

## US-led Coup in Venezuela: The Plot Thickens

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*A lot has happened and we have learned more since last week when we wrote, [Venezuela: What Activists Need To Know About The US-Led Coup](#). This article updates activists so we remain well-informed and can educate others in the face of a bi-partisan and corporate media narrative supporting the coup.*

This weekend, there were competing protests in Venezuela. At a protest celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Bolivarian Process, the day Hugo Chavez was sworn into office, tens of thousands watched as President [Maduro called for National Assembly elections](#). The current Assembly has been [in contempt of court](#) since July 2016 and their decisions were nullified because they have refused to remove illegally-elected members. The defunct legislature's president, Juan Guaido, appointed himself president of the country in violation of Venezuelan law and is under investigation.

Some scenes at Guaido's rallies were surreal. At the Caracas rally [where Guaido spoke, the stage featured massive US and Israeli flags](#) and in the crowd, there were [pro-Trump puppets](#), one with Trump as the Statute of Liberty with a Christian cross around his neck. At another rally, opposition protesters [removed the Venezuelan flag](#) replacing it with the US flag.

Numerous US and pro-Trump symbols at Venezuela's opposition march today. [pic.twitter.com/ezrC672VlJ](https://pic.twitter.com/ezrC672VlJ)

— teleSUR English (@telesurenglish) [February 2, 2019](#)

Opposition protesters today in Punto Fijo lower the Venezuelan flag to raise the US flag. [pic.twitter.com/nXOg1YBS3L](https://pic.twitter.com/nXOg1YBS3L)

— teleSUR English (@telesurenglish) [February 2, 2019](#)



Images from the pro-Guaido rally in Caracas. From Twitter, Telesur.

### **Details of long term plan for Venezuela's oil and domination of Latin America**

First, it is important to understand why the US is supporting this poorly thought out and poorly planned coup. The Trump coup is a new phase of the long-term goals of US foreign policy when it comes to Venezuela and Latin America.

Vijay Prashad describes the long-term reality of US coups and domination of Latin America in [The U.S. 12-Step Method to Conduct Regime Change](#), writing what is happening in Venezuela is “nothing unique in American history.” Prashad describes the coup in Chile, which Nixon and Kissinger began in 1970 and completed in 1973. In Venezuela, the [National Endowment for Democracy](#), [USAID](#) and CIA have been involved in regime change operations and building opposition to Hugo Chavez and Nicolas Maduro from the beginning of this century. The US spends tens of millions of dollars annually to support opposition oligarchs and big business interests.

The Grayzone Project [documents](#) the more than ten-year effort by US regime change operatives that created a series of young opposition leaders including fake president Juan Guaido. Guaido was a little known right-wing politician who came in second in a legislative election in the second smallest state in Venezuela. He was thrust on the national scene by the coup. In [our last article](#), we [described how Canadian and US officials](#) encouraged him to become a self-appointed president.

*In our next [Clearing the FOG](#), we interview Dan Cohen of the Grayzone Project. You'll find it [here](#).*

The Wall Street Journal, in “[U.S. Push to Oust Venezuela's Maduro Marks First Shot in Plan to Reshape Latin America](#),” reveals the motive is to place Latin America back under US control. Commenting on this article, [Yves Smith expresses how the US](#) seems to have not learned from the failed wars in the Middle East, which cost the US trillions and created chaos and suffering while weakening the US' global standing.

[Eric Draitser at Counterpunch](#) focuses on how this coup is about defeating what is perceived as socialism in Venezuela. [The defeat of Chavismo](#) is critical to the US controlling the region. Venezuela cannot be allowed to refuse US domination. John Bolton made the coup very

personal this week, threatening Maduro to accept Guaido's offer of amnesty or [find himself in the Guantanamo Bay prison](#).

Mexico and Uruguay announced an international conference set to take place in Montevideo on February 7, but the [US is rejecting dialogue](#). The US and coup plotters do not want dialogue, they want regime change and nothing less.

[Dimitri Orlov points to the end of the fracking boom](#) in the US as a reason why there is haste in trying to dominate Venezuela. He writes "the fracking bonanza is ending. Most of the sweet spots have already been tapped; newer wells are depleting faster and producing less while costing more." Fracking is already losing billions and soon will be losing trillions of dollars. As a result, a "rather large oil shortage is coming, and it will rather specifically affect the US, which burns 20% of the world's oil." While a sensible country would use this as a reason for a rapid transition to a clean energy economy, the US seeks to prop up its oil companies by stealing Venezuela's oil.

The US signaled how abusive it could become by [appointing war criminal Elliot Abrams](#) to the coup team. [The Intercept details](#) Abrams' long-term work of violently crushing democracy. His record: In the 1980s, 75,000 Salvadorans died mostly from government death squads; in Guatemala, he supported a government that committed widespread human rights violations in a war that killed 200,000 people; in the Contra War in Nicaragua, Abrams pled guilty to lying to Congress about the Iran-Contra Deal that resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. After he was pardoned by George H.W. Bush, Abrams returned to the White House of George W. Bush where among other things he gave the green light to the failed coup against Hugo Chavez in 2002.

### **The Economic War as An Excuse for Humanitarian Intervention**

The Grayzone Project reports on documents that expose US plans for economic war in Venezuela. [Ben Norton writes](#), the "documents acknowledge that Washington has been using what it clearly describes as 'financial weapons' to wage 'economic warfare' on the oil-rich South American nation." Sanctions began under [Bush in 2004](#), escalated under [Obama when he declared Venezuela a national security threat](#) in 2015 and escalated under Trump. Sanctions imposed by Trump have bled Venezuela of [billions of dollars](#).

WikiLeaks published an excerpt from what it titled the "[US coup manual](#)," which describes how the US uses "financial weapons" to wage "economic warfare." These documents describe how sanctions and other punitive economic policies are not a mere prelude to war; they are a form of war. As Norton writes, the US is not considering war, but has "already been waging a war, for years."

Even under this tremendous economic war, which worsened with a drop in oil prices, the Maduro government has focused on uplifting people. Telesur describes [gains made under Maduro's administration](#):

- Venezuela expanded its free health care coverage to more than 60 percent of the population.
- Earlier this year, the United Nations Program for Development placed Venezuela among the countries with the highest Human Development Index, surpassing most Latin American countries.
- Venezuela has [built 3 million homes](#) for the poor and working class, 1.6 million

under Maduro, to house up to ten million people in a population of 30 million.

- Maduro's administration has provided more than 4,800,000 computers, over 100 million technology textbooks to students across the country, and more than 20,000 schools have received new computer equipment.
- Venezuela ranks sixth in the world in terms of enrollment in primary education and has increased its coverage of secondary education to 73 percent of the population.
- There have also been gains in civil rights of historically oppressed sectors of Venezuelan society, like women, Afro-Indigenous people and the LGBTQ community.

These gains do not make Venezuela a socialist economy, indeed [Norway is more socialist than Venezuela](#). Venezuela [remains a capitalist country](#) with 70% of the economy in private businesses. Some on the left [criticize Maduro for not moving the country more rapidly](#) to institute a socialist economy. Why is Venezuela attacked and not Norway? [Glen Ford of Black Agenda Report](#) argues another reason they are targeted is racism. Another is that Venezuela has rejected US domination.

The combination of tremendous drops in oil prices, the US economic war and oligarch's undermining the economy has resulted in the [economy shrinking by 50% in five years](#) - worse than the US depression.

This week, [John Bolton offered to send humanitarian assistance](#) at the request of Guaido. When Venezuela has tried to buy essential goods and pharmaceuticals, they have been blocked and offered humanitarian aid instead. This presents a problem because if Venezuela accepts humanitarian aid, then it would provide an excuse for the Organization of American States (OAS) to intervene. And it would allow US institutions such as USAID into the country to bring the aid.

The irony of the US offering aid while conducting an economic war is evident. The [UN rapporteur said](#) that sanctions are killing people in Venezuela. [Mark Weisbrot of the Center for Economic and Policy Studies writes](#) that the US is seeking to take control of Venezuela even if their actions are illegal and kill thousands of people.

Venezuela wouldn't need aid if it were not for the sanctions and blockade. Venezuela, which has the second largest gold reserves, is currently raising hundreds of billions of dollars by selling [29 tons of gold reserves to UAE](#) as well as [selling gold to Russia](#).

### **The Flawed Coup is Failing Because of Mistaken Assumptions**

An [eye witness account from Venezuela describes](#) how the coup is lacking popularity. A protest called earlier in the week had a very small turnout. Jessica Dos Santos, who writes about daily life in Venezuela, describes people trying to live normal lives and while people have criticisms of Maduro, they are more opposed to US intervention. [She writes](#)

“when it comes to fighting against foreign intervention, then there isn't much to think about: Our home country is and must be first. And this is because of our love for it, but also because we have historical awareness. There isn't one single nation that has come out better after a US or NATO intervention. In addition to that, intervention presupposes that we don't have the capacity to solve our own problems.”

[Moon of Alabama described big flaws](#) in the poorly thought out Trump coup. This includes false perceptions on the ground in Venezuela where they underestimated support for Maduro and opposition to US imperialism among people and the military. He describes the lack of support for the coup in the Venezuelan constitution, with their misinterpretation of Article 233, which requires the president to be unable to serve in order for the president of the National Assembly to replace him. Further, he describes how Guaido has no support base and how the coup was rushed without input from the Pentagon, Southcom, or Department of Justice, who were likely to oppose such a measure.

[Guaido](#) is now being investigated in Venezuela. His assets have been frozen and he is not allowed to leave the country. In most countries, he would already have been imprisoned. The vast majority of the military has stood by Maduro. [CNN interviewed fake “veterans”](#) not even in Venezuela asking for US military aid. And there have been [false reports that the military](#) was recruiting minors (youth) to rise up against Maduro.

### **Support the Venezuelan People: End the Sanctions and Prevent War**

Maduro sent a [video message](#) to the people of the United States describing the false media coverage and urging people of the United States to stop their government from intervening in Venezuela. He said “If the U.S. intends to invade us, they will have a Vietnam worse than they can imagine. Let’s not allow violence,” urging viewers to “not permit a new Vietnam in Venezuela.”

People in the United States have a lot of work to do to convince the government not to intervene in Venezuela, i.e. end economic sanctions, stop military threats. [Max Blumenthal interviewed members of Congress](#) and asked them about whether the US was meddling in Venezuela. Most denied it or were misinformed and those that understood what was going on refused to speak out. Some have spoken out against the coup, notably, [Tulsi Gabbard](#), [Ro Khanna](#), [Barbara Lee](#), [Bernie Sanders](#), and [the Progressive Caucus](#), although even some of them perpetuate falsehoods about the situation.

Being in solidarity with the people of Venezuela means opposing war and intervention. A [recent poll](#) found 86% of Venezuelans oppose war and 81% oppose the economic sanctions.

The [threat of war against Venezuela is real](#). The US already has military bases in Colombia. There was more evidence this week. [John Bolton displayed a notepad](#) that said “5,000 troops to Colombia” and [US military transport planes](#) are flying over and landing in Colombia.

Activists must demand the United States follow the rule of law. The coup and sanctions violate international law as [this letter from NGOs to the United Nations](#) explains. Idriss Jazairy, the [UN Special Rapporteur](#) on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures, explains how the US economic sanctions violate international law. [He wrote](#), “Coercion, whether military or economic, must never be used to seek a change in government in a sovereign state. The use of sanctions by outside powers to overthrow an elected government is in violation of all norms of international law.” The [United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recognized Maduro](#) as president and rejected Guaido’s claim to the presidency.

The OAS, which is dominated by the United States, [refused to recognize Guaido](#) and rejected

intervening in Venezuela. Even the Lima Group, made up of right-wing governments in Latin America that oppose Venezuela, has [rejected military intervention](#).

This article and [Venezuela: What Activists Need To Know About The US-Led Coup](#), provide people with the information they need to combat the false media narrative about Venezuela. The Alliance for Global Justice has prepared an [activist tool kit on Venezuela](#).

Protests have already been held in the US and around the world have already been held and more are being organized. On [Monday, February 4, 2019](#) at 3PM, at the United States Permanent Mission to the United Nations located on the corner of 45th Street and First Avenue, NYC. On [February 23, the one month anniversary of the coup, there will be a national day of actions](#) protesting the coup.

This week Popular Resistance joined a [call for a national march on Saturday, March 16, in Washington, D.C.](#) against the Trump administration's effort to engineer a coup in Venezuela and start a new devastating war there. If we unite and mobilize, we can stop this war and end US sanctions in Venezuela.

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**Kevin Zeese** and **Margaret Flowers** co-direct [Popular Resistance](#) where this article was originally published.

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