

Guaidó launches abortive military coup in Venezuela

By Bill Van Auken
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A coup attempt launched Tuesday morning in Venezuela, distinguished by the brazen criminality of the US government in supporting and orchestrating it, appeared to have failed miserably by nightfall.

The attempt was launched with the posting of a video by the US-backed right-wing puppet Juan Guaidó, backed by a few dozen men in military uniform outside the La Carlota air base in Caracas, calling for the military to rise up against the government of President Nicolás Maduro. While the attempt led to violent street clashes and rival demonstrations by supporters and opponents of Maduro, it provoked no significant military revolt.

Coming more than three months after Guaidó, on January 23, proclaimed himself the country's "interim president," an action directly coordinated with and immediately supported by Washington, Tuesday's coup attempt took place amid flagging popular support for the right-wing opposition that has served as the political base for the US regime-change operation.

By late Tuesday, no military base had been taken by the opposition and no major figure in the Venezuelan armed forces had declared support for Guaidó. While the "interim president" had picked the La Carlota air base as the backdrop for his video, there was no indication that any personnel there were supporting his provocation. The choice of the base was determined, rather, by its proximity to the wealthiest districts of eastern Caracas, the traditional base of the right-wing opposition.

The most significant development in the launching of what Guaidó termed "Operation Liberty" was the presence by his side of Leopoldo López, the leader of the extreme right-wing political party Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) of which Guaidó is a member.

López, a scion of one of Venezuela's most aristocratic families, has been under house arrest since 2017 after being convicted on charges of organizing a violent campaign in 2014 known as "La Salida," or the exit, aimed at overthrowing the Maduro government. In 2002, he was one of the leaders of the abortive CIA-backed coup attempt against then-President Hugo Chávez.

The overthrow of Maduro, while ostensibly transferring the government to Guaidó, who before his self-swearing-in as

"interim president" last January was virtually unknown in Venezuela, would in reality place the reins of power in the hands of López, an arch-reactionary and long-time CIA asset.

By late Tuesday afternoon, however, López and his family had sought asylum in the Chilean embassy in Caracas. Similarly, some 25 Venezuelan military personnel who had joined Guaidó's coup attempt sought refuge in the embassy of Brazil.

Dozens of other Venezuelan soldiers told the country's news media that they had been tricked into participating in the provocation staged outside the La Carlota air base, awakened at three in the morning and told to grab their rifles and turn out for an important event where they would receive medals.

Guaidó's provocation triggered a Twitter storm from the top echelons of the US government signaling support for the coup on Tuesday morning.

"I am monitoring the situation in Venezuela very closely," President Trump tweeted. "The United States stands with the People of Venezuela and their Freedom!"

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo tweeted that the United States "fully supports" the protests. Vice President Mike Pence tweeted a message to "all the freedom-loving people of Venezuela who are taking to the streets today in #operacionlibertad—Estamos con ustedes! We are with you! America will stand with you until freedom & democracy are restored."

Right-wing governments in Latin America, including those of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Iván Duque in Colombia and Mauricio Macri in Argentina, also issued statements of enthusiastic support for the coup attempt.

By Tuesday afternoon, however, Brazil's minister of institutional security, the retired general Augusto Heleno, issued a frank assessment of the day's actions, declaring that, while there had been "certain support from the armed forces... this didn't reach a high level." He added that Brazil did not see any solution to the Venezuelan crisis "in the short term."

One clear signal of Washington's direction of the abortive coup attempt was a meeting the day before in Washington between Pompeo and Ernesto Araújo, the foreign minister of the government of Brazil's fascistic President Bolsonaro, the strongest Latin American ally in the US regime-change

operation in Venezuela. A State Department press release said that the two had discussed “defending human rights and democracy in Venezuela.” Early on Tuesday, Araújo issued a statement declaring that it was “positive that there is a movement of the military that recognizes the constitutionality of President Juan Guaidó.”

Washington’s response to the faltering coup attempt in Venezuela was delivered by Trump’s right-wing national security adviser John Bolton in a press conference outside the White House Tuesday afternoon. He described the situation as “very delicate” and insisted, despite all evidence to the contrary, that what was taking place in Caracas was “clearly not a coup.”

Oddly, he mentioned three times the names of three high-ranking Venezuelan officials, whom he claimed had made “commitments to achieve the peaceful transfer of power” to the US puppet Guaidó, insisting that they had to “act this afternoon or this evening to bring other military forces to the side of the interim president.”

One of those named was Vladimir Padrino, Venezuela’s defense minister. In the course of the day, however, Padrino issued a statement in front of massed officers denouncing Guaidó’s action as “a cowardly terrorist act and a coup attempt on a very small scale.” Padrino declared that “80 percent of the troops who responded to this call were tricked,” adding, “We hold responsible for any bloodshed the fascist, anti-patriotic leadership.”

The second official named by Bolton was the head of Venezuela’s Supreme Court (TSJ), Maikel Moreno. During the day, the TSJ issued a statement condemning the “attempted coup against the Constitution and the laws of Venezuela on the part of a group of military deserters acting together with elements of the national right wing.”

The third official was the commander of the presidential guard, Iván Rafael Hernández Dala, who was still in the Miraflores presidential palace, which was surrounded by thousands of demonstrators opposing the coup attempt.

Bolton addressed a tweet to the three men saying it was their “last chance” to be absolved of US sanctions or “go down with the ship.” Bolton suggested that the three officials had been prevented from keeping their “commitment” by Cuba and Russia.

“The Cubans, we believe, have played a very significant role in propping Maduro up today, possibly with help from the Russians,” Bolton said.

Similarly, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made the claim, repeated as fact by the US corporate media, that Maduro had been on the verge of fleeing to Havana on Tuesday, but had been dissuaded from going only by the Russians.

Bolton repeated the incessant threat of the Trump administration: “I will say again, as the president has said from the outset, and Nicolás Maduro and those supporting him—particularly those who are not Venezuelans—should know

is, all options are on the table.”

Trump, meanwhile, stepped up US threats against Cuba, threatening to impose a “total embargo” on the island.

Washington’s regime-change operation is aimed not only at asserting unrestricted exploitation of Venezuela’s oil reserves—the largest on the planet—by US-based energy conglomerates, but also at reasserting US hegemony over all of Latin America and countering the growing challenge particularly from China, the continent’s largest source of investment, but also from Russia.

The “all options on the table” threats are increasingly directed at not just the Maduro government in Caracas, but also against US imperialism’s nuclear-armed rivals.

As for US plans in Venezuela, one indication of an escalation came with a report that Erik Prince, the billionaire head of the military contractor formerly known as Blackwater and brother of Trump’s Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, had floated a plan for sending 5,000 mercenaries recruited from among former Latin American soldiers into Venezuela to support Guaidó’s coup attempt.

While the initial coup attempt on Tuesday appears to have failed, the dangers confronting the Venezuelan working class remain intense. It cannot rely on the Maduro government, which represents one faction of Venezuela’s financial and corporate elite, having its principal pillar in the Venezuelan military and enjoying the backing of the so-called *boliburguesía*, a layer of corrupt officials and capitalists who have fattened off of financial speculation and government contracts.

These layers are hardly immune to the immense pressure being placed upon Caracas by US imperialism.

Should the so-called “democratic transition” promoted by Washington prove successful, it will result in the imposition of an extreme right-wing US puppet regime that will carry out a ruthless and bloody campaign of repression against the working class in the interests of Big Oil and international finance capital.

The working class in the US must oppose US intervention and reject the “democratic” pretensions of the likes of Trump, Pence, Pompeo and Bolton with the contempt they deserve. It is up to the working class of Venezuela to settle accounts with Maduro and the corrupt capitalist elements he represents, not the US military and intelligence apparatus and its right-wing puppets.

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