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By Andrea Lobo  
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## Uruguayan defense minister warns of “military conflict in Venezuela”

Uruguayan Defense Minister José Bayardi warned in an interview with *Sputnik* this past weekend of the “possibility” of “a military conflict in Venezuela.”

“Tensions surrounding a military conflict are permanent,” he said. “Even some Latin American countries keep baiting or agitating about the eventuality of a military solution,” he added, describing this as “irresponsible.”

He then said that Washington was “recklessly” heightening tensions through “unilateral” economic sanctions against Venezuela and by turning the opposition parties into a “military spearhead.”

The danger was highlighted by statements made Monday by Carrie Filipetti, US deputy assistant secretary for Cuba and Venezuela in the State Department’s Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs. Filipetti told the *Miami Herald* that “the president is very focused, single-mindedly focused on making sure that we can get to a transition as soon as possible... the time for transition is really now, so you will see that urgency reflected in our upcoming policies.”

A number of other developments have signaled a major escalation in the US-led regime-change operation in Venezuela, chiefly the decision last week by the Organization of American States to invoke the 1947 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR), a mutual defense accord “to prevent and repel threats and acts of aggression against any of the countries of America.”

Washington, which instigated the move in the name of its political stooges in Venezuela, claims that the goal is to discuss “economic and political” measures against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro. However, in his announcement on September 10 of the OAS’ action, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited recent Venezuelan military exercises near Colombia’s border as the immediate cause of the decision.

“Nicolas Maduro not only poses a threat to the Venezuelan people, his actions threaten the peace and security of Venezuela’s neighbors,” Pompeo declared.

The OAS Permanent Council voted in favor of convening the foreign ministers of the 19 TIAR member-states later this month to discuss the Venezuelan crisis, describing it as “a clear threat to peace and security in the Hemisphere.” The opposition-led National Assembly of Venezuela voted in July to re-join the TIAR.

The OAS ambassador to Mexico, which abandoned the TIAR in 2002, warned last Wednesday that “we are dangerously approaching a point of no return.”

Except for Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Dominica, México and Uruguay, all other governments in the region have recognized the self-proclaimed “interim president” Juan Guaidó, who announced last month the formation of a “Center of Government.”

Despite being composed of far-right parties overwhelmingly opposed by the Venezuelan people, Guaidó’s parallel cabinet was immediately backed by the pro-Guaidó regimes across Latin America.

This follows Trump’s executive order on August 5 freezing all Venezuelan assets in the US, effectively seizing more than \$5.5 billion from the cash-strapped Venezuelan government. The White House also banned US entities from doing business with the Maduro government and threatened to enforce this embargo globally with secondary sanctions.

On Sunday, Guaidó published a statement that officially “confirmed that the Barbados mechanism has run its course,” referring to the negotiations initiated in Barbados and continued in Norway between his opposition faction and the Maduro government.

On Monday, the Agreement for Change (Concertación por el Cambio), a small opposition block of legislators that split from the Guaidó-led faction last year, signed an agreement with the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The deal involves the return of the PSUV to the National Assembly and the beginning of talks on elections and political detainees.

Opposition legislator Timoteo Zambrano declared at a joint press conference: “To the governments of the world, we ask for support. The end doesn’t justify the means. The end must be a Venezuela for all of us.” Beyond opposition to the existing economic sanctions, the step reflects mounting fears of an even more aggressive foreign intervention.

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Last week, Trump ousted his national security advisor, John Bolton, citing the failure of the regime-change operation in Venezuela as a major reason. Several senior officials went out of their way to claim anonymously to the media that Trump was “frustrated” by Bolton’s insistence on a military invasion, while insisting that “all options are on the table” given Maduro’s military “maneuvers.”

That the leaks were designed to portray the Maduro government as the “aggressor” was confirmed last Tuesday by the US envoy to Venezuela, Elliott Abrams. He declared that Washington is “not closer” to a military confrontation and that the invocation of the TIAR does not signal a US “invasion,” but added that Colombia would “react” to attacks by Venezuela and that “we would be fully supportive of Colombia in that situation.” He continued, “We should all worry about whether the Maduro regime intends to try deliberately to escalate tensions.”

Maduro’s military exercises demonstrate the government’s organic hostility to the mobilization of the mass opposition that exists among workers in Venezuela and regionally against the imperialist threat. Absent that, the bourgeois nationalist Maduro regime seeks to counter the imperialist regime-change operation with a combination of conciliatory moves and military gestures.

At the same time, Maduro is responding to very real and brazen threats by the Pentagon, whose Southern Command has declared itself to be “on the balls of our feet” in anticipation of a possible military attack, as well as to threats by Colombia, whose president, Ivan Duque, accuses Maduro of harboring Colombian guerrillas.

If anything, the statements by US officials show that the Trump administration is preparing the public for a possible military aggression.

Trump acknowledged in late August that his government was engaged in talks with Maduro’s ruling clique. However, Maduro’s continued attempts to reach a deal with US imperialism to secure the interests of the layer of financiers, military officials and bureaucrats that enriched itself under *Chavista* governments have only emboldened the

American ruling class. It seeks unlimited control over Venezuela's oil assets and the rolling back of Chinese and Russian influence in Venezuela and regionally.

US allies, including those that voted for invoking the TIAR, have expressed fears that a war in Venezuela could unleash an even worse humanitarian and refugee crisis. They also undoubtedly fear mass anti-imperialist protests. Nonetheless, the recent escalation against Venezuela demonstrates that as the class struggle, the economic crisis and geopolitical tensions intensify globally, the national ruling elites align more closely with imperialism, seeing this as the better way to defend their class rule and maintain access to global finance.

The situation poses enormous dangers to Venezuelans and to workers across the region and globally.

Rebecca Chavez of Inter-American Dialogue said recently at a congressional hearing: "An invasion of Venezuela would require between 100,000 and 150,000 US troops, who would face as many as 356,000 Venezuelan troops in a country twice the size of Iraq."

Fulton T. Armstrong, a former CIA analyst for Latin America, told the *Military Times* in March that there were three options: "a humanitarian corridor" within Venezuela controlled by US troops, surgical strikes against the presidential palace after having provoked Maduro "into doing something that you could say threatened US interests," or, most likely given "the imagination of people like Elliot Abrams," a "covert action."

The human and economic costs of a war would be unfathomable, and as tensions escalate, any deliberate or even unplanned altercation could trigger a conflict that quickly involved nuclear-armed Russia and China. Just two months ago, on July 19, the Pentagon claimed that a Venezuelan fighter jet "aggressively shadowed" a US Navy plane flying in "approved international airspace."

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