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By Andrea Lobo
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Leaked audio of top Colombian officials exposes failure of US coup operation in Venezuela

The text of a leaked audio recording published Wednesday by the Colombian newspaper *Publitrato*, has laid bare the failure of the US regime change operation against Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the deep-going crisis within US foreign policy circles.

The leaked conversation between Colombia's ambassador to the US, Francisco Santos Calderón, and the country's incoming foreign minister, Claudia Blum, also exposes the subservience and extreme right-wing character of the Colombian ruling class as it confronts a deepening domestic crisis.

On Thursday, hundreds of thousands of workers, students and peasants participated in protests during a one-day national strike, the largest in nearly half a century. The administration of President Ivan Duque unleashed brutal repression against peaceful protesters, leaving three dead, dozens injured and almost 100 arrested. The government unleashed its entire repressive apparatus, trained and built up by the Pentagon under the cover of the "war on drugs".

During the meeting with Blum, held on November 14 in an apparently public area of the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Washington D.C., Colombia's Ambassador Santos began by warning, "The US State Department, which used to be important, is destroyed, it doesn't exist." He then described how he used to visit the State Department constantly ten years ago as vice-president, and how the Singaporean ambassador told him that he visited the State Department once a week under Obama, but now "it doesn't count."

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Besides US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the rest of officials are “terrible” and have “no weight,” he said. “Those managing the political relationship are the National Security Council, the White House”, he added, describing private meetings with Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and senior advisor, and his associates.

At the same time, he stressed, “it’s fundamental to keep a bi-partisanship. Colombia is a bi-partisan issue.” Blum agreed, declaring, “we must work with Democrats and Republicans. That is what [ex-president Álvaro] Uribe did.” However, she lamented that some US congressional staff “are pro-peace and pro-human rights.” Santos, an extreme right-winger, commented that these officials “can be talked to. I go have drinks with them.”

Perhaps the most striking statements relate to the latent danger of a catastrophic war in Venezuela, given the recklessness and militarism that dominate within ruling circles in Washington. Santos and Blum described the campaign as “paralyzed,” leaving Maduro “uncomfortable, but more at ease.” Santos stated in an angry tone that “if this government doesn’t go, it will make our life impossible. We must not let Washington lose sight of the importance of resolving Venezuela. After ten minutes, they get bored and move to another issue, so it’s up to me to invent things for them to keep it on the top of their mind.”

Santos also complained, regarding Venezuela, that “the CIA is not getting in there.” However, he then casually speculated that Trump could order an invasion to win the 2020 elections.

Blum responded that, “the solution is not a military coup because the [Venezuelan] military will not do it, [and] for the US to get him out with who knows what, they won’t do it either.” Then she protested that “the people have quit believing ... the thing about humanitarian help was a total fiasco,” referring to the abortive US-Colombian attempt to send a convoy of “humanitarian aid” across the Venezuelan-Colombian border last May as an anti-Maduro provocation.

In a passage noticeably absent in the Colombian and foreign press reports, Santos whispered that in Venezuela, “there is a brutal and quiet repression, any little protest, ‘bam bam’ ... In the slums, those who protest, they kill them the next day.”

Then, Santos indicated that he “understands” that the US wants to sell Colombia F-16 warplanes, but advocated instead for a plan to innovate “our instruments” with drones and artificial intelligence. He added worriedly, “What is our security going to be in the 21st century?” Finally, both celebrated the growth of US investments in Colombia.

Colombia's President Duque called Santos back to Colombia "for consultation" about the 25-minute audio, whose source has not been revealed. In a radio interview, Santos explained: "I had to tell the truth to the foreign minister about how international politics work in the US."

The picture that emerges is that of a US vassal state panicking, as it confronts growing opposition from below and deepening economic crisis, while also facing a political civil war in the foreign policy establishment in Washington. That is the significance of their nostalgia for the more "predictable" days when they received weekly orders from their bosses in the State Department.

In his masterpiece *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Leon Trotsky defined the "classic type of national bourgeoisie" in backward countries as "compradorism." These elites, he wrote, "lived and nourished themselves upon their connections with foreign imperialism, served it, and without their support could not have survived."

While this is expressed in a particularly naked fashion in Colombia, every national bourgeoisie's wealth and political rule are bound up with an objective dependence on imperialism, especially in the context of today's globalized financial and production chains.

The relations between the Colombia and US imperialism date back to the beginning of the 20th century, but have grown ever closer since the 1960s, when the US backed the regime as a bastion of reaction against social revolution across the region.

US military involvement, sharply increased under Plan Colombia after 1998. As the Washington Office on Latin America warned in 2001, "the United States is making its primary ally a corrupt and abusive army, members of which support, train, supply and coordinate paramilitary groups in many areas of the country." A 2011 paper found that under Plan Colombia a 1 percent increase in US military assistance was associated with a 1.5 percent increase in paramilitary attacks in municipalities with military bases.

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