

Claims that Venezuelan military burned aid truck exposed as imperialist propaganda

By Alexander Fangmann
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While much of Venezuela remains without power due to a blackout that President Nicolás Maduro claims is the result of US cyber attacks, the story surrounding the Venezuelan military's supposed burning of a "humanitarian aid" truck on the bridge from Cúcuta, Colombia on February 23 has completely unraveled.

It is now clear that the accusations of Marco Rubio, John Bolton and other US officials that Maduro ordered the burning of the aid shipment were lies aimed at drumming up support for the US government's efforts to foment a right-wing coup.

The burning of the aid truck occurred when a small number of right-wing activists and criminal gangs massed on the Francisco de Paula Santander bridge connecting Colombia and Venezuela and attempted to force through a convoy of trucks laden with supplies provided by the CIA-linked United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

US puppet Juan Guaidó and the right-wing opposition had hoped this gambit would provoke mass defections from the Venezuelan military and lead to popular support for ousting Maduro. However, the aid convoy, which was opposed by the Red Cross and the Catholic Church's aid organization due to its transparently political purpose, was easily repulsed and defections among the military have so far been minor.

Unsubstantiated reports from pro-opposition sources reporting that the Venezuelan military was responsible for the burned aid truck were immediately picked up by US officials. Senator Marco Rubio claimed on Twitter, without any proof: "Each of the trucks burned by Maduro carried 20 tons of food & medicine. This is a crime & if international law means anything he must pay a high price for this." Similar tweets were issued soon afterward by John Bolton, the US national security advisor, Mike Pompeo, the secretary of state,

and Mark Green, the head of USAID.

The pliant US media dutifully took up its role as purveyor of state propaganda, reporting as absolute fact all the claims that this incident was carried out by pro-Maduro forces. As Glenn Greenwald reported in the *Intercept*: "CNN led the way in not just spreading these government lies but independently purporting to vouch for their truth," when it claimed that "a CNN team saw incendiary devices from police on the Venezuelan side of the border ignite the trucks."

The lies about the burned truck were nevertheless used to force into line those within the Democratic Party who might have been wavering about the Trump administration's operation, including Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. On the night of the aid convoy operation, Sanders tweeted "The Maduro government must put the needs of its people first, allow humanitarian aid into the country, and refrain from violence against protesters."

As has been clear from soon after the incident, from pro-opposition media sources and reporting from Max Blumenthal in *Grayzone*, those responsible for burning the truck were the same fascistic anti-government protesters who were accompanying the Trojan Horse convoy. As the video clearly shows, the burning rag from one of the molotov cocktails thrown by the protesters separates from the bottle and veers toward one of the trucks.

Late Saturday night, the *New York Times* published an exposé analyzing video from the event and providing a graphic of the bridge, showing the relative positions of the government troops and the aid trucks, along with the positions of protesters. This completely undermined the claims that the burned truck was Maduro's responsibility.

The *Times* report, weeks after the event, only

underscores that none of the pro-imperialist claims by US politicians and media figures can be taken for good coin, including assertions that the vast majority of the Venezuelan population wants Maduro out and Guaidó in. There is broad hatred for Yankee imperialism among the Venezuelan population, who see Guaidó as a US puppet, whatever criticisms they have of Maduro. There is no mass support for a coup.

This, however, has not stopped the Trump administration from continuing its efforts to undermine the Maduro government. On a Sunday interview on ABC's "This Week" program, Bolton declined to predict that Maduro would be ousted, but declared, "I think momentum is on Guaidó's side."

Venezuela is currently in the fourth day of a nationwide blackout, with Maduro claiming on Twitter that the outage, and subsequent failures to restart the system, are the result of multiple cyber attacks. While Venezuela's infrastructure has suffered for years from a lack of investment, which could cause such an outage, an attack of this nature is certainly within the capability of the US government.

Guaidó has seized on the blackout to urge the sidelined, opposition-controlled National Assembly to declare a "state of alarm," which would authorize the delivery of international humanitarian aid, setting up the possibility of another confrontation with Maduro.

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