

A QUIET COUP DOWN SOUTH

On January 10th **Nicolas Maduro** was sworn in for his second term as president of **Venezuela**. *"I tell the people,"* Maduro said, *"this presidential sash is yours. The power of this sash is yours. It does not belong to the oligarchy or to imperialism. It belongs to the sovereign people of Venezuela."*

These two terms: oligarchy and imperialism-define the problems faced by Maduro's government.

Despite 10 years of governance by the socialist forces—first led by Hugo Chavez and now by Maduro—the Venezuelan oligarchy remains firmly intact. It dominates large sections of the economy, holds immense amounts of the country's social wealth and controls the main media outlets. A walk through the Altamira neighborhood in eastern Caracas is sufficient to gauge the resilience of the wealthy, most of whom have homes in Spain and in Florida as well. **Pelucones** is the name used to define them—bigwigs, a term with aristocratic connotations. They have resisted all attempts by the socialist Bolivarian movement to expand political and economic democracy in the country.



This oligarchy, through its media, controls the political and social narrative, defining the nature of Venezuela's crisis to its advantage. For this small sliver of the population, all of Venezuela's serious problems are blamed on the Maduro movement. None of the problems are laid on the doorstep of their long domination of Venezuela nor do they cast an eye at the United States, which has tried to suffocate the Bolivarian revolution since 1999.

Imperialism is a word that is rarely used these days. It is relegated to histories of colonialism in the distant past. There is little understanding of the suffocating way that financial firms and multinational businesses drive their agenda against the development aspirations of the poorer nations. There is even less understanding about the muscular attitude of countries such as the United States, Canada and the Europeans against states that they deem to be a problem.

The gunsights were once firmly on West Asia and North Africa—on Iraq, Libya, Syria and Iran—but now they are focused on Latin America—on Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. These countries face economic sanctions and embargoes, threats of annihilation, covert operations and war. The definition of imperialism is simple:

if you don't do what we tell you to do, we'll destroy you.

Pressure on Venezuela has been intense. U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly called for the overthrow of the Bolivarian government, led by Maduro. Sanctions have been ratcheted up. Economic warfare has become normal. Threats of a military invasion are in the air.

On January 4, **the Lima Group of 13 Latin American governments and Canada** said that it would not recognize Maduro as the president of Venezuela. Behind them sits the U.S. State Department, which has put pressure along the hemisphere for the isolation of Venezuela as well as Cuba and Nicaragua. The U.S. State Department characterized the inauguration of the new president as *"Maduro's illegitimate usurpation of power."* Diplomatic language has dissolved into this kind of crudity.

The Lima Group was set up for one reason: to overthrow the current government of Venezuela. It has no other purpose. Sanctions and diplomatic withdrawals are part of the Lima Group's arsenal. Buoyed by the election of far right-wing politicians such as Brazil's **Jair Bolsonaro** and enthused by the fulminations of Trump, the Lima Group has tightened the pressure. Argentina's **Mauricio Macri** went to Brasilia to meet Bolsonaro, where he condemned the "dictatorship" of Maduro, and accused him—personally—of being responsible for the difficulties in Venezuela.

The Lima Group's violations of the UN Charter have been helped along by the Organization of American States, which held an extraordinary session to push its members to take economic and diplomatic steps for the "restoration of democratic order" in Venezuela. It perhaps needs to be emphasized that "restoration of democratic order" is a euphemism for regime change.

When U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley tried to draw the UN Security Council into such language—of dictatorships and regime change—she was rebuffed by the other members. In November 2017, for instance, Bolivia, China, Egypt and Russia boycotted an informal meeting called by Haley. No other such meeting has been possible. There is worry that the Trump administration will attempt in Venezuela what the Obama administration conducted in Honduras, or worse, what the Bush administration conducted in Iraq.

Wagging the Dog in Venezuela

You could scour the bowels of US imperial crimes, from the Mexican-American War to the Gulf of Tonkin in Vietnam, and you won't find a more brazen cynical act of gangsterism than that which is now underway against Venezuela. Before they drop the bombs, they drop the narrative, of course. And the disinformation bombardment in Venezuela has been one of the longest bombing runs in history. Massive sums of US money have been spent on media distortion, subversion, sabotage, military coups, and threats of invasion throughout the Chavez-Maduro era. The gold-toothed Venezuelan emigres who fled to Miami with their ill-gotten gains have long been effectively a coup in the making. The recruitment of neighboring Colombia into "associate membership" of NATO, the propelling of Brazil's Bolsonaro (another NATO applicant) to power, and plans for US military bases there have all been in preparation for this day.

In Venezuela, a successful coup will quickly become a civil war that will most likely draw in other countries from Cuba to Colombia and Brazil with incalculable

consequences – not least for the world's oil prices. Discerning readers will already be aware that Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves and is a major producer – and the biggest seller to the American market.

This is not about Maduro, the former bus driver-turned-foreign minister who is now the elected president of Venezuela. If it were, I'd waste my time critiquing his period in office. It's not about Maduro because the US had been seeking to overthrow his predecessor Hugo Chavez for more than a decade before this. Even though Chavez was one of the most electorally successful politicians on the planet in a democratic process described by former US president Jimmy Carter as "the best in the world," US presidents Bush, Obama, and Trump routinely called him a dictator.

Although many such crimes have been committed across all continents for centuries by the US, none have constituted such comic-opera gangsterism as

U.S. Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo** and his department. Pompeo, in a tweet, wrote, *"The time is NOW for a return to democracy in Venezuela."* The word "now"—in capitals—suggests that Pompeo is clear that there needs to be no procedures, only a coup. The day after this tweet, Pompeo's department said, *"It's time to begin the orderly transition to a new government."* This was a call for regime change, for a coup, and it comes from Washington, D.C.- VP **Pence** later explicitly told the opposition to act, expressing *"the unwavering support of the United States as you, the people of Venezuela, raise your voices in a call for freedom. Nicolás Maduro is a dictator with no legitimate claim to power."*

Orchestrating a coup, U.S. national security adviser, **John Bolton**, coined the phrase **"Troika of Tyranny"** that includes **Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela**. It is plain that the United States wants to overthrow the governments in each of these countries, and perhaps Bolivia as well.

Venezuela's Supreme Court stripped the opposition-dominated National Assembly of almost all its powers in 2017, in support of the newly formed Constitutional Assembly, but on Monday it went even further- The court declared the legislature in contempt and nullified all its recent actions, including the appointment of its president Juan Guaidó. He has argued that the constitution lets him serve as acting president of the nation in the absence of a lawful government.

On January 23rd the 35 year old opposition leader, Guaidó declared himself acting leader and swore himself in as President of Venezuela. Minutes later Donald Trump said he recognizes him as interim president.

Days earlier the Maduro Government had suppressed a military revolt, arresting a group of officers who stole weapons and kidnapped four officials. The attack at a National Guard outpost in the capital Caracas came shortly after a social media video circulated showing a sergeant calling for Venezuelans to support the removal of President Maduro.

The head of the **Organization of American States**— Uruguayan **Luis Almagro**—sent out a tweet that welcomed **Juan Guaidó** as the president. **A foreign official from a regional body has superseded the Venezuelan people and attempted to install a new president in Caracas.**

Hinting at a willingness to use force to secure this tweeted coup- when asked about possible actions that the United States could take, a senior U.S. official reiterated: *"When we say all options are on the table, it means all options are on the table."*

"Now if they choose the route of violence and seek to usurp the constitutional order and democracy, let us be clear, that we have a host of options. We will take every single one of those options seriously," the official cautioned. *"The message to Maduro and his cronies will be that — if that is the route they choose — it will be very clear to them ... they will have no immediate future. They will have no immediate livelihood. And therefore, one way or another, have their days counted."*

Ironically for one enmeshed in a game of chicken over the continued operation of his own government, Trump described Maduro's leadership as *"illegitimate"* and said the country's congress was the only *"legitimate branch of government."* While still holding Maduro *"directly responsible"* for any threats to the safety of the Venezuelan people.

In response to Trump's coronation of the opposition leader Maduro broke diplomatic ties with the U.S. and gave diplomatic staff 72 hours to leave Venezuela. The U.S. has told them to ignore the order, that it *"is meaningless."*

Pompeo said the US will maintain diplomatic relations with Venezuela despite Maduro's order- *"The United States does not recognize the Maduro regime as the government of Venezuela. Accordingly the United States does not consider former president Nicolas Maduro to have the legal authority to break diplomatic relations with the United States or to declare our diplomats persona non grata."* saying that the US would instead conduct relations *"through the government of interim President Guaidó,"* urging Venezuela's military to support efforts to restore democracy, he said the US would back Guaidó in his attempts to establish a government.

Trump also urged other nations to follow suit in supporting Guaidó. Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Paraguay have done so. Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba, Turkey and Russia have expressed support for Maduro.

Any troops that Trump is withdrawing from conflict zones might not be going home anytime soon. They might soon enough find themselves deployed on the beaches of Punto Fijo, facing a Bay of Pigs style resistance from the Chavistas.



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Independent Media Institute.org
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this latest – more "Bugsy Malone" than "The Godfather." An almost random figure whose name was largely unknown until this week has disdained to put himself up for election as president of the republic, instead pronouncing himself to actually be the president, and has even sworn himself in!

And the "international community" recognizes Juan Guaidó. This includes US, Canada and assorted American satrapies across the world. They will likely soon be joined by the so-called democratic European Union, NATO and almost certainly the UK. It is a new form, to be sure – usually the hated Latin American presidents are killed, like Allende in Chile, or have fled or been jailed before the coup de grace is delivered. But Trump is in a hurry.

-George Galloway

Former British MP, expelled from the Labor Party 12 years ago for his leftist views but presently on track through Jeremy Corbin to be reinstated.

(Thanks to Ron Paul Institute)