the protesters will march toward San Cristóbal's military barracks holding flags.

In preparation for Saturday, Maduro has deployed troops to the border to enforce a blockade of the aid, closed Venezuela's border with Brazil, ordered the grounding of private jet traffic nationwide, and blocked air and sea travel between Venezuela and the nearby Dutch island of Curaçao, where supplies from the US arrived earlier on Thursday.

On Friday, the *New York Times*, which, along with the Democratic Party, is fully supporting Trump's regime-change operation and is backing the fraudulent "humanitarian" aid effort, quoted Jason Marczak, director of the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council think tank in Washington DC as saying, "Venezuela's borders are a powder keg with sky-high tensions, meaning that any errant move could unleash a wave of violence. The key question is who will blink

first.”

There are concerns within the US ruling elite and foreign policy establishment over the potential consequences of the brazen and reckless policy being carried out by Trump and his far-right team of advisers, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor John Bolton, and Trump's designated point man on Venezuela, Elliot Abrams. This was reflected in a segment on Thursday's Public Broadcasting Service evening news interviewing Venezuelan citizens who vehemently oppose the intervention by the US and Washington's hand-picked puppet Guaidó.

Washington's pretensions of humanitarian concern and democratic scruples are absurd. The economic crisis that is ravaging Venezuela is the result of the global capitalist economic crisis and fall in oil prices, compounded by US economic sanctions and the pro-capitalist policies of the Maduro regime, which, despite its claims to "Bolivarian socialism," has continued to pay off its loans from the imperialist banks and protected the interests of domestic and international capital.

The US has pledged a paltry \$20 million in humanitarian aid to the country, while the embargo it imposed last month on the nation's oil industry is costing Venezuela \$30 million in revenues every day. The *Wall Street Journal* reported Friday that oil stockpiles in the country are at a five-year high as a result of the sanctions imposed in January, because of the reduction in Venezuela's export markets. The US is seeking to starve the country into succumbing to an American coup.

The US is out to overthrow the Maduro regime because it wants to seize the country's oil industry—Venezuela sits astride the largest proven oil reserves in the world—and destroy the growing influence of China and Russia in the country and the region, so as to establish unbridled US hegemony over all of Latin America.

Recently, John Bolton said on Fox News: “It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela.”

Trump has made the removal of the "socialist" government in Venezuela the spearhead of a fascistic attack on socialism. In a rant last Monday before an audience of far-right Venezuelan and Cuban exiles and Republican operatives in Miami, Trump proclaimed, "the twilight of socialism in the Western Hemisphere," and made clear that regime change in that country was the prelude to similar operations against Nicaragua and Cuba.

On Wednesday, John Bolton reiterated this intention,

tweeting: “As President Trump said Monday, Ortega’s days are numbered, and the Nicaraguan people will soon be free.”

Bolton and Abrams were personally and intimately involved in the drive by the United States in the 1980s to supply arms to terrorists such as the Nicaraguan Contras and the Salvadoran death squads under cover of providing "humanitarian aid."

It is highly likely that the C-17 Air Force cargo planes Washington is flying into Cúcuta contain weapons and ammunition along with food and medical supplies. The Russian foreign ministry, which has denounced the “aid” operation as “a convenient pretext for conducting military action,” accused the US of deploying “special forces and equipment near Venezuelan territory.”

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters Friday that the US is preparing weapons shipments for the opposition. She said the arms, purchased “in an Eastern European country,” would likely include “large-caliber machine guns, grenade launchers, assault rifles and man-portable anti-aircraft rocket systems.”

Whatever happens on Saturday, the Trump administration is preparing to escalate its coup efforts in Venezuela. Vice President Mike Pence, who personally gave Guaidó the go-ahead to announce his "interim presidency" last month, will be in Colombia Monday for a meeting of the Lima Group, a coalition of Latin American countries, plus Canada, that have backed Washington's demand for Maduro's ouster. He will be joined by Guaidó in the discussions to plot the next stage of the coup.

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