

Trump Has Venezuela in His Sights

As the sabre-rattling statements mount up, just how close is military intervention, asks Tim Young

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President Trump has again raised the possibility of regime change in Venezuela, as talk of military intervention against its democratically elected government grows in the United States.

Speaking recently at the UN, he declared:

“It’s a regime that frankly could be toppled very quickly by the military, if the military decides to do that” and later added that “all options are on the table.”

This comes hot on the heels of Republican **Senator Marco Rubio**’s aggressive remarks in an interview in Miami, in August.

“For months and years, I wanted the solution in Venezuela to be a non-military and peaceful solution, simply to restore democracy,” Rubio argued, but he continued: “I believe that the armed forces of the United States are only used in the event of a threat to national security. I believe that there is a very strong argument that can be made at this time that Venezuela and the Maduro regime has become a threat to the region and even to the United States.”

Rubio is a longstanding opponent of the Venezuelan government.

In February this year, for example, he openly called for the military to overthrow President Maduro, saying:

“The world would support the armed forces in Venezuela if they decide to protect the people and restore democracy by removing a dictator.”

The US government, of course, is always willing to lend a hand to enable military coups to overthrow elected governments in Latin America and elsewhere. The New York Times (September 8 2018) has revealed that the Trump administration held a series of secret meetings with Venezuelan military officers to discuss a coup d’état.

Creating the right media backdrop for such a scenario is vital for its success in the court of world public opinion. Helping the narrative along, US ambassador to Colombia **Kevin Whitaker** said on September 16 that Colombia can count on US support in the event of “Venezuelan aggression against Colombia.”

Two days later, Colombia's new ambassador to the US Francisco Santos, the brother of former president Santos, also said that "all options must be open to deal with the crisis in Venezuela." This was tweeted approvingly by Senator Rubio.

In the previous week, at a rally held after a press conference in Cucuta, a Colombian town on the border with Venezuela, Organisation of American States (OAS) secretary general **Luis Almagro** said:

"With respect to a military intervention to overthrow **Nicolas Maduro's** regime, I don't think any option should be ruled out ... Diplomatic action should be the first priority, but we shouldn't rule out any action."

This is effectively saying, supposedly on behalf of the organisation's 35 member states, that the democratically elected government of President Nicolas Maduro should be overthrown, either by "diplomatic action" or "military intervention."

Military intervention against a sovereign state would be illegal under international law without a UN security council mandate.

Mandate or not, such action would involve huge destruction and a massive loss of lives. For comparison, the illegal US invasion in 1989 of Panama, a country one-fifteenth the size of Venezuela led not only to the ousting of the government and enormous damage to infrastructure but to 3,000-5,000 civilians being killed.

Almagro's statement is also shocking because calling for the violent overthrow of the government of an OAS member state violates key chapters of the OAS charter.

These all commit the OAS and its member states to the principles of respect for the territorial integrity of states, respect for national sovereignty, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the right to self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

Almagro's belligerent stance has been opposed by a group of 10 Latin American countries, which issued a statement rejecting violent regime change. This grouping represents the majority of the Lima Group, a set of Latin American and Caribbean nations, as well as Canada, convened in 2017 to put additional pressure on Venezuela.

Their statement was hailed by Bolivian **President Evo Morales** as a "defeat of Trump's interventionism and a victory for dignity and courage of Venezuela and Latin America."

Undeterred, the US has continued to ratchet up the pressure against Venezuela. The supposed threat by Venezuela to the US has been used again to justify yet more sanctions against the country. The new sanctions are to be enforced against four current or former officials of the Venezuelan government, including **Vice President Delcy Rodriguez**.

As a permanent observer to the OAS, the British government should condemn Almagro's violation of international law and call for respect for the principles of OAS. Beyond that, opposition to US steps towards the violent overthrow of the elected government of President Maduro must be redoubled, if we wish not to see a repeat of the downfall of Allende's Chile.

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