

No Coup! No War! Hands Off Venezuela!

The threat is real...

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*The trumpets of regime change have sounded, and the drums of a possible war are beating against Venezuelan democracy. Provocations hitherto unimagined threaten to plunge the whole region into chaos and strike a serious blow against popular democracy around the world. Venezuela's foreign instigated coup attempt began with a phone call to from **Vice President Mike Pence** to the pretender, **Juan Guaidó**, giving the green light to a would-be "president" who has no legitimacy. The prospect of direct foreign intervention, including the military kind, is no longer just an option "on the table". It is looming so largely that we must stop asking if the unthinkable is possible. Instead we must stop the unthinkable.*

We must stop this coup. We must stop this war.

The whole world has been shocked by the words on the yellow tablet displayed "inadvertently" during a White House briefing by **National Security Advisor John Bolton**. The jaundiced man scribbled on his jaundiced papers: "Afghanistan -> Welcome the Talks," followed underneath by, "5,000 troops to Colombia." Was this an unbelievable security breach? Or was it intentional? Either way, it was a barely veiled threat that anyone knowing the context of the times will see was aimed at the people of Venezuela. There is no other explanation. And it is no mistake that the possible end to the war in Afghanistan is coupled with talk of troops to South America. The [Alliance for Global Justice](#) produced an [article on January 23 2019, published by Venezuela Analysis](#), that noted,

"Certainly, there is a long-standing connection between the Colombian military and the war in Afghanistan. Colombia has sent advisors, trainers, and special operations troops to Afghanistan, and there is a history of U.S. troop transfers between the two countries. In fact, the application in Afghanistan of lessons learned from decades of protracted war in Colombia is an oft-mentioned theme among military officials. Regarding Syria, Venezuelan expert on unconventional warfare, Jorgé Negrón Valera, wrote in October 2018 that, 'A hypothesis of a direct conflict cannot be discarded. But all indications are that the first thing on the Pentagon's table will be Syria....' But as we enter 2019, the situation has changed. Should U.S. troops be withdrawn from Afghanistan and Syria, they could be well-suited for redeployment in a Colombia-based conflict with Venezuela."

Since the new year, alleged eyewitness reports, including photos, have circulated rumoring the presence of U.S. Army helicopters and unusually large troop deployments to Panamá along the Colombian border. And at the same time Bolton is flashing his notes at the media pool, General Mark Stammer, the head of US Army South, is in Bogotá to discuss border issues. Right now, the Colombian military has its largest concentrations of troops in the coca

growing areas of south Colombia, and along the border with Venezuela. Both areas were visited by former Southcomm commander Admiral Kurt Tidd twice last year, in February and November. One of the first acts of the new commander, Admiral Craig S. Faller, was to visit Colombia, also in November, two days after the change of command. Likewise, the new Colombian President Iván Duque visited the Southcomm headquarters in Doral, Florida last July. In Admiral Faller's ceremony to take charge of Southcomm, he remarked, "As I see it, the Western Hemisphere is our neighborhood.... and in our neighborhood, security and stability can't be taken for granted."

While we still cannot say with certainty that there will be a foreign military intervention, we are seeing movements and plans happening that could presage this ominous development. If there was ever a time to take a stand and say No sanctions! No coup! No war! Hands off Venezuela! — that time is now.

What would a military intervention look like?

What would a foreign military intervention look like? There are several different scenarios, from outright invasion to the sealing of Venezuela's borders to surgical strikes and logistical support for on-the-ground coup plotters. We must be prepared for all eventualities.

The very threats of military action are themselves a form of intervention. From Trump's repetitive mantra that "all options are on the table" to John Bolton flashing his yellow note pad, they are designed to intimidate the legitimately elected government of Venezuela and all supporters of the Bolivarian movement. At the very least, we are seeing classic psyops in action.

Before examining the various possibilities, we should address the assertion that military intervention is unlikely because we have not witnessed the kinds of build-up seen before the wars against Iraq. Lieutenant Colonel Octavio Perez, retired from the U.S. Army, now serves as a military analyst for several news outlets including CNN, NBC, Telemundo, and Univision. He explains,

"The president said...the good thing is that Venezuela is so near. Many journalist friends were saying to me, Where are the aircraft carriers? Where is the American navy? It's that less than seven hours [away] there is a military base called Fort Bragg, North Carolina where there is the 82nd [Division] of paratroopers... and for the moment he [Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro] knows that it is a question of eight hours, more than 1,200 paratroopers on the way to Venezuela. It's not that they are going to land in Caracas, they can land in Maracay, they can land on the border with Colombia, establish a containment area for the 'Free Republic' of Venezuela and bring Godoy [Guaidó], and from there establish this human channel for Guaidó. And here is where the militaries would enter, not for an invasion of the country, but in order to establish this 'humanitarian corridor'"

Proponents of regime change have tried different methods so far unsuccessfully to overthrow Venezuela's elected government. These have included organized demonstrations with the intention of generating a great political destabilization, economic sabotage via sanctions, and the infiltration of the Venezuelan military with collaborators. Another open tactic has been to cause food and medicine shortages, accompanying this with a very intense propaganda campaign that Venezuela is not a viable nation. Earlier this year there was a meeting of Senators of almost all South American countries, called by the Colombian

Senate, to take measures against the government of Nicolás Maduro. They included the passage of national laws to prevent monetary or commercial exchange with that nation.

These tactics have caused massive social displacement over the last two years, propitiating the exodus of significant segments of the population as refugees. In other words, the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis is a crisis produced from outside. And today it serves as justification for an eventual “humanitarian” intervention. This has been a most useful argument for many of the invasions and wars in the world today.

The most dangerous bases: in Colombia

Wars can be defined when they start, but not when they end, and always leave deep wounds difficult to cure. An aggression from Colombia will always be considered a betrayal by Venezuelans, even by those who today call for the overthrow of Maduro. Military action would most likely emanate from Colombian military bases where the U.S. has a presence, where the most direct and virulent attacks might take place in a very short time.

Perhaps the most dangerous base is the Forward Operating Location (FOL) base in Colombian Guajira between the capital city of Rioacha and the railway line that connects the coal mine in Cerrajón and Bahia Portete. FOLs do not have a direct U.S. military physical presence, but they function like aircraft carriers on the mainland. They remain hidden in the environment with a large airstrip and all the necessary instruments installed to produce a surprise attack of great magnitude. Gasoline is stored underground, and there are communication systems, radars and the arsenal necessary to achieve such an attack, without having to return to a possible alternate base, hundreds or thousands of kilometers away. In this case the airstrip is on the road that connects Rioacha with Maicao, right on the Venezuelan border. This road is flat for most of its trajectory. In one strategic place, it is extended to 8 lanes by a little over 3000 meters. Less than 500 meters from that track you only see a Wayú indigenous ranchería. No one seems to inhabit it. Under these constructions there is a military complex that keeps the arsenal, instruments and gasoline necessary to produce a bombardment of the Maracaibo Gulf, the most important oil producing area in Venezuela. That base is a little over a minute in low flight from an F-16 or an F-18 Gulf of Maracaibo.

A little further to the southwest of this place is the naval base of Cartagena with capacity to receive dozens of B-54 aircraft, capable of transporting in a matter of hours all the arsenal that is required to sustain a bombardment. Added to this airport is the port of the naval base, which has already been measured in multiple “joint” military trials with the Colombian Navy, to identify the support capacity of several aircraft carriers, submarines and hundreds of ships of different depths.

Further south, following the path of the Magdalena River, between the Central Cordillera and the Eastern Cordillera, there is the Palanquero air base, between La Dorada and Puerto Salgar. It is the most important air base in Colombia. There is a track and some hangars with capacity to hold hundreds of F-16, F-18 and several B-52 simultaneously. That base is a low flight, in 13 minutes, from the Gulf of Maracaibo. There is no mountain that prevents visibility or forces the elevation of an average height of aircraft for military action of this type.

A little further south, almost in the same canyon that is formed between the two mountain

ranges, is the most important infantry base in Colombia, capable of holding several thousand soldiers and with space to mobilize hundreds of helicopters for the transport of troops and military supplies. This base is called Tolemaida and is on the outskirts of the town identified as Melgar.

There are four more military bases, already with a US presence, which are: Bahía Málaga - with an airfield of more than 3000 meters-, to the north of the only commercial port in Colombia on the Pacific, which is Buenaventura; the military base of Tres Esquinas, in the department of Caquetá and with an airstrip of more than 3000 meters as well, from where the bombing might proceed on strategic points of Caracas, including the Miraflores Palace; and the military base of Larandia, further south, in the middle of the Amazon jungle.

Is NATO part of the strategy?

At the end of the government of Juan Manuel Santos, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, he signed an agreement to make Colombia part of NATO. This means that all air bases are made available to the military needs of the North Atlantic Organization. By placing this country in the framework of this treaty, the pincer on Venezuela closes. Furthermore, with Venezuela's possible military backing by Russia, should an invasion be launched, and given the belligerent attitude of NATO toward the Russian nation, it is easily imaginable that a military engagement could be perceived as a direct concern to NATO, and might unfold in the same way as so many of the proxy hot wars that characterized the Cold War period. Adding fuel to this speculation is the ultimatum by NATO partners Britain, France, Germany, and Spain, demanding that the already legitimately elected Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, call yet new elections.

Brazil is also mobilizing a good part of its army towards the border with Venezuela under the excuse of the control of refugees that are arriving from the Bolivarian country. The military and space base of Alcántara has been carrying out, since the end of 2017, joint military operations with Peru, Colombia and the United States. The strategy of a large-scale invasion is already designed and ready. It could be an invasion done with many armies: those of Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Chile, even NATO. The presence of the United States' army may well be a "small" one.

Full-scale invasion not the only possibility

A direct, full-scale, belligerent military intervention by foreign powers is not the only scenario possible. One scenario could be similar to what we have seen in various conflicts including Syria, Libya, and Iraq-between-the-wars. This would be some combination of so-called "surgical strikes" on specific targets, mainly to aid on-the-ground coup actors, or via limited engagements to enforce No Fly Zones.

However, there are other options that may be much more suitable for this hemisphere. There is the model we saw in the overthrow of the elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide in Haiti. Coup plotters were funded, trained, and directed by the U.S. government and its agents, but acted "independently". They were then backed up with interventions in the name of "humanitarian aid", augmented later by "disaster response". A central factor was the establishment of an international troop presence from the UN, which, despite its repression of popular movements, was justified as a "peacekeeping" intervention.

The first order of such a military intervention would be focused on containment. Do US

activities to spread its border militarization model, and to develop international rapid military deployment efforts, have anything to do with the coup attempt in Venezuela?

The US military is the expert when it comes to temporary, mobile military bases constructed ostensibly to bring humanitarian aid, deal with natural disasters, and combat the so-called Drug War. In reality, they are exercises in rapid deployment and large-scale population control. Amazonlog in Brazil in 2017 was the largest international military exercise ever, anywhere. It involved troops from the United States, Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. A major component of the exercises was to coordinate the securing and operation of international borders by the military.

One could say that militarized borders and temporary bases surrounding Venezuela but not within its borders does not actually constitute a direct military intervention. They are wrong. These borders and bases would be coordinating with both military, paramilitary agents, and other coup participants. The hoped-for ability not only to absorb refugees, but contain Venezuela at its borders, would be important components for a successful coup.

The coup in Haiti in 2004 was carried out by paramilitary leaders who were financed and trained at a camp in the Dominican Republic run by the US government-funded International Republican Institute. The coup was a success, despite Pres. Aristide's immense popularity. The crisis of violence and refugees was used to justify multinational military occupation. During that time, Lavalas, the largest political party in Haiti, was outlawed and not allowed to participate in elections.

We see elements of the Haiti model being applied to Venezuela. We see economic sanctions and other forms of sabotage, foreign funded and trained opposition, and Colombia being used as a base for paramilitary training and operations. One could easily imagine the use of temporary bases, concentrations of Colombian, Brazilian, Peruvian, and, yes, U.S. troops on Colombia's borders used to contain refugees, despite whatever bloodbath the right might be perpetrating. And that bloodbath, that economic, social, and political chaos could have the world calling for, and some respected international body providing, an alleged "peacekeeping mission", that is, troops of occupations backing up a new coup government.

But unlike in Haiti, which did not have its own military before the coup, Bolivarian Venezuela and its people are armed and organized, they have powerful allies, and the situation in Colombia is unstable and still could undermine plans for intervention.

Stopping the threat of war

The bottom line is really this: none of us can see the future. We simply do not know what will happen. But we do know how to make things happen, and how to stop things. We need to grow an international peace movement calling for an end to sanctions, an end to the coup, and NO WAR ON VENEZUELA!

Let us close with observations from Colombian analyst Douglas Hernandez. Hernandez is the founder of the website Fuerzasmilitares.org and a contributor to both the US Air Force's Air and Space Power Journal and the Brazilian military magazine Segurança & Defesa. Writing for Colombia Reports, he notes:

"Modern warfare is multidimensional, and doesn't necessarily involve the deployment of ships, tanks and planes, in order to... subdue the adversary to

your will. Perhaps, given that the succession of political, diplomatic, economic or psychological operations has failed to bring down the Venezuelan “regime”, direct methods will now be tried, using military force....”

Hernandez goes on to reveal indications that the crisis in Venezuela could be on the verge of turning around – and that this is something her enemies would loathe to let happen, an international embarrassment to them. He goes on,

“Confidence is recovering to the point that several thousand Venezuelans abroad have asked their government for help to return to their country, and in this context the ‘Return Home Plan’ has been activated to arrange their return and grant them some facilities for their social and economic readjustment.

At the time of writing and in less than a month, 3,364 Venezuelans have returned to Venezuela. This being so, this is the only case in which people who had left a socialist country, return to ‘a dictatorship’ on their own free will.

The measures Venezuela has taken are unorthodox, divergent, and tend to grant it economic sovereignty. Now with the Petro issue, the only crypto currency backed by a State, and backed by oil reserves and gold reserves with which Venezuela is going to conduct its international business, the country has an opportunity to return to the path of prosperity....

With its wealth, which could be converted into welfare for its population, and under a different ideological, political and economic model, Venezuela could become a “bad example” for the rest of the world, and people could want to imitate its model....

So, a wave of attacks and accusations has been unleashed to justify military intervention and remove the chavistas from power. This is where the problem lies, in my opinion.

It seems to me that a war between Colombia and Venezuela can be avoided if society as a whole rejects it on the basis of a more holistic knowledge of the situation.

Will there be an invasion, an occupation, a hot war against Venezuela? We don’t know. But the way to stop it is to speak up, stand up – stop it from happening before it ever starts. We, the international society, must wholly reject it.

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