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Multifaceted Attack Against Venezuela on Eve of Maduro Inauguration

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's inauguration for his second term on January 10 is targeted by the US, the allied [Lima Group](#), and the hardline Venezuelan opposition. They have demanded that Maduro refuse inauguration. A multifaceted attack aimed at regime change is underway using sanctions, military threats, and a campaign of delegitimization to replace the democratically elected president.

Since President Hugo Chávez began his first term as president in 1999, the Bolivarian Republic has promoted regional integration and independence, resisted neoliberalism, opposed “free trade” agreements that would compromise national autonomy, and supported the emergence of a multipolar world. On account of these policies, Chávez (1999-2013) and now Maduro, have faced relentless attacks by the colossus to the north. Today the Maduro administration faces the challenges of defending national sovereignty from imperial domination and overcoming crippling US sanctions that have exacerbated a severe economic crisis.

The US has brazenly announced its consideration of a “[military option](#)” against Caracas and has assembled a coalition of the willing in Colombia and Brazil to prepare for an eventual “humanitarian” intervention. Most alarming is that the US seems indifferent to the consequences of such an invasion, which could easily become a regional and global conflagration involving Colombia, Brazil, and even Russia and China.

What the US finds particularly infuriating is that Maduro had the temerity to run for re-election in May 2018 after the US demanded he resign. The US [State Department](#) had

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issued warnings four months prior to the election that the process “will be illegitimate” and the results “will not be recognized.” US ambassador to the UN [Nikki Haley](#) insisted that Maduro abdicate and presidential elections be postponed.

The Venezuelan National Electoral Commission rejected this diktat from Washington. On [May 20](#), 2018, the Venezuelan electorate had the audacity to re-elect Maduro by a [67.84% majority](#) with a participation rate of 46.07% (representing 9,389,056 voters). Two opposition candidates ran for office, Henri Falcón and Javier Bertucci, despite a boycott orchestrated by opposition hardliners and the US.

New Phase in the Campaign Against Venezuela

The campaign to bring about regime change enters a new phase with the inauguration of President Maduro for a second term. With no legal standing or representation inside Venezuela, the Lima Group has now become a major protagonist of a soft coup in Venezuela.

Just five days before the inauguration, at a meeting held in the capital of Peru, 13 out of 14 members of the [Lima Group](#) issued a [declaration](#) urging Maduro “not to assume the presidency on January 10... and to temporarily transfer the executive power to the National Assembly until a new, democratic presidential poll is held.”

The following day, [Andres Pastrana](#), former president of Colombia, a member nation of the Lima Group, tweeted that the new president of Venezuela’s National Assembly, Juan Guaidó, should “now assume the presidency of the government of transition as established in the constitution beginning the 10th of January and as requested by the Lima Group.”

In a speech delivered before the Venezuelan National Assembly on January 5, [Guaidó](#) stopped short of claiming executive power, but declared that starting January 10, Maduro ought to be considered an “usurper” and “dictator.” Guaidó also urged convening a transitional government that would hold new elections and “authorize” intervention from abroad.

Although the US is not a formal member of the Lima Group, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, participated in the meeting by teleconference. Pompeo had returned earlier in the week from a visit to Brazil and Colombia, during which, according to a senior State Department official, Maduro’s inauguration was on the agenda:

“There’s a very important date that is coming up, which is the 10th of January, where Maduro will hand over power to himself based on an election that many governments in the region and globally have condemned, including the United States, . . . as illegitimate.

So we will be discussing, I'm sure, our joint efforts with Colombia and with the region to address this new era beginning on the 10th of January in Venezuela.”

The US Imperial Project

US policy towards Venezuela has three strategic objectives: privileged access to Venezuela's natural resources (e.g., the world's largest petroleum reserves and second largest gold deposits), restoration of a neoliberal regime obedient to Washington, and limitation of any movement towards regional independence.

These US objectives are conditioned by a continuing adherence to the Monroe Doctrine for Latin America and the Caribbean, the so-called “backyard” of the US empire. The contemporary mutation of the 1823 imperial doctrine entails a new Cold War against Russia and China and hostility to any regional integration independent of US hegemony.

Back in the 1980s-90s during Venezuela's Fourth Republic, local elites afforded Washington preferential access to Venezuela's rich natural resources and dutifully imposed a neoliberal economic model on the country. Currently, US policy appears aimed at re-establishing such a [client state](#).

However, to bring about such a return, the US imperial project would have to change not only the Venezuelan leadership but dismantle the institutions and even the symbols of the Bolivarian revolution. The devastating US economic sanctions are designed to [increase economic hardship](#) in order to ultimately break the will of the chavista base and fracture the Venezuelan military as well as the civic-military alliance. This breakdown would presumably pave the way for installation of a provisional government.

It is time once again to give peace a chance. But Washington has opted for the collision course set by the Lima Group as well as the Secretary General of the Washington-based Organization of American States (OAS) over efforts of the Vatican and former prime minister of [Spain, Luis Zapatero](#), to broker dialogue between the government and the opposition. The imperial project is abetted by the conservative restoration in Brazil and Argentina and the electoral victory of uribistas in Colombia.

Multifaceted War Against Venezuela and the Bolivarian Response

Washington is engaging in a multifaceted war against Venezuela by deploying economic sanctions, backing a campaign to install a transitional government, and preparing [proxy military](#) and paramilitary forces for an eventual intervention.

On August 4, 2018, a failed [assassination attempt](#) against President Maduro did not draw condemnation from either Washington or the Lima Group. On November 4, according to Venezuelan Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino, three Bolivarian National Guard were

killed and ten wounded in an attack by [Colombian paramilitary](#) forces in the frontier region of Amazonas. On December 5, the Brazilian vice president-elect [Hamilton Mourão](#) declared: “there will be a coup in Venezuela . . . And the United Nations will have to intervene through a peace force . . . and there is Brazil’s role: to lead this peace force.” On December 12, 2018, [President Maduro reported that](#) “734 members of a paramilitary group called G8 was training [in the city of Tona, Colombia] for attacks against military units in the frontier states of Zulia, Tachira, Apure and Amazonas.” This report ought to be taken seriously given the presence of eight US military bases in Colombia, the recent association of Bogotá with NATO, [Colombia’s rejection](#) of direct communication with Venezuelan authorities, and its participation in [US-led military exercises](#) over the past two years. Last week, US Secretary of State Pompeo visited Colombia and Brazil to shore up joint efforts to [“restore of democracy”](#) in Venezuela.

In response, Venezuela has been fortifying the civic-military alliance built up over the past two decades. The National Guard, military, and militias (now over [1,600,000 strong](#)) have been able so far to fend off several terrorist attacks against public institutions and government leaders as well as an assassination attempt against President Maduro in August.

Caracas has also been developing close military cooperation with Russia and consolidating ties with China. With the recent visit of a pair of its [TU 160 heavy bombers](#) to Venezuela, Russia has demonstrated its ability to transport armaments more than 10,000 kilometers at supersonic speeds should the Caribbean nation come under attack by a foreign power. China has entered into agreements for massive economic cooperation with Venezuela, partially offsetting the punishing US sanctions. Also, the visit of a [Chinese navy hospital ship](#) in September subtly signaled Chinese military support of Venezuela.

Shifting Geopolitical Environment

Although the Lima Group now backs a soft coup in Venezuela, with the inauguration of [Andrés Manuel López Obrador \(AMLO\)](#) as President of Mexico in December, the group has lost the support of one of its key members. [Mexico](#) declined to sign on to the latest Lima Group declaration and warned against “measures that obstruct a dialogue to face the crisis in Venezuela.” [Maximiliano Reyes](#), Mexico’s deputy foreign minister, said: “We call for reflection in the Lima Group about the consequences for Venezuelans of measures that seek to interfere in [their] internal affairs.”

The extreme partisanship of Secretary General of the OAS Luis Almagro against Venezuela has undermined his standing. In September 2018, Uruguayan President [Tabaré](#)

[Vázquez](#) declared that Uruguay would not support Almagro for a second term as Secretary General of the OAS. Almagro was finally [expelled](#) from his own political party in Uruguay, the Frente Amplio, in December 2018, largely for his statements in Colombia about the need to retain a military option against Venezuela.

In December 2018, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA-TCP) held its 16th meeting in Cuba, [declaring](#) its “concern for the aggression and actions against regional peace and security, especially the threats of the use of force against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.” ALBA was founded by Venezuela and Cuba and is now comprised of ten nations.

No Other Choice but Resistance

The Venezuelan people have a long history of resistance to foreign domination and are not likely to view a US-backed [“humanitarian” intervention](#) as a liberating force. Nor are the popular sectors likely to support an unelected “transitional government” with a self-appointed [Supreme Court](#) in exile which is currently based in Bogotá, Colombia. And if the coalition of the willing includes Colombian paramilitary forces who are notorious for their role in the [murder of community activists](#) inside Colombia, their deployment in the event of a “humanitarian” mission would be abhorrent inside Venezuela.

The 1973 US-backed coup in Chile, followed by a lethal cleansing of that nation of leftists, is a cautionary lesson. Add to this the historic memory of the political repression during Venezuela’s discredited Fourth Republic and the [Caracazo of 1989](#), in which the most marginalized and poor were the main victims, and it would be no surprise should the popular sectors have only one thing to offer a provisional government bent on inviting imperial intervention: resistance.

Note: All translations from the Spanish to English are unofficial.

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