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## US and Allies Look to Military Intervention in Venezuela



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The Bolivarian social and political movement first led by former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and holding state power since 1999 has long faced U.S. assaults. They've ranged from U. S. support for an unsuccessful military coup in 2002, backing for violent street disturbances, U.S. moneys assigned to political opponents, and U.S. economic sanctions against Venezuelan political leaders. Now the U.S. government may be on the verge of blocking Venezuelan oil sales in the United States.

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One avenue for altering Venezuela's government seems to be closing. Political forces rooted in Venezuela's business class and mobilized against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro are flailing. But another has yielded results. Years of shortages at the hands of bankers and commercial interests have led to suffering and distress such that serious destabilization, their goal, may be at hand. Terrible inflation and real hardship for most Venezuelans may be the cue for military intervention billed as humanitarian.

It's evident from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's visit February 1-8 to Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, and Jamaica that the United States sees action ahead, and soon. In Austin, Texas, en route, he noted that, "The corrupt and hostile regime of Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela clings to a false dream and antiquated vision for the region that has already failed its citizens." He noted that, "In the history of Venezuela and in fact the history in other Latin American and South American countries, oftentimes it's the military that handles that, that when things are so bad that the military leadership realizes they just – they can't serve the citizens anymore, they will manage a peaceful transition."

A day later in Mexico City he charitably mentioned that, "If President Maduro would return to the Venezuelan constitution, restore the duly elected assembly, dismantle the illegitimate constituent assembly, and return to free, fair elections, then he's happy to stay."

Florida Senator Marco Rubio, never shy about regime change in Venezuela, tweeted that, "The world would support the Armed Forces in Venezuela if they decide to protect the people & restore democracy by removing a dictator."

But as Tillerson arrived in Colombia on February 6 there was a snag. Having negotiated intermittently for two years, representatives of Venezuela's government and of rightwing opposition parties, meeting in the Dominican Republic, had reached an agreement. It called for "rejection of foreign intervention," electoral guarantees, common defense against economic sanctions, and "end of economic warfare." The negotiators agreed also on a date for upcoming presidential elections.

Then Julio Borges, representing the opposition negotiators, took a telephone call from Tillerson in Bogota. He was ordered to call off the agreement.

On February 13, the Lima Group – Latin America and Caribbean nations supporting U.S. neo-liberal objectives – announced they wouldn't recognize the results of Venezuela's presidential elections set for April 22. Polling data gives President Maduro a 55 percent advantage.

At that meeting the Peruvian foreign minister disinvited President Maduro from attending an Organization of American States summit meeting in April hosted by Peru.

Admiral Kurt Tidd, head of the U.S. Southern Command, met with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and other officials in Bogota on February 8-9. Venezuela presumably was on the agenda. Testifying before the Senate Armed Forces Committee in 2017, Kidd opined that, “[The growing crisis](#) in Venezuela could eventually require a regional response.”

Colombia is taking the lead in publicizing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. Officials point to thousands of hungry and destitute Venezuelans crossing into Colombia’s eastern cities and departments. In fact, many are Colombians who long ago had [moved to Venezuela](#) because of threats to their survival in Colombia.

Santos is anathema to defenders of the Bolivarian process. *He “has opted to be the spokesperson for the White House with its constant aggression,” according to former Venezuelan Vice President Jose Vincent Rangel, and “[He’s mixed up in our internal politics on a daily basis, and brazenly so.](#)”*

In recent weeks Colombia’s government has sent 3000 troops to Cúcuta and Catatumbo, regions on Colombia’s border with Venezuela. [Extra paramilitary](#) forces are moving in. In January the United States sent [415 marines to Panama](#). They will be staying until June, 2018 as part of the military’s humanitarian intervention program called New Horizons. U.S. troops have long been in place in Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao, Dutch-owned islands located off Venezuela’s northern coast. [Brazil is deploying](#) soldiers to its northern border with Venezuela. The United States has its own troops and military bases in Colombia.

The U.S. Southern Command in November organized training exercises for U.S. Brazilian, Peruvian, and Colombian troops in Tabatinga, a Brazilian town on the Amazon River. They were [preparing a base](#) to be available for future humanitarian operations.

The question remains: why is the United States focused on Venezuela? U.S. concerns have ranged from Venezuela as center for international drug trafficking, as safe harbor for Islamic terrorists, as owner of bountiful oil deposits no longer under U.S. control. Surely power brokers in Washington are no fans of a government claiming socialism as one goal and continent-wide unity as another. They were never happy with Venezuela’s promotion of regional alliances for the sake of social programs and protection of sovereignty.

The role of China in [propping up Venezuela’s](#) problem – ridden oil industry may be especially galling to the U.S. government, in part due to concerns that China is displacing the United States as Latin America’s main trading partner. Indeed, “In seven Latin

American countries, China has surpassed the United States as the main destination for exports,” according to one analyst. And, “Eight Latin American countries now import more from China than they do from the United States.”

Surveying the scene, Ángel Guerra Cabrera, a Cuban political journalist living in Mexico, asserts that Venezuela “is the Spanish Republic of today.” As in the 1930s, “a decisive struggle is underway in Venezuela for democracy and self determination of the peoples.”