

Report reveals that armed troops were mobilized to force through US aid provocation on Venezuelan border

By Bill Van Auken
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An armed force of some 200 Venezuelan military defectors and mercenaries was mobilized on Venezuela's border with Colombia last month in a bid to force through Washington's Trojan Horse "humanitarian aid" convoy organized with the aim of fomenting a military coup against President Nicolas Maduro and a potential civil war in the South American country.

According to Bloomberg news, this armed provocation was stopped at the last minute by the Colombian government, which feared that a violent clash on its border with Venezuela could escalate into a military confrontation between the two countries.

The report indicated that the armed contingent assembled on Colombian soil was led by retired Gen. Cliver Alcalá, a dubious figure who went into exile in Colombia after denouncing the Maduro government. A confidante of the late President Hugo Chavez, who participated in his abortive 1992 military coup in Venezuela, Alcalá was one of the first senior Venezuelan military officers to be sanctioned by the US government in 2011, accused of organizing trade in guns and drugs with the Colombian FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas.

Last month, Alcalá directed an open letter to the Venezuelan military, calling for it to rise up against Maduro, while making no mention of Juan Guaidó, the right-wing opposition figure who proclaimed himself "interim president" of Venezuela on January 23 and was immediately recognized by Washington as the country's "legitimate" leader.

What precise role was played by US intelligence agencies in mobilizing the intervention force led by Alcalá is as yet unclear. The operation, which would have led to mass casualties and a potential full-blown war, has all the earmarks of the kind of military interventions and provocations that have been the stock-in-trade of the CIA from the 1954 operation to overthrow the elected government of Jacobo Árbenz in Guatemala to the abortive

Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, the numerous fascist-military coups throughout the hemisphere, and the "contra" terrorist war against Nicaragua.

In the end, the February 23 attempt to force through a handful of trucks carrying a negligible amount of food and supplies was a debacle.

Guaidó and the right-wing opposition had claimed that the "humanitarian aid" gambit would bring out masses of Venezuelans clamoring for the offerings of the USAID and compel the military to disobey orders and rise up against the Maduro government. In the end, only a small number of right-wing activists supplemented by criminal gangs that control smuggling on the border turned out and were easily repulsed by the military, which failed to break ranks.

Despite the relentless propaganda campaign mounted by Washington and the Western media, it was impossible to conceal the abject hypocrisy of US imperialism offering a pittance in aid—a grand total of \$28 million has been promised—even as it systematically strangles the Venezuelan economy with financial, trade and oil embargos that have cost the country's economy some \$35 billion.

Having failed in this first attempt, Washington and its Venezuelan stooges are preparing new provocations while ratcheting up a punishing sanctions regime that is tantamount to a state of war.

Guaidó's return to the country on Monday after an 11-day tour of Latin America seeking to drum up support for a military intervention was accompanied by direct threats of US action if Venezuelan authorities enforced a court order that had barred the right-wing operative from leaving the country while facing a criminal investigation. The Maduro government clearly decided to avoid this provocation by allowing Guaidó to enter the country, escorted by a phalanx of ambassadors representing the US and its allies.

Bloomberg news quoted one Latin American diplomat as stating that "US strategy seems to be to continue to provoke instability in Venezuela in hopes that Maduro will make a

move that could warrant more aggressive US action.”

In a demonstration of the continuity of US imperialist policy toward Venezuela, the Trump administration issued a decree to the US Congress extending a declaration of “national emergency” over Venezuela, describing the country as an “unusual and extraordinary threat” to US national security.

The “national emergency” decree—which turns reality on its head, under conditions in which Washington has carried out unending aggression against Venezuela—was first implemented by Trump’s Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, in March 2015, laying the legal foundation for the ever-escalating economic blockade and military threats against the country.

The “extraordinary threat” posed by Venezuela is, in the eyes of US imperialism, that the country’s oil reserves, the largest on the planet, are not under the unfettered control of the US energy conglomerates, and that Caracas has forged close economic and political ties with Beijing and Moscow. This is what the unfolding coup centered on the fiction of Juan Guaidó’s self-proclamation as “interim president” is aimed at reversing.

The Venezuelan government responded to the decree, stating that “For the immense majority of the countries of the world, it is inconceivable that the greatest military power on the planet, which misses no opportunity to violate international law and which systematically uses force to benefit its own interests, attempts to describe Venezuela as a ‘threat’.”

The two US officials leading the assault on Venezuela, National Security Adviser John Bolton and Washington’s special representative on Venezuela, Elliott Abrams, both threatened an escalation of US actions against the country.

Bolton declared that Washington “is putting foreign financial institutions on notice that they will face sanctions” for dealing with the Venezuelan government.

Similarly, Abrams told a press conference Tuesday that secondary sanctions against companies and countries carrying out trade with Venezuela were “clearly a possibility.”

Asked whether Washington had plans for a military intervention in Venezuela, Abrams replied, “We have a lot of plans; we have a lot of steps that we can take.”

He claimed that US policy was to pursue economic and financial pressure to bring down the Maduro government as part of a “peaceful transition,” but reiterated that “all options are on the table.”

Abrams was tried and convicted for lying to Congress in 1986 about the illegal operation to fund and arm the “contra” terrorist army unleashed against Nicaragua. His appointment as the Trump administration’s special

representative on Venezuela is a clear signal of the criminal aggression being prepared against that country.

Guaidó on Tuesday met with a group of trade union bureaucrats representing public employees and claimed afterward that their unions would carry out a series of escalating strikes. Neither he nor the bureaucrats announced any date for these supposed strikes nor what workers would be involved.

Sections of the union bureaucracy in Venezuela have lined up behind Guaidó, essentially betting on the victory of the US imperialist regime-change operation.

Venezuelan workers confront the decimation of their living standards under conditions of hyperinflation, growing unemployment and repression of strikes and protests. The Maduro government has placed the entire burden of the country’s economic crisis on the backs of the working class, while defending capitalist interests in a country where, rhetoric about “Bolivarian socialism” notwithstanding, private control of the economy has actually grown and the profits of the financial sector have soared.

The rise of Guaidó and the extreme right-wing representatives of Venezuela’s oligarchy to power on the backs of a US intervention, however, would only usher in a direct dictatorship of the banks, big business and foreign capital for the purpose of organizing a bloodbath against the Venezuelan working class.

There is no progressive way out of the profound economic and political crisis gripping Venezuela outside of the independent intervention of the working class fighting for the seizure of bourgeois property and the placing of Venezuela’s vast oil wealth under popular control, while appealing to the workers and oppressed throughout the Americas for support.

Workers in the United States, in Europe and throughout the world must implacably oppose the imperialist intervention by the United States and fight to unite their struggles with those of the working class in Venezuela and throughout Latin America against the common enemy, the capitalist system.

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