

US security forces storm Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C.

By Nick Barrickman
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On Thursday at noon, United States law enforcement officials, some of them helmeted and wearing flak jackets and carrying battering rams, forced their way into the Venezuelan embassy in Washington, D.C., detaining four anti-war activists who had been residing there.

The activists, Kevin Zeese, Margaret Flowers, Adrienne Pine and David Paul, part of a group calling themselves the Embassy Protection Collective (EPC), had been invited to stay inside the Venezuelan embassy over a month ago by the elected and internationally recognized government of President Nicolas Maduro.

The raid against the embassy was carried out in flagrant violation of international laws governing diplomatic relations between states and is of a piece with the reckless and illegal actions taken by the Trump administration in an effort to force a regime change in Venezuela, home to the largest proven oil reserves on the planet.

According to the *Washington Post*, “Federal law enforcement officers, including several in fatigues wearing tactical gear, entered the building through a back door and conducted a sweep with police dogs. After more than an hour, police brought the activists into a driveway hidden from the view of protesters and the news media...”

Hundreds of armed security forces were involved in the operation, including elements of the US Secret Service, the Metropolitan Police and the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service.

The *Post* noted that ambulances and personnel with stretchers had been assembled at the embassy in the lead-up to the raid. As of this writing it is unclear if any of the detained activists were injured. The four are due to face charges in U.S. federal court Friday relating to their occupation, including the supposed interference with the diplomatic mission of officials representing U.S. puppet and self-appointed “interim president” Juan Guaidó. Trespassing charges have not been brought, apparently because the lease for the building is in the name of the

Maduro government.

As of Friday, representatives of the US puppet Guaidó are due to take possession of the embassy. In a statement dripping with cynicism, Guaidó-appointed ambassador Carlos Vecchio, a U.S. State Department asset, declared “The usurpation has ended... It has taken time and effort, but we have complied with the Venezuelan people. Infinite thanks to the Venezuelan diaspora for their sacrifice. Next liberation: Venezuela.”

Speaking to the press, the Collective’s legal counsel, constitutional lawyer Mara Verheyden-Hilliard, stated of the raid and arrests: “This is an extraordinary step by the Trump administration and frankly, one that has been supported by every politician that has remained silent. They don’t have to take a position on the government of Venezuela, they do have to take a position in defense of diplomacy, of the Vienna Convention, of international law. That is what is at issue with this seizure and this entrance today.”

The lawyer stated that the embassy raid had been “a State Department operation” that had been “carried out by State Department personnel.” Verheyden-Hilliard declared: “This is sending a message to embassies and diplomatic missions all over the world that any host country can make the decision that if it disagrees or does not like the leadership of another country it can simply appoint someone else, say that they are recognizing another person as the leader, and then seize and enter an embassy.”

Pseudo-left representatives of U.S. imperialism, such as Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and House Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, declined to issue so much as a tweet in opposition to the seizure of the embassy by U.S. security forces. This is in line with their defense of the Trump administration’s drive for regime change in Venezuela. In February, Sanders solidarized

himself with the phony “opposition” of Guaidó and his supporters, who have sought to promote a military coup against the bourgeois nationalist government of Nicolás Maduro.

For her part, Representative Ocasio-Cortez pledged in an interview two weeks ago with the *National Review* to toe the line of the Democratic Party, declaring, “I defer to caucus leadership on how we navigate this.” In February, Democratic Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi announced she had decided “to recognize Juan Guaidó, president of the National Assembly, as the interim president until full, fair and free elections can be held,” and that “Nicolás Maduro’s regime of repression ... must be condemned swiftly by the full international community.”

Prior to the raid, EPC activists had faced a police-backed siege of the property, with right-wing Guaidó supporters blocking, physically attacking and harassing activists delivering supplies. Last week, in a move demonstrating the U.S. government’s disregard for international law, electrical power to the embassy was cut along with the building’s water supply.

On Tuesday, an eviction notice was delivered to EPC members which bore no markings indicating its authenticity. According to *Consortium News*, the document “appeared to have been written by the Guaidó faction but was posted and read by D.C. police as if it were a document from the U.S. government.” On Wednesday, the U.S. government issued warrants for the detainment of the EPC members, presaging Thursday’s events.

The treatment of the collective by the Trump administration has been denounced internationally. On Sunday, the National Lawyers Guild issued a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, the United Nations and others, which states, “the United States government, through various law enforcement agencies, has condoned and protected violent opponents in support of an attempted siege of the Embassy. In so doing, the U.S. government is creating a dangerous precedent for diplomatic relations with all nations.”

Verheyden-Hilliard, the legal counsel for the activists, spoke on the Trump administration’s fears of the potential for a broader movement of the population: “This is a direct response to a growing view in the United States that more and more people were standing in support of diplomacy, more and more people were standing in support of peace. People don’t want to see another war;

they don’t need to see the United States government waging another illegal war.”

The lawyer noted this to be the case “despite a lot of the press coverage [of the embassy occupation, which] has not been forthright. Much of it has been extremely biased and ... not accurate. The people who have been here inside of the embassy have been peaceful. The people who have supported them inside of the embassy have been peaceful. The assaults that we have [seen], the violence ... the noise from the sirens, the flashing lights and the use of strobes ... these are all nonlethal weapons that were being authorized for use ... No action was taken by American law enforcement to stop the illegal actions.”

Vecchio has no standing as a Venezuelan diplomat and represents a government that exists only in the regime-change propaganda of US imperialism. Rather, he is a leader of Guaidó’s far-right Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, wanted in Venezuela for inciting violence.

He is scheduled to meet early next week with officers of the US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), which oversees US military operations in Latin America. Earlier this week, he said that he would discuss with the US military brass plans “to advance in strategic and operational planning with the priority goal of stopping our people’s suffering and restoring democracy.”

This direct turn to the US military follows Guaidó’s abortive April 30 coup attempt, which failed to produce any significant fissures in Venezuela’s armed forces or elicit any significant popular support. Since then, backing for the self-proclaimed and US-backed “interim president” has visibly waned, with barely a few hundred people turning out for a demonstration Guaidó called last Saturday.

Absent popular support or backing from any major faction of the Venezuelan military, Guaidó appears to be banking on a direct US military intervention. The assault on the Venezuela’s embassy in Washington may well be a warning that a violent assault is being prepared on the country itself.

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