

Washington's Escalation to Venezuela's Oil

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If we listen to Washington's threats to Venezuela there is always a military component to everything they do to undermine the legitimate Maduro government. "All options are on the table", is the repeated slogan that is now also heard from the self-appointed "president", Juan Guaidó, as if he were referring to another country and not his own.

A realistic successful military intervention can only take place if the Venezuelan high-ranking officers of the armed forces deserted in mass. This is not likely to happen. However, Venezuela cannot ignore those threats. The US has carried them out irresponsibly in other countries.

The provocation with "humanitarian aid" on February 23 was a pathetic attempt to break the loyalty of the Bolivarian National Armed Forces (FANB) as well as to test the reaction of the Venezuelan people, particularly on the Venezuelan border with Colombia. In fact, the main stage was Colombia and not Brazil. That's where Guaidó, Ivan Duque and Elliot Abrams congregated for the "aid" show and the photo op of the trio holding hands as if they were rooting for a baseball team.

Marco Rubio, in the meantime, kept tweeting about how many army people were deserting to the Guaidó "team". Not too many did. The official number identified publicly as deserters by the Venezuelan government has been 116. So, at this point Guaidó's army is very thin. But as a former "*guarimbero*" (rioter) he is more comfortable among his fellow "*guarimberos*". In fact, there were a few at hand at the border in Colombia doing their favorite thing, preparing and throwing Molotov cocktails. Eventually they managed to burn down the trucks of "aid".

When the hope of a mutiny of the armed forces ended, plan B was to use the so-called "humanitarian aid" as a grandstand stunt against "the brutal regime of Nicolas Maduro". And they turned it into the false flag of burned trucks of "aid" in Colombian territory falsely attributed to the Venezuelan forces.

In fact, video evidence shows *guarimberos*, reportedly Venezuelans, setting the "aid" trucks on fire when it became obvious that they would not be allowed into Venezuela. But more interestingly, videos of the burned trucks showed a different cargo: material such as metal cables, gas masks, nails and other tools that could be used in violent actions. No food and no medical supplies.

The alleged aid was never intended to be delivered to the general population.

Overall this has to be seen as another failure of the escalating attempt of regime change in Venezuela. What was supposed to be the High Noon stand off on February 23 had amounted

to nothing much.

So what's the next step in this escalation ladder by the US?

The immediate reaction we have seen so far, has been one more declaration from the so-called Lima Group - whose number went from 14 to 10 countries - where the most outrageous feature is that they included what I call a fabricated entity called "Venezuela" that has nothing to do with the legitimate Venezuela recognized at the United Nations. US Vice President Mike Pence's call on all "Lima Group" members to freeze the assets of Venezuela's oil company PDVSA and restrict visas for Venezuelan officials did not happen.

Washington, on the other hand, has issued sanctions on the governors of four Venezuelan States: Ramon Carrizalez, the governor of the Venezuelan state of Apure, who had previously served as vice president of Venezuela; Jorge Garcia Carneiro, the governor of the state of Vargas, who previously served as the head of the Venezuelan Army and minister of defense; Rafael Lacava, governor of the state of Carabobo; and Omar Prieto, the governor of the state of Zulia. Additional sanctions on six Venezuelan military personnel were announced later.

In terms of escalation ladder it is important to keep in mind what is at the end of that ladder for the US: There is the world's largest estimated oil reserves located in the Orinoco Belt, which runs along the Orinoco River from the Central State of Guárico all the way into the Atlantic. That is a huge prize!

I am reminded of a brilliant explanation that Hugo Chavez gave in 2008 when he warned of a possible attempt to split Venezuela if the opposition seized five crucial Western States: Zulia, Táchira, Mérida, Barinas and Apure.

When Chavez highlighted these states on a map they took the shape of *Media Luna*, as he named it - that is Half Moon in Spanish. He warned that Venezuela had to be watchful of those states. At the time Brazil was not a concern; Lula was president.

I believe Chavez's warning is still valid today. Three of the five states border with Colombia: Zulia, Táchira and Apure. And I don't think that the latest US sanctions on the governors of two of those states, Zulia and Apure, is a coincidence.

Zulia is the historical oil producing state, and Apure is the strategic gateway to the Orinoco Oil Belt. The Governor of Táchira was spared maybe because she happens to be an opposition party governor.

At this point logic suggests to rule out a US military option assuming that Washington is listening to most of the Latin American countries that have warned against any military intervention. That would be the biggest mistake the US could make. But they have made similar mistakes before. On the other hand, the president of the Constituent National Assembly of Venezuela, Diosdado Cabello, has warned not to believe the exclusion of "use of force" in the "Lima Group" declaration, and asked "to be alert."

Caracas is quite prepared to fight back if necessary and so far it is outsmarting Washington's attempts to create bogus information for public consumption. What could have been another stand off between the two countries with the announced return of Juan Guaidó to Venezuela, fizzled out when he was not arrested at the port of entry. Guaidó had grandiosely announced that he gave instructions to mobilize nationally and internationally in

case of his arrest. Only a few foreign diplomats “mobilized” to receive him at the airport.

For the time being the US will continue climbing the escalation ladder towards Venezuela’s oil through more Hybrid War tricks, like infowar and false flags. The immediate goal is to convince more governments to see Washington’s point of view.

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