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Trump's "Bay of Pigs" in Venezuela

A pair of abortive armed landings by US-led mercenaries on Venezuela's coast earlier this week has made it clear that the global coronavirus pandemic and the death and devastation it has wrought upon the American people have done nothing to curb US imperialism's predatory and criminal pursuit of geostrategic interests in South America and across the globe.

The first of the two landings took place early Sunday morning in Maputo in the state of La Guaira, barely a half hour's drive from the Venezuelan capital of Caracas. Eight of the armed men who came ashore, including the leader of the group, an ex-Venezuelan army captain known as "Pantera" (the panther), were killed, and the rest captured.

A second landing took place on Monday on the peninsula of Chuao in Aragua state, also on Venezuela's Caribbean coast, west of Caracas. Here, the armed invaders were detected by local fishermen, who turned them over to Venezuelan security forces.



US mercenaries Luke Denman (circled at top) and Airan Berry (bottom) after being captured in Venezuela.

Among those captured was Josnars Adolfo Baduel, the son of a former Venezuelan defense minister sent to prison on corruption charges, who has been at the center of a series of coup plots. Also taken prisoner were two US citizens, Luke Denman, 34, and Airan Berry, 41, both of whom have been identified as former US special operations troops. Baduel told Venezuelan authorities that the two Americans had told him that they worked for the security force of US President Donald Trump.

Venezuelan officials have shown the media passports and military ID cards of the two captured Americans, along with photographs of armaments captured along with the mercenaries. They also released a video of an interrogation of Denman, who said that his mission had been to seize control of a Caracas airport in order to receive planes that would carry out the rendition of Venezuela's President Maduro to the US. Asked who was directing the operation, he replied, "President Donald Trump."

At the center of the operation was one Jordan Goudreau, an ex-Green Beret veteran of Iran and Afghanistan, who runs a Florida-based private security contracting firm, SilverCorp USA. By his own account, Goudreau was hooked up with the Venezuelan right and its US-backed coup plots by Keith Schiller, Trump's longtime bodyguard, who served as director of Oval Office operations. Videos have since surfaced showing Goudreau working security at Trump rallies.

The military contractor's ties with US intelligence and the Venezuelan right became apparent when he was hired in February 2019 to provide security for a concert paid for by British billionaire Richard Branson on the Venezuelan-Colombian border as part of a failed CIA Trojan Horse operation to force phony aid convoys into Venezuela.

Goudreau has publicly taken responsibility for the latest operation, claiming that it is still ongoing and its objective is "to overthrow the government of Maduro." He said that despite the abject failure of the maritime invasion, other elements remain active inside Venezuela and were "going to start attacking tactical targets," in other words, launch a wave of terrorism.

In addition, Goudreau confirmed the validity of a contract posted online that was signed between himself and Juan Guaidó, the right-wing political nonentity who proclaimed himself "interim president" of Venezuela in January of last year and was instantly anointed by Washington and its allies as the "legitimate government" of Venezuela.

A taped conversation in English between Guaidó and Goudreau has also been released in which the US puppet agreed to pay \$213 million to the American security contractor to carry out the armed intervention, with the fee guaranteed by oil resources stolen from Venezuela by the US government.

Goudreau claimed that Guaidó failed to make the promised payments. Whatever the exact arrangement, however, it is clear that someone paid for the organization of a mercenary army and its deployment to the shores of Venezuela. Whether it was the puppet or the puppet master makes little difference.

If Guaidó, who attempted to spark a military coup little more than a year ago, is not behind bars, it is because Maduro's "Bolivarian Socialist" bourgeois government still sees him as a possible interlocutor with US imperialism and the traditional oligarchy in pursuit of a deal to salvage Venezuelan capitalism and prevent a revolutionary explosion from below.

Asked about the attempted seaborne invasion of Venezuela, Trump claimed that he knew nothing about it and that it had "nothing to do with our government."

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo gave a somewhat more conditional answer at a State Department press conference Wednesday, declaring, "There was no US government direct involvement in this operation." He said he was "not prepared to share any more information about what we know took place."

As for the two captured US mercenaries, Pompeo stated that Washington would "use every tool that we have available to try and get them back."

On what grounds the US can demand that they be sent back, the secretary of state did not say. Is there the slightest doubt that a pair of foreign nationals caught invading the US with the objective of kidnapping or killing Donald Trump would be sentenced on terrorism charges to life in prison or worse?

The armed incursions have unfolded in the context of a "maximum pressure" campaign of crippling sanctions against Venezuela that is tantamount to a state of war. An effective embargo against the country has cut off its oil exports and prevented it from importing vitally needed medicine and medical supplies, leading to tens of thousands of deaths, even before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. Since its outbreak, US imperialism has only tightened the sanctions seeking to employ disease and death as a weapon in forcing the Venezuelan population into submission and completing its drive for regime change.

Even as the death toll mounted in the US and the economy plummeted, Trump ordered the deployment of a naval task force to waters off Venezuela's Caribbean coast on the pretext of combatting narcotics trafficking, even though the vast majority of drugs flowing into the US are sent via Colombia and the Pacific Ocean through Central America, protected by Washington's right-wing allies in Bogota, Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City. The destroyers and littoral combat ships sent into this operation are ill-designed for catching drug smugglers.

The sordid events on Venezuela's coast recall the darkest chapters of US imperialism's prolonged history of military aggression, semicolonial exploitation and police state repression in Latin America. In earlier US imperialist interventions gone bad, including the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961, Washington officials initially also issued categorical denials of US involvement. Similarly, in the illegal operation to fund the "contra" terrorist war against Nicaragua in the 1980s, Washington maintained deniability until CIA contractor Eugene Hasenfus was shot down flying weapons to the contra mercenaries.

Both the Bay of Pigs and the so-called Iran-contra affair triggered major political crises in Washington and close scrutiny by the American media. The reports of an abortive US-orchestrated invasion of Venezuela, however, have been passed over in near silence by the corporate media and have elicited not a word of criticism from Trump's ostensible political opposition within the Democratic Party. From Biden to Sanders, they have all lined up behind the regime change operation in Venezuela.

This operation, serving the interests of America's ruling oligarchy, is aimed at establishing unfettered control by US energy conglomerates over the country's oil reserves, the largest on the planet, and rolling back the growing influence of China and Russia in Venezuela and Latin America as a whole, which US imperialism has long regarded as its "own backyard."

In the midst of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic that threatens the lives of millions, US imperialism is pursuing its predatory interests by means of military aggression, threatening to ignite another world war that would kill billions.

Only the working class, uniting across national boundaries in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism and imperialism, can provide an alternative to the grave threats posed to the survival of humanity.

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