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Canada mobilizes support for US coup in Venezuela

Canada's Liberal government is front and center in Washington's drive to overthrow Venezuela's elected president, Nicolas Maduro, and install a virulent right-wing regime that will throw open the country—site of the world's largest oil reserves—to unbridled imperialist exploitation.

Earlier this week, Canadian Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland hosted a meeting in Ottawa of members of the so-called "Lima Group" of states. It called on Venezuela's military to complete the US-orchestrated coup that was initiated Jan. 23, when the speaker of the Venezuelan legislature, Juan Guaidó, proclaimed himself the country's "interim president" and US President Donald Trump tweeted that Washington recognized him as Venezuela's "legitimate" ruler.

The statement issued by the Ottawa meeting, from which only Mexico dissented, makes clear that the Lima Group and its member states are now acting as full-fledged coup partners, closely coordinating their actions and funneling resources behind the regime-change operation fronted by Guaidó. The statement announced that Guaidó's request that his "government" be incorporated in the Lima Group had been accepted "with great pleasure." The Group's members, it added, will "recognize and work with the representatives designated by the interim government of Juan Guaidó in their respective countries."

The Lima Group was established in 2017 with the ostensible purpose of brokering a peaceful resolution to the growing social-political crisis in Venezuela. Comprised of

Washington's principal allies in the Americas, it has functioned as a chorus for the Trump administration in its increasingly bellicose campaign for regime change in Caracas.

In this, Canada has very much played the role of choir-master. Freeland and her boss, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, have urged on governments with ties to and roots in coups, death-squads, and the extreme right—including those of Brazil, Colombia, Honduras and Guatemala—to proclaim Maduro's reelection in 2018 fraudulent and Venezuela a unique threat to "democracy" and the "rule of law."

Canada's role in the Lima Group conforms with a pattern stretching back decades. On numerous occasions Ottawa has acted as Washington's advocate and accomplice in international fora or initiatives, like UN peacekeeping missions, from which the US is either excluded or declines to participate.

Given Washington's long and bloody record of invading and occupying Latin American countries and its support for the abortive 2002 military coup in Venezuela against Maduro's predecessor and mentor Hugo Chávez, US participation in the Lima Group would have shattered any pretense of it being a neutral interlocutor. And such a pretense was essential if the Lima Group was to provide, as it has over the past year-and-a-half, a multilateral and human-rights façade for the US-led campaign of intensifying diplomatic and economic pressure on Maduro.

But Canada's role in the regime-change operation directed against Venezuela's bourgeois nationalist government goes far beyond simply giving its imprimatur to an illegal and anti-democratic attempt to seize power. The Trudeau government was intimately involved in its organization and launch, including decisions concerning its timing, pretext and pseudo-legal justification.

One senior Canadian government official claimed that the reason the Liberal government followed so closely on the heels of Trump's Jan. 23 tweet in recognizing Guaidó as Venezuela's "true" head of state was because Canadian diplomats had been "listening" to Guaidó and other opposition leaders and had "anticipated" developments.

This is a subterfuge. As a Jan. 26 Canadian Press report revealed, Canadian diplomats worked with their Latin American counterparts in Caracas to prepare the coup, by pressing Maduro's right-wing opponents to unite and by prodding them to challenge the government. "Emboldening Venezuela's opposition" was a "labour of months," writes the Canadian Press' Mike Blanchfield. "The turning point came Jan. 4 when the Lima Group ... rejected the legitimacy of Maduro's May 2018 election victory and his looming Jan. 10 inauguration, while recognizing the 'legitimately elected' National Assembly."

Blanchfield went on to quote an unnamed Canadian official as saying the opposition “were really looking for international support of some kind, to be able to hold onto a reason as to why they should unite, and push out somebody like Juan Guaidó.”

Canada’s trade union-backed, purportedly “progressive” Liberal government is thus deeply involved in an imperialist intrigue that threatens to plunge Venezuela into civil war or serve as the pretext for a US invasion—as underscored by Trump’s repeated pronouncements that “all options are on the table.”

Canada’s corporate media and political establishment have rushed to endorse the made-in-the-US regime change operation and Canada’s role in it, including through the Lima Group.

This includes the social-democratic NDP. Its leader Jagmeet Singh responded to the launching of the coup with a statement all but echoing Freeland’s endorsement of Guaidó. Then, in the face of an outcry that he was aligning with Trump and the Brazilian fascist Bolsonaro, Singh lamely tried to walk back his remarks. But this week the party’s foreign affairs critic, Hélène Laverdière, herself a former Canadian diplomat and longtime backer of Venezuela’s right-wing opposition, emphatically declared the NDP’s support for the Guaidó-fronted coup. Her only quibble was that the Trudeau government should have joined the European Union in supposedly giving Maduro a week to vacate power before recognizing Guaidó as “interim president.”

This unanimity in backing aggression against Venezuela is rooted in the predatory interests of Canadian imperialism. Canadian banks and mining companies have major interests in Latin America and the Caribbean, and Canada’s ruling elite shares Washington’s determination to wrest back economic and geopolitical influence from Russia and China in Venezuela and Central and South America as a whole.

Canada’s elite is also determined to maintain its military-strategic alliance with Washington, calculating that, under conditions of trade war, the rise of new powers and a surge in great power and inter-imperialist conflict, it remains the best means for it to assert and advance its imperialist interests on the world stage.

Under Trudeau, as under the Harper Conservative government before it, Canada has integrated itself evermore deeply into the principal US military-strategic offensives—in the oil-rich Middle East and against Russia and China.

This is not to deny that there are significant Canada-US frictions, especially as Trump with his “America First” policies has made clear Washington and Wall Street are determined to extract greater benefits from their partnership with Ottawa and Bay Street.

In recent days the Trudeau government and press have been eager to put distance between Ottawa and Trump's threat to invade or blockade Venezuela. Late last week Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan said talk of military action was "very premature." Subsequently, Freeland and other government officials were much more categorical in ruling out military action ... at this time.

To be sure, there are compelling domestic reasons for Trudeau to want to put distance between himself and Trump, including in covering up the real motivations behind Canada's actions in Venezuela. While Trump and his top aides do little to disguise their lust for Venezuela's oil wealth, Trudeau and the Canadian ruling elite believe it wiser to hide behind phony pretenses of concern for human rights and Venezuela's impoverished masses.

But there are also real fears US military action could destabilize a large swathe of Central and South America, similar to the ruinous impact of the US invasion of Iraq.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has made clear that the task of defeating the Maduro regime, which despite its socialist rhetoric speaks for a faction of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie, lies with the Venezuelan working class. Canadian workers and youth must emphatically oppose the US-led, Canadian-backed coup in Venezuela and the Trudeau government's rearmament plans as a vital component part of the struggle against the ruling class' program of austerity and war.