U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!

By Bruce Lesnick & Jeff Mackler

A Socialist Action Booklet
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Introduction

It took some 34 days for the Donald Trump administration to decide on May 18, 2019 to forcefully evict from the Venezuelan Embassy in Washington, D.C. four antiwar activist members of the Embassy Protection Coalition. The four were there with the formal and express consent of the Venezuelan government and its president, Nicolas Maduro. Their attorneys repeatedly informed threatening U.S. government officials that any attempt to evict members of this Embassy Protection Coalition would be in flagrant violation of U.S. and established international law, wherein the embassies of recognized governments cannot be violated. Embassy personnel and appointed representatives, as well as their offices and contents, cannot be breached or infringed upon by the host government. These principles were recently affirmed with regard to the Ecuadoran Embassy in London that provided sanctuary to Wikileaks founder Julian Assange. Until the new Ecuadoran government reversed its previous position and decided to allow British authorities to remove Assange, for some seven years no one dared to enter.

In this matter, the Trump administration finds itself ensnared in its self-declared and delusional contradiction. On the one hand it maintains official recognition of the Venezuelan government and, therefore the sanctity of its embassy; on the other, it insists that it’s puppet “president,” appointee, Juan Guaidó, is the true representative of this government. In the end, as with all such matters when U.S. imperialism’s “interests” are at stake, international law and all other “laws” are ignored with impunity and brute force is employed to achieve heinous ends. No doubt, if the embassy matter becomes subject to future litigation Trump and Company fully expect that their U.S. Supreme Court, or any other judicial body, will find or invent some “legal” justifications to suit the imperial needs of the capitalist system it is sworn to uphold.
One can only imagine reading a Supreme Court decision wherein the court recognizes the right of the U.S. government to appoint its agents/puppets to the presidency of another country! Certainly no such U.S. judicial authority has ruled that the myriad of recent regime change wars that leveled much of the infrastructure of Iraq, Libya and Syria, and now Yemen, and slaughtered literally millions of civilians, were illegal.

**U.S. Embargo/Blockade/Sanctions kills 40,000**

Today, the full force of U.S. imperial power is directed against Venezuela, including enforcing an international embargo and blockade, unprecedented sanctions, overt threats of intervention and the massive U.S. sequestering of $billions in Venezuela’s international assets. The combination of these U.S. actions alone, according to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, has resulted in the incredible loss of 40,000 Venezuelan lives due to U.S.-imposed starvation and lack of medical supplies.

**CIA’s Fake Revolution**

U.S. media monopolies for months, and to this day, dutifully report each and every Trump and CIA-manufactured lie to justify its ongoing regime change coup efforts. Trump’s warmongering cohorts, National Security Adviser John Bolton, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Elliot Abrams went to the extreme in scripting and orchestrating, “Wag the Dog” Hollywood style, a fake revolution against the Venezuelan government, aimed at convincing the Venezuelan people and world public opinion that the Venezuelan army had gone over to Guaidó’s side, that Guaidó was in power and that masses were in the streets proclaiming his victory. Guaidó’s April proclamations to this effect included that he had won the support of three major military officers, that his soldiers had captured a prime military base in Caracas and that
massive numbers had rallied to his cause in Caracas and across the country to demand President Maduro’s ouster. All this soon proved to be CIA-created fiction, repeated as truth ad nauseam, according to the media investigating group, FAIR (Fairness in Accuracy and Reporting), in virtually every major newspaper in the country. See: https://fair.org/home/failed-coup-a-fake-corporate-news-story-designed-to-trick-venezuelan-soldiers-and-us-public/

The named “defecting” Venezuelan military officers – who had apparently been contacted by the CIA and offered huge bribes – played along with the would-be coup makers only to later expose their deeds – repudiating Guaidó’s and the CIA’s fabrications. (See May 5, 2019 Los Angeles Times.) None defected. The mass protests that Guaidó announced never materialized. Small groups of Guaidó supporters gathered briefly in Caracas’ upper middle-class neighborhoods to engage police with rocks. Meanwhile the subsequent May Day mobilizations a day later of 400,000 government supporters, the largest in several years, were invisible to the corporate media. In the end, the entire rigged scenario proved to be a fiction. The New York Times finally reported in a front page article on May 22, “Weakened and unable to bring the political crisis gripping Venezuela to a quick resolution, Mr. Guaidó [fleeing from one safe house to another in Venezuela] has been forced to consider negotiations with Mr. Maduro.”

Yet to this day the fiction of Guaidó’s presidency is maintained by the nation’s duopoly war parties. Not a single U.S. politician moved to expose this charade. Manufacturing such scenarios, accompanied by demonization of a nation’s leader as a mass murdering tyrant, often accompanied by “proof” of heinous misdeeds such as the now-refuted charge of using lethal sarin gas against civilians in Syria, is the stock in trade in imperialism’s arsenal of mass deception aimed at justifying “humanitarian” and regime change wars in the public mind.
Self-Determination for Venezuela

The articles in this Socialist Action pamphlet serve as a resounding refutation of these crudely orchestrated regime change efforts and as an affirmation of Socialist Action unconditional support of the right to self-determination of Venezuela’s people and democratically elected government. Today’s central antiwar movement demand, “U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!” has proved to be increasingly effective in forging broad united front-type mass action coalitions like the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), whose focus is on bringing thousands into the streets in clear opposition to the bi-partisan warmakers. UNAC’s component organizations, of course, hold a range of often divergent assessments on the policies of the Venezuelan government. They are united in rejecting U.S. intervention in all its horrific expressions, but as a mass action coalition they take no position on the nature of the Venezuelan government. As individual organizations each is free to present its own views.

Socialist Action’s assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution is presented here in some detail. While standing full square on the side of the Venezuelan government and people against every effort of the U.S. government to overthrow it, we have also been harsh critics of Venezuela’s “pink revolution” policies that have tragically served to weaken its fight against imperialist-imposed isolation and war.

Socialist vs. “Pink” Revolutions

Venezuela’s “pink revolution”— as with all of Latin America’s recent experience with the political rule of social-democratic, reformist, or left nationalist governments that promised to improve the lives of the working masses without fundamentally challenging their nation’s capitalist and private
property foundation—has proved to be inadequate to the task. John Pilger’s Feb. 22, 2019, Counterpunch article entitled “The war on Venezuela is built on lies” makes this absolutely clear. Pilger, a longtime admirer and friend of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and a sympathetic, anti-imperialist friend of Venezuela, explains in great detail what has been widely viewed as Venezuela’s democratic electoral process and its significant social achievements. But Pilger’s balance sheet includes this painfully accurate yet contradictory statement: “For all the Chavistas’ faults—such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption—they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented democracy.”

The iron laws of capitalism, whether in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, repeatedly demonstrate that advancing the interests of the vast majority is inherently incompatible with defending the prerogatives of the minority ruling-class capitalist elite. The Chavez/Maduro governments, as Pilger painfully notes, “never seriously challenged big capital,” that is, the overwhelming ownership and control by the “one percent” of Venezuela’s major industries including its oil – partial “nationalizations” notwithstanding – its land, banking, and related financial institutions, basic resources, systems of transportation, shipping, etc. Venezuela’s land largely remains the private property of big landowners.

In short, the Chavez/Maduro project of “coexisting” with capitalism left it incapable of developing a rounded economy capable of producing its own food—Venezuela imports almost all of its food—and instituting a semblance of planned and balanced economic growth aimed as satisfying human needs as opposed to capitalist profits. Today, 70 percent of Venezuela’s economy
remains in capitalist hands, not to mention some 70 to 90 percent of its media.

Rhetoric aside, Venezuela is no socialist economy. The rhythms of its economic, and therefore social development, are contingent on the exigencies of the world capitalist market. When world oil prices, always manipulated by the U.S. and a few of the most powerful oil producers, plummeted from over $110 per barrel to less than $40 over the past decade, Venezuela’s economy suffered greatly and became increasingly subject to imperialism’s ever-deepening destabilization measures.

The Chavez government’s conscious decision to avoid any fundamental break with capitalism left it unprotected, as was the case with similar reform-minded governments in Brazil (Lula), Ecuador (Correa) and Nicaragua (Ortega). The Chavistas sought to coexist with the “boli-bourgeoisie” (Venezuelan capitalists) who occupied essential parts of the government infrastructure and were included in Venezuela’s United Socialist Party. Capitalism and government corruption are inseparable.

In contrast to Venezuela’s reform-minded but capitalist-committed Chavistas, Cuba’s socialist revolution of 1959 proceeded to rapidly, in Fidel’s words, “nationalize the capitalist class down to the nails in the heels of their boots.” It quickly established a planned economy based on meeting human needs, not capitalist profits; it distributed the land to the long-oppressed and exploited peasantry; and it armed its population to defend all of those gains. In consequence, Cuba’s proud revolutionary achievements remain largely intact and a shining example to oppressed people everywhere, despite more than a half-century of U.S. imperialist efforts to restore it to its former neo-colonial status.
The Way Forward for Venezuela

Venezuela today stands at the threshold of social change. It can take the Cuban route and move toward a fundamental break with capitalist domination or it can continue on the dead-end path of “peaceful” co-existence with an imperialist-backed internal capitalist elite. The latter course, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, is a sure road to disaster.

Genuine socialist revolution, established via the direct and democratic rule of the working-class majority, requires the formation of a deeply-rooted, mass revolutionary socialist, working-class-based party. While no such party exists in Venezuela today the conditions for its formation, given the deep radicalization brought on by the immediate threat of a U.S. invasion and the experience of millions with the severe limitations and failures of previous reform projects, are propitious. The road to the construction of such a party centers on winning the confidence and mass support of the working class and absolute opposition to imperialist intervention. In the current context, the best defense is a good offence. There is nothing the Venezuelan government can do to placate the rapacious capitalists in the U.S. or within Venezuela. Appeasement will not work. Power must be met with power. And the only source of power within Venezuela that can match the imperial behemoth at the gates is an emboldened, organized, mobilized working class headed by a mass revolutionary socialist party that proves in action to be the best defenders of the interests of Venezuela’s working masses. U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!

Jeff Mackler, May 22, 2019
Venezuelans took to the streets in August 2017 in response to Trump’s comment that he would consider the “military option” against Venezuela. (Photo: PSUV)

Once again, the Wall Street-captured, war-promoting, servants of the one percent—who administer the U.S. government at the pleasure of, and solely in the interest of, corporate America—have deigned to command a sovereign nation as to how to handle its internal affairs.

In a further escalation of the U.S. government’s long-running campaign against the elected Venezuelan government, Vice President Mike Pence pledged on Tuesday, Jan. 22, his “unwavering support” for opposition moves aimed at unseating the elected president Nicolás Maduro. The following day, in violation of international law and the right of self-determination, President Trump formally recognized U.S. puppet politician Juan Guaidó as
the legitimate Venezuelan leader. On Jan. 24, The New York Times joined the war chorus, proclaiming, “The Trump administration is right to support Mr. Guaidó.”

To the chagrin of U.S. robber barons, Maduro was elected in 2013 in a process the Carter Center previously called the “best in the world.” Maduro was then re-elected in 2018. Fearing another electoral defeat and seeking to deny Maduro legitimacy, the rightist opposition boycotted that election, with the strong encouragement of its U.S. sponsors.

This latest act of U.S. imperial aggression is not the first of its kind directed against Venezuela or other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that refuse to march in lock step with U.S. corporate interests. Other hostile actions include:

• The illegal, decades long economic blockade of Cuba.
• The invasion of Guatemala in 1954.
• The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.
• The invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965.
• The U.S. supported coup in Chile in 1973.
• The Contra war against Nicaragua from 1981-1990.
• The invasion of Grenada in 1983.
• The invasion of Panama in 1989.
• CIA backed coups in Haiti in 1991 and 2004, including years of occupations.
• The U.S. supported coup in Honduras in 2009.
• Material aid to Nicaraguan opposition groups from at least 2016 to the present.
• Support for Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.
• The U.S.-supported coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002.
• Economic sanctions against Venezuela from 2006 to the present.
• A special $5 million fund for Venezuelan opposition groups established by Barak Obama in 2011.
• Coup attempts against Venezuela’s Maduro in 2015 and 2018.

The same corporate behemoths that push for cutbacks, layoffs, offshoring, and austerity here at home—all to maximize corporate profits—are behind the latest threats against Venezuela. Working people in the U.S. only lose if the one percent succeeds in imposing their will on the Venezuelan people or anyone else.

Many have justifiably criticized the capitalist Chavez and Maduro government policies from the left. But in the current context, under the threat of U.S. intervention, this is not the overriding consideration. Any changes or improvement in the Venezuelan government are for the Venezuelan people alone to make.

The U.S. imperial machine has no progressive role to play in Venezuela or elsewhere! The last thing U.S. corporate leaders want is a truly mobilized, active, and empowered Venezuelan working class. In the U.S., antiwar and working-class activists must take to the streets to demand, “U.S. Out Now!”
Ruling elites have united behind the Trump administration in its illegal, unjust, and brutal attempt to meddle in the internal affairs of Venezuela. Democrats and Republicans alike have fallen in line, revealing the degree to which the two parties march in lock step when the geopolitical prerogatives of the one percent are at stake. The governments of some 20 countries—including Canada, Britain, Spain, Germany, France, Australia, Brazil, Israel, and Argentina—have all pledged fealty to the U.S. and its hand-picked puppet in Venezuela.

The New York Times, champion of the “liberal” wing of the ruling rich, editorialized in support of the Trump administration’s transparent coup plotting on Jan. 24, insisting, “the Trump administration is right to support Mr. Guaidó.”

Pretend socialist and Democrat Bernie Sanders shed crocodile tears, decrying violence and economic disaster in
Venezuela while failing to note his own government’s hand in creating those conditions. Sanders provides left cover for U.S. military intervention, asserting, “The United States should support the rule of law” in Venezuela. To date, self-described “democratic socialist” Alexandria Ocasio Cortez has been silent on U.S. aggression in Venezuela.

On the heels of a multi-year, evidence-free³ propaganda offensive⁴ denouncing Russia’s supposed interference in the 2016 U.S election, it is beyond ironic to see politicians, pundits, and corporate media moguls cheer for the proven, documented, and admitted interference by the U.S. in Venezuela. As reported by Al Jazeera⁵, “On Venezuela, Democratic Party leaders are often hard to distinguish from their Republican counterparts … most, like Nancy Pelosi⁶, have staked out openly pro-coup positions. And after two years stoking anti-Russia panic, MSNBC’s standard script offers little guidance to confused liberals seeking to triangulate a political position—Trump is for the coup but Russia⁷ is against it—what to do?”

The Devil is in the Details

Soon after Donald Trump assumed the Presidency, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) and Vice President Mike Pence began a concerted campaign⁸ to convince Trump to adopt a plan to oust elected Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. As The New York Times reported, “Mr. Rubio’s approach has generated unusually bipartisan support, including from leading Democrats like Senators Richard J. Durbin of Illinois and Robert Menendez of New Jersey.”

In September 2018, The Times ran the headline⁹, “Trump Administration Discussed Coup Plans With Rebel Venezuelan Officers.” The article reports, “American officials eventually decided not to help the plotters, and the coup plans stalled.” But
the machinations didn’t end there. The focus shifted to finding some figurehead who could claim to be the “legitimate” Venezuelan ruler. After considering various opposition politicians, Rubio and Pence settled on the little-known engineer serving as president of the Venezuelan National Assembly, Juan Guaidó.

According to AP and the Washington Post, the preparations¹⁰ for the current coup and secret meetings with Guaidó date back at least to December 2018: “In mid-December, Guaido quietly traveled to Washington, Colombia and Brazil to brief officials on the opposition’s strategy of mass demonstrations to coincide with Maduro’s expected swearing-in for a second term on Jan. 10.”

On Jan. 22, Trump, Pence, and National Security Advisor John Bolton met to discuss options. According to The Times, Pence advised Trump to assure Guaidó that the U.S. would recognize his bid for power if, by chance, he were to make such a claim. Trump agreed. Later that day, Pence called Guaidó to give him the good news.

Pence then posted a video¹¹ on-line asserting that elected President “Nicolas Maduro is a dictator with no legitimate claim to power.” In the video, Pence went on to proclaim U.S. support for Guaidó. Then, surprise, surprise: Guaidó claimed he was the rightful president the very next day. The Trump administration and U.S. imperial allies around the world quickly endorsed Guaidó’s claim.

Shortly after declaring himself “interim president,” Guaidó moved to seize Venezuelan oil revenue held in the U.S. so as to use those funds to finance his assault. As the Washington Post reported¹², “For now, the hope is to use the newly declared interim government as a tool to deny Maduro the oil revenue from the
United States that provides Venezuela virtually all of its incoming cash, current and former U.S. officials said.”

On Jan. 29, the U.S. imposed additional sanctions on Venezuela’s state-owned oil company, PDVSA (Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A.) Forbes\textsuperscript{13} reports, “The restrictions would amount to $7 billion in blocked assets today, and an estimated $11 billion in export revenues over the course of 2019, according to [National Security Advisor John] Bolton.” In an interview on Fox Business, Bolton bragged of how U.S. corporations would benefit from the new sanctions: “You know, Venezuela is one of the three countries I call the troika of tyranny. It will make a big difference to the United States economically if we could have American oil companies really invest in and produce the oil capabilities in Venezuela. It’d be good for the people of Venezuela. It’d be good for the people of the United States.”

On Jan. 25, the Bank of England refused to allow Venezuela access to $1.2 billion in its gold reserves. Bloomberg reports\textsuperscript{14}, “The Bank of England’s decision to deny Maduro officials’ withdrawal request comes after top U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and National Security Adviser John Bolton, lobbied their U.K. counterparts to help cut off the regime from its overseas assets.” The U.S. Treasury department released a statement\textsuperscript{15} the same day announcing, “The United States will use its economic and diplomatic tools to ensure that commercial transactions by the Venezuelan Government, including those involving its state-owned enterprises and international reserves, are consistent with” U.S. recognition of Guaidó as the interim president.

Among the rationalizations presented in the corporate media for replacing Maduro with Guaidó is that the process that resulted in Maduro’s 2018 election victory was flawed. But former U.S. President Jimmy Carter declared\textsuperscript{16} in 2012 that “the election
process in Venezuela is the best in the world.” In February 2018, the main right-wing opposition parties, fearing defeat, pledged to boycott the presidential election scheduled for May. Two minor opposition candidates did participate. Maduro won the election, but as intended by the boycott, there was lower than normal voter turnout. The U.S. and the main Venezuelan opposition groups refused to recognize the results.

Guaidó and his backers among politicians and the media also cite Article 233 of the Venezuelan constitution as justification for his ascension. But that article refers only to a procedure to be followed if the elected president (Maduro in this case) were to become permanently unavailable. And in such a case, the next in line for the presidency would be Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, not Guaidó, who is the leader of the National Assembly.

Economic Destabilization


What coup supporters fail to mention, however, is the campaign of harsh economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and its imperial allies against Venezuela, dating back to the Obama administration. Those sanctions, together with U.S. moves to block loans to Venezuela from the world’s leading financial institutions, have wreaked havoc with the Venezuelan economy.
In his recent report\textsuperscript{21}, former UN Special Rapporteur Alfred de Zayas characterized the sanctions as “economic warfare.” He went on to recommend that the International Criminal Court investigate the economic sanctions against Venezuela as possible crimes against humanity. As quoted in the London-based Independent, Zayas explained, “What’s at stake is the enormous, enormous natural resources of Venezuela. And I sense that if Venezuela had no natural resources no one would give a damn about Chavez or Maduro or anybody else there.”

Eugenia Russian of FUNDALATIN, a Venezuelan human rights organization formed before Hugo Chavez was elected president, explained to the Independent, “It is insufficient to see only the errors or deficiencies that the government may have, without seeing the environment of international pressure under which this population lives.”

**Familiar Pattern**

We should note that this latest campaign of U.S. intervention is not the first of its kind directed against Venezuela or other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that refuse to march in lock step with U.S. corporate interests. Other U.S. imperialist actions include:

- The illegal, decades-long economic blockade of Cuba.
- The CIA-backed invasion of Guatemala in 1954.
- The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961.
- The invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965.
- The U.S. supported coup in Chile in 1973.
• The invasion of Grenada in 1983.
• The invasion of Panama in 1989.
• The U.S. supported coup in Honduras in 2009.
• Material aid to Nicaraguan opposition groups from at least 2016 to the present.
• Support for Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.
• The U.S. supported coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 2002.
• Economic sanctions against Venezuela from 2006 to the present.
• A special $5 million fund for Venezuelan opposition groups established by Barak Obama in 2011.
• Coup attempts against Venezuela’s Maduro in 2015 and 2018.

The Wall Street Journal reported^{22} on Jan. 30 that the current U.S. attack on Venezuela is but the first move in a strategy to “reshape Latin America.” In particular, “After Venezuela and Cuba, U.S. officials are eyeing Nicaragua.”

**Fighting Back**

When first elected in 1998, the Chavez government promoted significant reforms^{23}. It used revenue from the nationalized PDVSA energy sector to increase social spending by 60% from 2002-2012. By 2012, Venezuela had reduced inequality by 54% and poverty by 44%. Extreme poverty was reduced from
40% in 1996 to 7.3% in 2010. Medical care became free, as did education from preschool through university. But today, under relentless economic and political attack by U.S. imperialism and its allies, many of these reforms have been whittled away and the living conditions of the working class have become ever more dire.

Socialists support Venezuela’s right to self-determination unconditionally. But this does not imply agreement with every policy or pronouncement of the Chavez and Maduro governments. Within Venezuela, the only force strong enough to beat back the current assault and future imperial offensives is the masses of working people.

Unfortunately, the Venezuelan United Socialist Party, led by President Maduro, has failed to fully prioritize working class interests. Despite its name, it has demonstrated—by its consistent defense of private industry, land and banking, and by its failure to fully mobilize the independent power of masses of working people—that it is a capitalist rather than a socialist party.

When faced with similar aggression in the 1960s, the Cubans took a different road, leading ultimately to the arming of the workers and peasants, nationalization of key industries and banking under workers’ control, and the creation of committees of workers and farmers in every village, neighborhood and workplace to defend their revolution.

Up to now, Maduro, and Chavez before him, have sought to tame Venezuelan capitalism in the hope of gaining enough breathing space to implement reforms. Meanwhile, attacks from the still-powerful Venezuelan capitalist class and their imperial boosters continue unabated. In this manner, the Venezuelan working class has been fighting with one hand tied behind its back. Unleashing the full strength of the working class and openly challenging the capitalists for power offers the best chance of
defeating the current and all future attacks against the Venezuelan people.

Nevertheless, we do not condition our support for the self-determination of the Venezuelan people in any way. Any changes or improvement in the Venezuelan government are for the Venezuelan people alone to make. The U.S. imperial machine has no progressive role to play in Venezuela or elsewhere! The last thing U.S. corporate leaders want is a truly mobilized, active and empowered Venezuelan working class. In the U.S., antiwar and working-class activists must take to the streets to demand, “U.S. Out Now! Hands Off Venezuela!”

**Same Enemy, Same Fight**

Working people in the U.S. must understand that the same corporate behemoths that push for cutbacks, layoffs, offshoring, and austerity here at home—all to maximize corporate profits—are behind the latest threats against Venezuela. Working people in the U.S. gain nothing, and stand to lose much, if the one percent succeeds in imposing their will on the Venezuelan people. For this reason, we must do all that we can to stay the hand of the warmakers, understanding that in this context as in so many others, an injury to one is an injury to all.

The power of organized, mobilized workers is the only thing that coup plotters, war hawks, and capitalist oligarchs in the U.S or Venezuela truly fear. Two recent examples demonstrate this point:

The first is the recent strike of the Los Angeles teachers. Inspired by their brother and sister unionists who fought and won strikes in West Virginia, Virginia, Oklahoma, Colorado, and Arizona, the 34,000-strong UTLA strikers faced down an intransigent school board and forced it to accede to a number of
important demands that advanced the interests of teachers, students, and the broader community.

Then there was the response of La Guardia air traffic controllers to President Trump’s recent government shutdown. On the day that federal workers missed their second paycheck, an unusual number of controllers at La Guardia Airport called in sick. Delays resulted and quickly spread to other airports. Within hours, the phony government shutdown was over! The political and economic cost was high enough to force bipartisan agreement to resume paying the salaries of government workers. That’s power!

That kind of power can stop the U.S. warmakers in their tracks. It can stop the current U.S. aggression against Venezuela, and in Venezuela, it can be used to mount a potent defense against the current capitalist assaults from the internal coup plotters and their U.S backers.

4 https://www.thenation.com/article/russiagate-elections-interference/
5 https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/venezuela-slow-coup-continues-190129055253356.html
6 https://twitter.com/SpeakerPelosi/status/1088579867703197696
10 https://www.apnews.com/d548c6a958ee4a1fb8479b242ddb82fd
12 https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/without-a-road-map-trump-administration-pins-hopes-on-venezuelas-
U.S. Gears up for War on Venezuela

By Jeff Mackler and Bruce Lesnick

April 4, 2019


The relentless U.S. imperial beast has embarked on a full-scale, openly declared, bipartisan regime-change war aimed at overthrowing Venezuela’s democratically elected government headed by President Nicolás Maduro.

Top U.S. officials—from President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, National Security Adviser John Bolton and special envoy Elliot Abrams of Iran/Contra infamy, to Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and pretend socialist Bernie Sanders—almost daily take to the airwaves, with the world’s corporate media cheering in lock step, insisting that “all options are open,” including overt war via direct U.S. military intervention.
Sanders demanded that Venezuela open its borders to “humanitarian aid,” while DSA Democrat Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez waffled on the issue.

There are only two sides in the present conflict, period. One either supports the victory of the Maduro government over the U.S. onslaught, or one sides with the imperialist aggressors. There is no third option! And since the imperial U.S. war machine serves the same wealthy 1% that is responsible for cutbacks, austerity, exploitation, repression, and devastation in the U.S., the effects of a defeat of the Venezuelan people would be keenly felt by all working people here at home. This is why we must mobilize to demand:

- U.S. Out Now!
- End the Sanctions!
- Hands Off Venezuela!

President Trump’s most determined thrust toward war was set for Saturday, Feb. 23, at the Colombian border town of Cúcuta and at a manufacturing site at the Brazilian border, where U.S.-financed and orchestrated “humanitarian aid” conveys attempted to force their way into Venezuela, without success. The move was thwarted by Bolivarian National Guard forces and thousands of Venezuelan workers, peasants, and youth who blockaded the various bridges leading into their country.

The planned imperialist intervention was designed to serve as spectacular media opportunity depicting “murderous” Maduro forces turning back unarmed “humanitarian aid” trucks filled with food and medical supplies bound for the “starving people” of Venezuela.
Center stage in this crudely-orchestrated scenario was assigned to the U.S. and CIA-appointed puppet “president” Juan Guaidó, who slipped into Colombia to lead what was touted as a massive rebellion against the Venezuelan government. The high point of the event was projected to be mass desertions from the Bolivarian Armed Forces and Guaidó’s return to Venezuela, via a U.S. escort to be sure, as the nation’s new president. A vivid eyewitness account was presented by the weekly Latin American Summary (Resumen LatinoAmericano) in a Feb. 23 on-the-scene article entitled, “Bolivarian Venezuela Scores Another Strategic Victory”:

“Suddenly, as they rolled across the bridge on the Colombian side, they [the “aid” trucks] were set on fire by a group of guarimberos [road blockers] who sprayed the vehicles with gasoline while they were being filmed and photographed by many reporters.

“But since the hegemonic media are the violent advance units of mass mind poisoning, they invented another matrix of lies by accusing Chavismo supporters of starting the fire. What’s more, they told us that it was the members of the Bolivarian National Guard, who were stationed far from the scene, who were to blame for this clumsy action. And this morning every major corporate news agency from the National Public Radio (NPR), New York Times, Washington Post, BBC, the Guardian on down were reporting this as the gospel.

“What they didn’t say is that the thugs ‘hired’ by the opposition addicted to Guaidó and protected by the Colombian police (there are videos on the internet as evidence) became irate because things didn’t go well and they didn’t get paid their agreed upon fees. That’s why a hooded mob gave the ‘contractors’ a good beating. This also happened to Guaidó supporter Congressman
José Antonio Olivares, who was hit in the face and head by a group shouting, ‘thieves, pay what you promised.’

Hands Off Venezuela demonstration in Miami, Fla., on Feb. 18.
(Photo: Marty Goodman / Socialist Action)

In a Feb. 27 address to the UN Security Council, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza claimed that some of the “aid” trucks sent to Colombia’s border with his country were found to contain nails and wire—which could be used in constructing barricades. He produced photographs to back up his assertions.

Antiwar activists may remember how in the 1980s President Ronald Reagan’s Deputy National Security Adviser, Elliot Abrams, and his CIA cohorts used planes with fake Red Cross markings to send arms to the Contras, who were fighting to overthrow the popular government in Nicaragua, violating U.S. and international law in the process.
In the end, Guaidó, who now calls for direct U.S. military intervention, was compelled to admit that his “humanitarian aid” gambit was a failure, as was his boast that 600,000 Venezuelans would mobilize in Caracas to demand the government’s resignation. The small groups that did take to the streets in Caracas threw rocks at government soldiers. Guaidó’s claim that some 400 Venezuelan soldiers had deserted to his side was left unsubstantiated; the Venezuelan government put the figure at 20.

**U.S. Economic Warfare**

While Guaidó’s hoped-for triumphant re-entry into Venezuela as the nation’s savior proved to be farce, the real war waged by the U.S. against Venezuela remains deadly serious. The sanctions and related economic measures imposed by the U.S. against oil-rich Venezuela have been draconian, if not unprecedented. These include instructions to all U.S. banking institutions to seize hundreds of billions of dollars in Venezuelan accounts and transfer the funds into accounts payable to puppet president Guaidó.

The details of this have been well documented. Here it is sufficient to report that the full force of the U.S. leading capitalist banking elites, from the Bank of America to the J.P. Morgan Chase financial behemoths, have joined in stealing funds generated from the sale of Venezuelan oil in the U.S. and around the world. Add to this the U.S.-pressured decision of the British ruling class to sequester Venezuelan gold deposited in British banks to the tune of $1.3 billion, and the severing of Venezuelan access to the world’s lending institutions, and you have nothing less than a U.S.-led war against the Venezuelan people.

Indeed, a U.S. Army document published in September 2008 by Wikileaks demonstrates that the U.S. government sees economic aggression as a key component of its warfare strategy.
On Feb. 25, Vice President Pence demanded that all Latin American countries “freeze the assets of Venezuela’s state oil company, PDVSA.” Pence, according to the Feb. 25 New York Times, “also warned some countries in the region that have conspicuously sought to remain neutral in the crisis convulsing Venezuela that they cannot remain so, singling out Mexico and Uruguay.” The endlessly pontificating and threatening Pence declared, “We believe there can be no bystanders. No one on the sidelines of this, particularly in our hemisphere.”

Despite Guaidó’s abject failure at the border, the U.S. persists in demanding that its allies accept Venezuela’s being effectively expelled from the world economy. Insisting on the present legitimacy of the historic U.S. imperial credo embodied in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, Trump’s partisan warmakers proclaim that Venezuela is today situated in the U.S. “backyard” and, therefore, barred from exercising its sovereign rights as a nation.

In the same breath, they assert that Venezuela’s dire economic straits, including major food and medical shortages and a raging inflation, are of Venezuela’s own making! “The nation with the largest oil reserves in the world,” according to the cynical imperialist interveners, “can’t feed its own people.” Nothing could be further from the truth!

Pence announced that U.S. military planes were consciously violating Venezuelan airspace to find future “humanitarian aid” access routes into Venezuela from Brazil and Colombia.

“There is no turning back,” Pence insisted, declaring that, as in Libya, where U.S./NATO and allied forces from Qatar and other Gulf State monarchies destroyed the infrastructure of that nation and murdered thousands, including its president Muammar
Gadhafi, the U.S. was seeking to construct yet another “coalition of the willing” to do its bidding.

With the world’s largest oil reserves, Venezuela makes a prime target for U.S. profit-hungry corporate titans. However, there’s another dimension to the current aggression. U.S. oligarchs, who represent a tiny portion of the population but wield the lion’s share of political and economic power, cannot abide any group stepping out of line, be it at home or abroad. Though they pretend to support democracy, in truth, democratic rule by the majority is to the ruling rich like a cross to a vampire. They will never give up their power and privileges voluntarily, regardless of the wishes of the other 99% of the population.

The current attack on Venezuela demonstrates what happens when a majority democratically decides to defy the dictatorship of the wealthy 1%: at such a time, those at the top shed their democratic masks and strike out with vicious, deadly force. While mobilizing today to defend Venezuela’s democratic right to self-determination, working people in the U.S. would do well to remember this lesson of who really supports democracy and who really promotes violence.

The U.S. is no newcomer to engineering coups in Venezuela. Its 2002 effort, backed to the hilt by the Bush administration, lasted for 48 hours and included the arrest of President Hugo Chavez by a core team of U.S.-paid generals. In the intervening hours before massive mobilizations forced Chavez’s release, the coup makers passed 49 decrees abolishing the government’s progressive social measures while privatizing Venezuela’s oil industry, all in the name of returning the country to economic and social stability.

Similarly, the U.S.-engineered 1973 coup against the popular Salvador Allende government in Chile put the rightist
General Augusto Pinochet in power. Capitalist stability was restored by Pinochet’s slaughter of 60,000 Chilean workers herded into a sports arena or otherwise murdered out of public view. The string of U.S.-backed coups in the region also includes Haiti in 1991 and 2004 and Honduras in 2009.

**Cuba Calls for Worldwide Mobilizations**

Anticipating the possibility of another such regime-change slaughter, the Cuban newspaper Granma published a government statement entitled, “It is imperative to halt the imperialist military adventure against Venezuela.” Cuba’s revolutionary government called for massive worldwide mobilizations in support of Venezuela’s sovereignty.

On Feb. 23, the “humanitarian aid” invasion date set by Trump and Co., an estimated 150 antiwar protests, mostly in the U.S., demanded, “U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!” and “No to a U.S. Coup!” The Oakland, Calif., demonstration of 200 activists, initiated by a broad range of antiwar and social justice forces, including the United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), won the unanimous endorsement of the delegates to the San Francisco Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

To the consternation of U.S. officials, Cuba, as well as Iran, Russia, and China—all sanctioned or threatened with severe economic measures by the U.S.—joined forces to deliver tons of food and medical supplies to beleaguered Venezuela. Russian and Chinese agreements to expand purchases of Venezuelan oil are justly seen by the Maduro government as vital and widely viewed, regardless of motivation, as mutually beneficial.

Estimates of the cost of the U.S. economic war against Venezuela exceed $7 billion this year and is expected to rise to $30 billion in the years ahead.
No doubt the solidarity of revolutionary Cuba, itself invaded (in 1962), embargoed, and blockaded by the imperialist beast for nearly 60 years, is widely seen among Latin America’s working masses as an example of socialist politics in action. It was revolutionary Cuba that, along with Venezuela in 2005, when Hurricane Katrina had devastated much of New Orleans, offered to send serious humanitarian aid to the people of that city, including vast numbers of doctors and medical supplies. U.S. officials rejected this “no strings attached” offer.

In contrast, today, the strings attached to the phony U.S. “humanitarian aid” include a military invasion, conquest of Venezuela, and its return to colonial status. Demonstrating his extreme imperial arrogance, Trump bragged that Cuba and Nicaragua were next in line for colonial conquest.

Venezuela’s foreign minister, Jorge Arreaza, while stating that the events of Feb. 23 demonstrated that “the momentum of the coup is over,” took great care to make clear that Venezuela was incapable of resisting a full U.S. invasion. Venezuela’s sole defense, he stated, was in the expected solidarity of the Latin American people, a factor that he obviously held high in cautioning that a U.S. invasion would extract a great political price across the continent. Arreaza added that should a U.S. invasion become a reality, the Venezuelan people would defend their country with their lives.

Socialist vs. “pink” revolutions?

Venezuela’s “pink revolution”—as with all of Latin America’s recent experience with the political rule of social-democratic, reformist, or left nationalist governments that promised to improve the lives of the working masses without fundamentally challenging their nation’s capitalist and private property foundation—has proved to be inadequate to the task.
John Pilger’s Feb. 22, 2019, Counterpunch article entitled “The war on Venezuela is built on lies” makes this absolutely clear. Pilger, a longtime admirer and friend of former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and a sympathetic, anti-imperialist friend of Venezuela, explains in great detail what has been widely viewed as Venezuela’s democratic electoral process and its significant social achievements.

But Pilger’s balance sheet includes this painfully accurate yet contradictory statement: “For all the Chavistas’ faults—such as allowing the Venezuelan economy to become hostage to the fortunes of oil and never seriously challenging big capital and corruption—they brought social justice and pride to millions of people and they did it with unprecedented democracy.”

The iron laws of capitalism, whether in the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, repeatedly demonstrate that advancing the interests of the vast majority is inherently incompatible with defending the prerogatives of the minority ruling-class capitalist elite. Venezuela is a classic case in point. The Chavez/Maduro governments, as Pilger painfully notes, “never seriously challenged big capital,” that is, the overwhelming ownership and control by the “1 %” of Venezuela’s major industries—including its oil, partial “nationalizations” notwithstanding—its land, banking, and related financial institutions, basic resources, systems of transportation, shipping, etc.

Venezuela’s land largely remains the private property of big landowners. Its oil resource, vast as it is, remains dependent on imperialist ownership and control of the necessary infrastructure—refineries, pipelines, transport, etc.—to bring it from the ground to the market place. Indeed, Venezuela’s thick oil is largely incapable of passing through its pipelines without the importation and utilization of refined U.S. oil products to sufficiently dilute Venezuela’s crude.
In short, the Chavez/Maduro project of “coexisting” with capitalism left it incapable of developing a rounded economy capable of producing its own food—Venezuela imports almost all of its food—and instituting a semblance of planned and balanced economic growth aimed as satisfying human needs as opposed to capitalist profits. Today, 70 percent of Venezuela’s economy remains in capitalist hands, not to mention some 70 to 90 percent of its media.

Rhetoric aside, Venezuela is no socialist economy. The rhythms of its economic, and therefore social development, are contingent on the exigencies of the world capitalist market. When world oil prices, always manipulated by the U.S. and a few of the most powerful oil producers, plummeted from over $110 per barrel to less than $40 over the past decade, Venezuela’s economy suffered greatly and become increasingly subject to imperialism’s ever-deepening destabilization measures.

The Chavez government’s conscious decision to avoid any fundamental break with capitalism left it unprotected, as was the case with similar reform-minded governments in Brazil (Lula), Ecuador (Correa), Nicaragua (Ortega), and all the others. The Chavistas sought to coexist with the “boli-bourgeoisie” (Venezuelan capitalists) who occupied essential parts of the government infrastructure and were included in Venezuela’s United Socialist Party. Capitalism and government corruption are inseparable. In a true socialist society, real power resides in the democratic ownership, operation, and control of society’s wealth and resources by the working-class majority.

In contrast to Venezuela’s reform-minded but capitalist-committed Chavistas, Cuba’s socialist revolution of 1959 proceeded to rapidly, in Fidel’s words, “nationalize the capitalist class down to the nails in the heels of their boots.” It quickly established a planned economy based on meeting human needs, not
capitalist profits; it distributed the land to the long-oppressed and exploited peasantry; and it armed its population to defend all of those gains. In consequence, Cuba’s proud revolutionary achievements remain largely intact and a shining example to oppressed people everywhere, despite more than a half-century of U.S. imperialist efforts to restore it to its former neo-colonial status.

The Way Forward for Venezuela

Venezuela today stands at the threshold of social change. It can take the Cuban route and move toward a fundamental break with capitalist domination or it can continue on the dead-end path of “peaceful” co-existence with an imperialist-backed internal capitalist elite. The latter course, as history has repeatedly demonstrated, is a sure road to disaster.

Genuine socialist revolution, established via direct and democratic rule of the working-class majority, requires the formation of a deeply-rooted mass revolutionary socialist working-class-based party with a program and cadre that have absorbed the lessons of history and are prepared to challenge capitalist/imperialist rule fundamentally. While such a party does not exist in Venezuela today, the conditions for its formation, given the deep radicalization brought on by the immediate threat of a U.S. invasion and the experience of millions with the failures of previous reformist projects, are propitious.

In the current context, the best defense is a good offence. There is nothing the Venezuelan government can do to placate the rapacious capitalists in the U.S. or within Venezuela. Appeasement will not work. Power must be met with power. And the only source of power within Venezuela that can match the imperial behemoth at the gates is an emboldened, organized, mobilized working class headed by a mass revolutionary socialist party.
A defeat for working people in Venezuela at the hands of the U.S. ruling rich would be a setback for working people the world over. The social forces attacking Venezuela are the same as those blocking efforts to seriously address climate change; the same as those promoting mass incarceration, racism, sexism, deportations, homophobia, and economic inequality; the same as those attacking unions and pushing austerity; the same as those advocating endless war. U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!
U.S. Hands off Venezuela!

By Bruce Lesnick

April 4, 2019

Rally in Caracas on March 30 against the imperialist-abetted coup.
(Ariana Cubillos / AP)

When you corner a rat, it lashes out. The rats in charge of the U.S. empire are cornered by the contradictions built into their own system: increasing economic inequality, regular depressions and recessions, declining profit rates, perpetual austerity, and endless wars promoted to stave off increasing global competition. The current vicious U.S. assault on Venezuela—along with the ongoing attacks on working people here at home—are what it looks like when the imperial rat lashes out.
The Trump administration has openly declared the goal of regime change in Venezuela. Such an aim is illegal under international law. The mere threat of aggression is “not only an international crime; it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole.”

But U.S. hostility toward that sovereign, independent nation did not begin with the current administration. In a classic case of what Malcolm X called “turning the victim into the criminal,” Barack Obama declared a state of emergency in January of 2017 asserting that Cuba and Venezuela were national security threats to the U.S.

What is the reason for U.S. hostility toward Venezuela, a country that has never threatened any other, let alone the U.S.? Simply put, the popularly elected Chavez and Maduro governments have failed to blindly adhere to U.S. neoliberal economic priorities and imperial dictates. As the CIA acknowledged: “Social investment in Venezuela during the CHAVEZ administration reduced poverty from nearly 50% in 1999 to about 27% in 2011, increased school enrollment, substantially decreased infant and child mortality, and improved access to potable water and sanitation through social investment.”

Naturally, big business and the U.S. government they control couldn’t stand idly by while a country in their very “back yard” followed a road that, however tepidly and imperfectly, took steps that hinted at prioritizing human needs over private profits. A series of executive orders and sanctions, beginning under the Obama administration and continuing under Trump, have sought to economically strangle the Venezuelan people.

From freezing Venezuelan gold and U.S. dollar reserves held in foreign accounts, to blocking the sale of oil, Venezuela’s
chief hard currency export, the impact on the Venezuelan economy is estimated to be upwards of $20 billion in 2018 alone. Together these sanctions amount to a criminal siege, according to UN Special Rapporteur for Venezuela, Alfred de Zayas.

This was followed by a U.S.-sponsored coup attempt on Jan. 23, 2019, when President Trump announced U.S. recognition of opposition politician Juan Guaidó as the “legitimate” president of Venezuela. This was despite Guaidó’s never having run in a presidential election.

Mainstream Media Complicity

To cover up its illegal aggression, the U.S. attempted to stage the delivery of “humanitarian aid” at the Columbian and Brazilian boarders with Venezuela on Feb. 23. Venezuelan officials denounced the stunt as a “Trojan Horse,” noting that U.S. Special Envoy Eliot Abrams, who was promoting the phony aid drop, was known for concealing weapons in planes with Red Cross markings in support of the Contras—anti-Nicaraguan government mercenaries supported by the U.S. in the 1980s.

The phony aid drop was stopped by Venezuelan troops. Near opposition groups escorting the aid, one of the trucks caught fire. Video footage from the scene by Telesur showed opposition supporters starting the fire. Nevertheless, The New York Times, CNN and other mainstream media, plus John Bolton, Marco Rubio and Mike Pompeo, blamed the fire on the Venezuelan government forces for two weeks after the incident.

Only after the lie had been sufficiently spread and reinforced did The Times reverse itself on March 10, acknowledging that the same video published widely by Max Blumenthal of The Grayzone and by other alternative media sites
weeks earlier proved that Venezuelan troops were not responsible for the fire.

The Times barely paused before spreading additional misinformation in a story entitled, “‘It Is Unspeakable’: How Maduro Used Cuban Doctors to Coerce Venezuela Voters.” The story was calculated to smear the Venezuelan and Cuban governments, as well as thousands of Cuban doctors and teachers who have volunteered to provide concrete, legitimate aid to the Venezuelan people.

Nine days later, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) published a piece thoroughly debunking the Times story. Entitled, “Pathological Deceit: The NYT Inverts Reality on Venezuela’s Cuban Doctors,” the FAIR piece concludes, “the New York Times’ Andes bureau chief mobilizes anonymous sources and defectors—whose testimony ranges from dubious to preposterous—to further demonize Venezuela and provide cover for Washington’s murderous regime change policy.”

**Multi-faceted Attack**

The next move in the imperial assault on Venezuela came on March 7 with a cyber-attack on Venezuela’s power grid.

According to Venezuela’s Telesur, “An ongoing series of cyber attacks were perpetrated starting Thursday against the El Guri hydroelectric plant control system leaving the Venezuelan population without electricity for now almost 96 hours. According to the Venezuelan government, this nationwide blackout was brought about by foreign-backed actions aimed at destabilizing the government [of] President Nicolás Maduro, who stressed that the aggression ‘affected everyone equally without political distinction.’”
As noted in a March 9 story in Forbes, the U.S. has long had plans for disrupting the infrastructure of “uncooperative” nations: “Interrupting power and water supplies, disrupting traffic patterns, slowing or interfering with internet access, causing smart homes to go haywire and even remotely triggering meltdowns at nuclear power plants were all topics increasingly being discussed in the national security community at the time as legitimate and legal tactics to undermine a foreign state.”

The Cuban government issued a strong statement condemning the attack:

“The Revolutionary Government strongly condemns the sabotage perpetrated against the power supply system in Venezuela, which is a terrorist action intended to harm the defenseless population of an entire nation and turn it into a hostage of the non-conventional war launched by the government of the United States against the legitimate government headed by comrade Nicolás Maduro Moros and the civic and military union of the Bolivarian and Chavista people.”

**Genuine Aid**

On March 25, The Wall Street Journal reported that two Russian military planes had landed in Caracas: “The Russian delegation, made up of 100 soldiers and military officials, arrived over the weekend to provide technical consultations linked to arms that Venezuela previously had purchased from Moscow, according to Russian state media. One of the planes carried 35 tons of unspecified equipment, said a security consultant with close ties to Caracas.”

Russia, Cuba and China have also delivered humanitarian aid in cooperation with the Venezuelan government. Telesur reported, “China delivered 65 tons of medicine and supplies to
Venezuela Thursday as a result of a strategic cooperation between the two countries. The delivery of aid is one of many, according to government officials.”

According to Nicolás Maduro, as quoted in the Feb. 19 edition of El Periódico, “On Wednesday, 300 tons of Russian humanitarian aid will be legally delivered to the international airport of Caracas.” The article continues, “He also insisted that the donations made by the United States and Colombia at the request of the Venezuelan Parliament, which has an opposition majority, and that are blocked at the border, are outdated and contaminated food.

“The issue of humanitarian aid is a show, it is a hunting trap, they rob us 30 billion dollars and they offer us 20 million in rotten food, contaminated, to try to intervene in Venezuela,’ he insisted while asking the Colombian president, Ivan Duque, and the American, Donald Trump, stop the ‘madness.’”

Revolutionary socialists fully support the right of the Venezuelan government to obtain military, technical, and humanitarian aid from wherever they choose. One does not have to agree with every policy of the Maduro government to understand the stakes in the current conflict and to loudly demand: End the Sanctions! U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!
“Nobody said regime change was going to be easy,” read the first line on the front-page New York Times article of May 2 entitled, “Pressure Rises After Failure In Venezuela.” The article, billed as “news analysis,” continues, “President Trump’s top advisers woke up Tuesday [April 30] believing that a rebellion in the Venezuelan military that day would galvanize a popular uprising and topple a leader they have described as a reviled despot who must be replaced. But at day’s end, President Maduro was still in power and Mr. Trump’s advisers were left to blame Cuba, Russia and three influential Venezuelan officials, who failed to switch sides, for frustrating their plans.”

In the old days, and even recently, U.S. CIA-orchestrated coups were clandestine matters, wherein secretly trained troops were organized, armed, and financed by U.S. imperialism and sent
in to remove any government that the U.S. ruling elite deemed a threat to their economic and/or geopolitical interests. The 1962 U.S.-sponsored coup/invasion of Cuba as well as the U.S. 10-year “Contra” war against Nicaragua were prime examples.

The 1953 U.S. coup to remove the government of Iran was similarly disguised, with U.S. operatives dressed in Middle Eastern garb entering the presidential palace to oust Iran’s president, Muhammad Mossadegh. In Syria too, U.S.-trained and financed jihadist forces began their dirty work early on to remove the Bashar Assad government in an ongoing war that has taken the lives of an estimated 500,000 Syrians.

Students of history will undoubtedly add to the list literally hundreds of similar U.S.-orchestrated regime change efforts across Latin America, Asia, Africa, and indeed, across the globe. Europe too is not immune; witness the U.S.-backed fascist-led coup in Ukraine in 2014.

Opposition leader Juan Guido. “If the Americans were to propose a military intervention, I would probably accept it,” he said in a recent interview with Italian daily newspaper La Stampa.
Blatant intervention

But today, the imperial coup makers are out in the open, boasting their intentions around the globe. In Venezuela, their propagandists named three top Venezuelan military officers who they claimed had defected to the side of the U.S.-appointed “president,” Juan Guaido. Their U.S.-briefed corporate media friends in Venezuela and around the world were similarly primed with the scoop from Trump’s top officials, to wit, that Guaido’s supporters had captured a military base in Caracas and had mobilized to free an imprisoned Guaido supporter, who had been a leader of the previous U.S.-backed coup in 2002.

The programmed scenario was put to the test on the morning of April 30, with some eager corporate media pundits getting their “facts” a bit wrong. There was no Guaido takeover of any military base, but rather a photo-op scene replete with a group of heavily armed soldiers, touted as Venezuelans, surrounding Guaido’s truck outside of the claimed captured military base. Guaido’s call for a mass uprising failed to materialize.

His alleged military success in freeing his 2002 coup-making buddy, under house arrest with but a few guards present, failed to seriously demonstrate his claimed military prowess.

By day’s end, the facts were clear. Venezuela’s armed forces, including its army and armed militias, today some two million people, remained intact. The three named top officials who were said to have deserted, publicly stated otherwise and Guaido’s call for mass rebellion to oust the Maduro government fizzled to small groups of protesters in a few middle and upper class neighborhoods of Venezuela’s wealthy.

Meanwhile, May Day in Venezuela saw the largest pro-government mobilizations in years. Incredibly, President Trump
blamed his coup’s failure on the Cubans and Russians. With regard to Cuba, he pledged a tightened embargo/blockade aimed at strangling Cuba’s economy. Additional sanctions against Russia were said to be in the making. Russia’s crime was in providing food and medical supplies to Venezuela.

On May 1, according to The New York Times (May 4, 2019), U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov to “warn him that his country’s intervention in Venezuela was ‘destabilizing’ for that country and for the U.S.-Russian relationship.” National Security adviser John Bolton added, “This is our hemisphere—it’s not where the Russians ought to be intervening.”

Today we are witness to a U.S. imperialism that recognizes no restraints against the brutal exercise of its vast economic and military power. Trump officials have warned all Latin American nations, and indeed all nations around the world, that to defy its massive sanctions against Venezuela would be met with major U.S. retaliation.

**Big Business Media is Complicit**

A recent report by the news media watch organization FAIR (Fairness And Accuracy in Reporting) noted that almost all major U.S. media have aped the government-promoted drum-beat regime-change mantra daily spewed forth by the Trump administration and the Democratic Party.

In contrast, every delegation of antiwar and social justice activists who have recently visited Venezuela presents a diametrically opposed view. They give a view of a Venezuelan society deeply impacted by the monstrous U.S. sanctions and embargo on the one hand, but where the vast majority stand firmly opposed to any U.S. war against Venezuela and against all those
who would bring it on, including Juan Guaido, whose power and influence over the basic institutions of Venezuelan society—U.S. and CIA daily disinformation aside—is zero.

As with the U.S.-orchestrated war against Syria, Socialist Action unconditionally supports Venezuela’s right to self-determination, including its right to seek aid from Cuba and Russia.

Today, a small group of U.S. antiwar activists are dramatically and legally supporting this right. They have entered and now occupy the Venezuelan embassy offices in Washington, D.C., with the formal support of the Venezuelan government. As we go to press, they are threatened with eviction by Guaido thugs, who have smashed the embassy windows and are threatening the occupants with violence while U.S. officials stand by without interference. U.S. Hands Off Venezuela!
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