

Spain participated in failed 2019 US coup in Venezuela

By Alejandro López
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Reports show that Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government was at the forefront of the US-orchestrated coup attempt in Venezuela last May.

This would be the second time the Socialist Party (PSOE)-led government, now backed by Podemos, tried to back a US-led coup in the oil-rich South American country in little over a year. Last year, Madrid supported the Trump administration's abortive coup led by right-winger Juan Guaidó, a US-financed political non-entity, who called for the military to rise up and overthrow the government of Nicolás Maduro. At that time, Spain recognised Guaidó as "interim president."

Venezuela's vice president of Communication, Culture and Tourism, Jorge Rodríguez, denounced Spain last week for using its embassy in Caracas to plot coups. From Miraflores Palace, he referred to a June 26 article by the US daily the *Wall Street Journal*. It identifies Leopoldo López—the leader of the far-right Voluntad Popular Party, who has been in asylum at the Spanish embassy in Caracas for over a year—as one of the chief instigators in planning the failed "Operation Gideon."

The *Journal* recounts how López held meetings to discuss the coup. The coup was launched in early May, spearheaded once again by self-proclaimed "president" Guaidó, using CIA mercenaries trained in Colombia, in collaboration with the US military and intelligence agencies, to infiltrate Venezuela by sea and remove Maduro from office. It took place at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the deadly virus spread across the world, killing hundreds of thousands.

The plan called for entering Venezuela by boat on May 3-4, 2020 to seize Simón Bolívar International Airport in Maiquetia, snatch Maduro and other top figures in his government, and spirit them out of the country. Maduro has charged that the mercenaries' objective was a regime change operation aiming to assassinate him.

Rodríguez said López and Guaidó met with up to six

private security companies to seal a contract to illegally topple the Venezuelan government. He asked: "Do the ambassador and the government of Spain know that Leopoldo López has made and continues to make repeated videoconferences with the sole purpose of insisting on his plans to assassinate President Nicolás Maduro? [...] Do the ambassador [...] and the Government of Spain agree to these meetings that have taken place at the headquarters of his residence?"

The answer, obviously, is "yes." López is a scion of one of Venezuela's most aristocratic families, with close connections with right-wing regimes in South America and the US State Department. López started planning coups in the 2000s, when he participated in the short-lived coup that briefly ousted Hugo Chávez in 2002 – a coup backed by Spain's right-wing Popular Party (PP) government at the time. López was also convicted of organising a violent campaign in 2014 known as "La Salida" (the exit), aimed at overthrowing Maduro.

In 2019, López was "freed" from house arrest by Guidó and a dozen military officers during another failed coup in April 2019. When it was clear the operation was failing, López sought asylum in the Spanish embassy in Caracas.

López's role in coups attempts against the Venezuelan government is so well known that sections of the right-wing opposition have tried to distance themselves from him to give themselves a more "democratic" veneer. Madrid knew perfectly well when López entered its embassy that Spain was hosting a conspirator. Madrid has had close connections with him at least since 2002.

Madrid's support for regime change in Venezuela exposes fraudulent claims that the foreign policy of Podemos and the PSOE is based on human rights. In fact, Madrid's interests are determined by its repeated attempts to carve out a new role for Spanish imperialism in its former South American colonies. It fears Spain is

falling behind its imperialist rivals in the new redivision of the world.

These ruthless regime change operations seek to advance its imperialist interests. According to the Spanish Economic and Commercial Office in Caracas, Spain is in seventh place on the list of destinations for Venezuelan exports. Statistics from the Central Bank of Venezuela also indicate that in the last ten years, Spain has been the second investor in the country after the Netherlands, with investments practically stagnant since 2017 due to the economic strangulation of Venezuela by Washington.

Currently, a hundred Spanish corporations operate in Venezuela, often present in strategic sectors. After the purchase of Telcel, Telefónica is the second largest mobile phone operator in the country. Spanish banks, construction firms, publishing houses, tourism companies, insurers and energy company Repsol remain in Venezuela despite difficulties posed by US sanctions.

These interests underlie the silence of Podemos in response to the Venezuelan government's accusations. This silence is even more extraordinary given that the chief founders of Podemos—Pablo Iglesias, Juan Carlos Monedero, Iñigo Errejón and others—worked through their Center for Political and Social Studies Foundation (Fundación Centro de Estudios Políticos y Sociales -CEPS) as advisers of the Chavez regime, and other so-called Pink Tide governments in South America.

According to the Venezuelan Ministry of Culture, the CEPS Foundation received \$7 million for its advising services for the government of Hugo Chávez.

While he is frequently attacked by right-wing forces as a Chavista agent, Iglesias has made clear he is aligned with the Spanish ruling class against Venezuela. In December 2018, months after Podemos orchestrated the installation of a minority PSOE government, Iglesias said, in what amounted to a public repudiation of his previous criticisms of the imperialist oppression of Venezuela: “I do not share some of the things I said in the past.”

“The political and economic situation in Venezuela is dire,” he said, without making any reference to the US economic strangulation of the country. The Podemos leader added that “rectifying politics is fine” and that “there are things in which I was wrong. ... What I said a few years ago does not correspond to what I think now”.

What had changed was the he was just one step from being part of a PSOE-led government. A year later, he became Deputy Prime Minister of the PSOE-Podemos government.

For years, “left populist” representatives of the affluent

middle class, like Iglesias, promoted bourgeois nationalism in Latin America—Lula in Brazil, Chavez in Venezuela, and Evo Morales in Bolivia—as the alternative to building a revolutionary leadership within the working class. They used this to market themselves as “left” while they sought to make their way into government.

In the words of Podemos co-founder Iñigo Errejón in *Podemos in the Name of the People* (2016) co-written with populist theoretician Chantal Mouffe, a decisive element to his thinking was the “exposure to the popular constituent processes of political transformation and state reform in Latin America.”

Errejón continued explaining his experience working for the Bolivian government: “I thus lived through a war of position inside the state, which I witnessed within. ... I also learned to appreciate how much effort conquests take, and how to build irreversibility, which from then on would become a central object of intellectual preoccupation for me. I remember discovering a statistician in Bolivia who showed that, since the beginning of the process of political change, and as a result of better access to milk, children now weighed more. And I remember thinking that perhaps this wasn't quite socialism, but that only a fool would dismiss the achievement like that...”

Five years later, since the book's original publication in Spanish, the Pink Tide has flowed out. Its own austerity and pro-corporate policies paved the way for a sharp shift to the right, including the rise to power of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

This has also exposed the pro-imperialist policies of Podemos. Errejón's “irreversibility” and “not quite socialism” paved the way for the US-backed coup in 2019 against Morales, who fled the country, abandoning the population to fight the coup in the streets. Morales is now attempting to reach a grand national agreement with the coup leaders. Podemos, for its part, now stands exposed as a political tool of imperialism's bloody foreign policy in Latin America.

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