

Bernie and the Dems Flunk Trump's Test on Venezuela's Coup

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Global Research, January 30, 2019

[Information Clearing House](#) 29 January 2019

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

When Trump announced his support for the unfolding coup in Venezuela, Bernie Sanders remained silent for 24 hours. This matters because coups are made or broken in the first moments or hours; a day during a coup can feel like a month or more.

With each hour Bernie's silence roared louder. So much was hanging in the balance with Trump at home and abroad, to the point where a finger could tip the scales— yet Bernie refused to lift his.



Among the many [Democratic Party candidates](#) running for President, only Tulsi Gabbard (image on the right) made an unequivocal statement condemning the coup, while leftist darling Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez limited her criticism to a retweet.

While U.S. politics grappled furiously over the government shutdown, Trump's coup gifted the Democrats a dagger and an exposed flank, yet they refused to strike, returning the weapon so that it could be used against the democratically-elected government of Venezuela.

Nancy Pelosi and other leading Democrats went further and cheerled their Commander and Chief by using their platform to attack President Maduro. Trump's position was consequently strengthened. Instead of being condemned [for breaking international law](#) he was made to look like a responsible statesman, leading a "coalition" of countries facing off against an 'authoritarian dictator'. The virulently anti-Trump section of the U.S. media closed ranks in his favor— since it was difficult to find a dissenting opinion.

In this context Trump was put into an excellent position to win the war over the government shutdown, that is until the bold actions of [airport workers](#) swiftly ended the drama. But Trump certainly learned a valuable lesson: the Democratic Party "resistance" crumbles in critical moments when a foreign conflict erupts, which helps promote more such moments in the future.

Bernie Finally Tweets!

After an excruciating day of silence Bernie finally found his voice— by sending three tweets. But the content was revealing, reinforcing the weakness that kept him silent during the first critical day.

Tweet #1 was essentially a point-by-point plagiarism of Trump's lies used to justify the coup. [Bernie Tweeted](#):

“The Maduro government has waged a violent crackdown on Venezuelan civil society, violated the constitution by dissolving the National Assembly and was re-elected last year in an election many observers said was fraudulent. The economy is a disaster and millions are migrating.”

Instead of targeting Trump's coup actions Bernie targets the victim. Bernie's allegation of a fraudulent election is [simply slander](#), since Venezuela's elections are widely regarded as among the best in the world.

Every time the opposition in Venezuela believes they'll lose an election they “boycott” it, though the opposition was fractured during the last election, to the point where some boycotted while others supported two separate anti-Maduro candidates. Thus, every semi-objective observer knew Maduro would easily and fairly [cruise to victory](#). For Bernie to give Trump this ammo— the key rationale being used to justify the coup— simply makes the Senator an accomplice in a crime.

Furthermore, Bernie claiming that Maduro “dissolved the National Assembly” is also untrue. Although [what happened is complicated](#), the Venezuelan Supreme Court (not Maduro) dissolved the National Assembly in 2017, in reaction to flagrant violations of law that made the pro-opposition Assembly a non-functioning institution that only passed laws which unconstitutionally attacked Maduro's government.

Venezuela has been functioning in a state of dual power since 2017, when a unitary government was torn into two by the pressures of the class struggle and the non-stop shenanigans of a U.S. supported opposition hellbent on overthrowing the government.

Regarding Bernie's mention of the economy being “a disaster”, he surely knows that [U.S. economic sanctions](#), pro-opposition [immigration policies](#) and political threats have much to do with the situation, choosing to ignore these critical factors because doing so bolsters anti-Maduro sentiment.

[Bernie's 2nd Tweet](#) was a reinforcement of the first, further buttressing Trump's actions:

“The United States should support the rule of law, fair elections and self-determination for the Venezuelan people. We must condemn the use of violence against unarmed protesters and the suppression of dissent.”

The “unarmed protestors” that Bernie is referring to here are the shock troops of the wealthy opposition trying to overthrow the government, who in 2017 lead deadly, violent protests that resulted in [over a 100 dead](#), which included the opposition [burning alive at](#)

[least four pro-Maduro supporters](#). Bernie certainly knows that the opposition in Venezuela is neither peaceful nor democratic.

[The 3rd and final tweet](#) is where Bernie finally expresses his half-hearted “opposition” to Trump’s coup:

“But we must learn the lessons of the past and not be in the business of regime change or supporting coups—as we have in Chile, Guatemala, Brazil & the DR. The US has a long history of inappropriately intervening in Latin American nations; we must not go down that road again.”

Bernie says “we must not go down that road again”, while failing to condemn the fact that Trump is a 1,000 miles down the coup road already. Much planning and organization has gone into the coup, to the point where every pro-U.S. country in South America and key European allies have agreed to recognize a new President, Juan Guaido, who has zero actual legitimacy.

Also, critically, in his Tweets Bernie puts no demands on Trump, offering no solutions to the mushrooming crisis— he doesn’t insist that Trump withdraw his recognition of the coup leader as President, nor does he suggest any specific actions that would act to reverse the current course, allowing it to continue unbothered.

Such a passive position— that buttresses many of the key lies that Trump used to make his case— amounts to, at best, a neutral position, and as Desmond Tutu said “neutrality aids the oppressor”. In reality Bernie’s position is a signal to Trump that no organized opposition to the coup will occur, while Democrats will limit their reaction to the ensuing bloodshed by criticizing Maduro.

Why Imperialism Matters

The question of imperialism isn’t abstract, affecting only people in under-developed, ‘exotic’ countries like Venezuela. In reality U.S. foreign intervention government directly impacts U.S. residents every day, ruining their living standards while ensuring that their children have an even less opportune future.

Money spent abroad— and the politics it creates— always affects what’s possible domestically, since tax dollars that go to destroy other governments cannot be used for the kind of proposals that Bernie makes, such as Medicare For All, free college education, a Green New Deal, etc. A key reason that Western European countries have amazing social programs is the small size of their armies.

War spending acts as an endless, guaranteed veto to social programs that people in the U.S. desperately want but are always denied— a true example of how oppression abroad limits your freedoms at home.

In the article [‘Does Bernie Sanders’ Imperialism Matter’](#), this writer argued:

“Imperialism is a bogeyman that haunts social progress, re-appearing in countless forms to keep resources flowing endlessly into wars abroad that stunt domestic spending and distract from working class demands. A new military “crisis” will always strive to take priority over domestic

considerations.”

Will the Coup Fail?

Some analysts have already dismissed Trump’s coup as a failure, since the Venezuelan military appears unified in their support for Maduro. But the coup machinery is marching forward. U.S. allies in Europe (France, Germany, and Spain) have [given Maduro 8 days](#) to hold new elections, or they will recognize Juan Guaido as President. Of course elections cannot be held in 8 days in any country; the demand simply acts as a pretense to give the coup momentum.

For European powers to follow Trump into the abyss over Venezuela means that Trump has spent much political capital cajoling them into action. This coup is a serious investment that will demand returns. The nations following Trump don’t typically break with international norms so spectacularly, since doing so is risky; thus the Europeans must be convinced that the U.S. will actually complete the coup, ensuring that Maduro falls, otherwise Germany will be recognizing as President a man ingloriously hiding underground to avoid arrest like a common criminal.

If Trump fails to complete the coup the U.S. loses vital credibility, and next time finding allies on such adventures will be harder. If the U.S. recognizes a President that never becomes President there are political-economic consequences. For example the U.S. cannot afford to look weak internationally while it’s actively threatening China and Russia and still involved in the multi-nation Syrian War. The major powers are furiously competing for allies and a failed coup makes one less competitive.

A country that uses its military as its main political lever cannot afford a sickly image, which is a key reason why so many establishment figures were furious at Trump for not “finishing the job” in Syria, leaving Assad in power (Trump has since hesitated on his decision).

Trump is thus committed to this new undertaking, which will deepen in the coming days and weeks. Many are expecting that Trump will use the [‘Syrian option’](#) — formerly referred to as the [‘Salvador option’](#) — which begins with the arming and training of anti-Maduro militias, and ends with attacks on the government and/or pro-Maduro forces that create the “need” for U.S. intervention to impose “law and order”. The rehearsal for this strategy already occurred in 2017, when the above-mentioned violent protests occurred but didn’t quite provoke a large enough crisis to justify U.S. military intervention.

Such conspiracy theories were immediately given credence when Trump announced, mid-coup, that he had a new ‘Special Envoy’ to Venezuela, the [notorious Elliot Abrams](#), made famous for his role in the Iran-Contra affair, where he was in the inner circle breaking laws while publicly advocating for the death squads (or “Contras”) that terrorized Nicaragua, Guatemala, and El Salvador, which is where the term “Salvador Option” was birthed. Abrams was convicted for his role in Iran-Contra but predictably pardoned by George H.W. Bush (who used his office as VP to Reagan to [promote Iran-Contra](#)).

In his new position Abrams will focus on accelerating and finalizing the coup by holding talks with Venezuelan military and opposition figures, cobbling together groups willing to take the coup to the next level, and no doubt conspiring with hostile neighbors Columbia and Brazil, who can easily be lured in to the conflict with the smallest of concessions (Columbia has been involved for a number of years). Promises will be made to Venezuelan military figures

who, after defecting, will have their profiles raised as the new leaders of the newly-created Venezuelan military.

If Maduro Falls

Abrams approach will quickly lead Venezuela into an especially bloody civil war, since much of the military came into maturity under Chavez, the majority of which still retain a strong devotion to the revolution and its principles.

Chavismo is further buttressed by the still-expanding [National Bolivian Militia](#), where hundreds of thousands of working-class people received military training that focused, in part, to prepare the country for exactly the kind of coup being unleashed today. The Venezuelan working class will not quietly accept a right-wing dictatorship, and they have the means and organization to resist and win.

But if Maduro's government falls the far-right opposition will seek to bulldoze the progress made under the Chavez-Maduro governments: a mass privatization frenzy will ensue while the currency crisis will be resolved over the backs of the working class.

The size of the political and economic "correction" will require enormous amounts of blood be spilled, as the organizations of the working class resist the attacks on their living standards, democracy, and dignity. The would-be President Juan Guaido has already [discussed plans](#) to ramp up the privatization of Venezuela's oil, as well as going to the austere-hungry IMF, who will demand nothing less than their typical "restructuring" economic packages that target the social programs created by Chavez-Maduro. Ironically, it was IMF austerity that sparked the Venezuelan revolution nearly 30 years ago with the [Caracazo Uprising](#).

When democracy is easily trashed abroad it empowers anti-democratic forces at home. As the U.S. military-industrial complex is emboldened, so too are the far-right political actors in the U.S. that are the most hardened supporters of militarism and 'Trumpism'. As coups give birth to fascist-minded governments abroad, new allies for Trumpism are created from what could have been allies for the left. These are the hidden yet real consequences of Bernie's inaction, which serves to minimize the importance of imperialism at a historic moment for the western hemisphere.

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