

In run-up to Trump's inauguration, US ruling circles discuss plans for Venezuela intervention

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The inauguration of Nicolás Maduro for a third consecutive term as president of Venezuela on January 10 marked the failure of the outgoing Biden administration's strategy to leverage the elections for regime change.

Since 2022, Washington organized a series of backroom talks with the Maduro administration and the US-sponsored opposition, offering sanctions relief in exchange for presidential elections, which would then be used to delegitimize the Venezuelan government regardless of the result.

As expected, both Maduro and the US-sponsored candidate Edmundo González Urrutia declared victory. But having vowed for weeks that he would be smuggled back into Venezuela from exile to stage a counter-inauguration on January 10, González decided not to risk it. He reportedly stayed in the Dominican Republic until Tuesday and now plans to visit the right-wing presidents of Guatemala and Costa Rica before attending Trump's inauguration Monday.

On January 9, the fascistic leader of González's coalition, María Corina Machado, launched a last-ditch attempt to incite the Venezuelan military against Maduro or at least to provide a distraction from the opposition's imminent debacle.

After months hiding from an arrest warrant, Machado made a public appearance at an opposition protest in Caracas, which failed at mobilizing a significant crowd. Shortly after, her party Vente Venezuela claimed that government agents "violently intercepted" Machado after leaving the protest and detained her briefly.

Following the same script, the corporate media, US politicians, including Trump, and humanitarian groups globally raised an outcry claiming that the opposition leader had been abducted. It was immediately apparent that her supporters and CIA handlers in Caracas had somehow failed to record any video or proof of the alleged encounter. Having failed at staging the provocation, Machado quickly recorded a video saying she was safe without providing a

credible explanation of why she was released.

Since January 8, Maduro carried out a series of measures to block any obstacles to his inauguration, including the first deployment nationally of the so-called Integral Defense Body (ODI), conformed by the military, police and paramilitary groups. This was preceded by the arrest of seven alleged "mercenaries," including two citizens, three Ukrainians and two Colombians, which adds to 125 others arrested since November in connection with "terrorist" plans. Venezuela also closed its border with Colombia ahead of the inauguration.

The US and a handful of other governments have recognized González as president-elect, claiming that the Unitary Platform has presented evidence of its victory. Most regional leaders have otherwise aligned themselves with the US regime-change drive. This includes the nominal allies of Caracas, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum, Colombia's President Gustavo Petro and Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who refused to attend the inauguration to signal their rejection of the legitimacy of Maduro's re-election. Chilean pseudo-leftist President Gabriel Boric has led the chorus denouncing Maduro as a "dictator."

While significant protests erupted nationwide against Maduro's claims of victory in July, these were heavily composed of wealthier layers in Caracas and involved fascistic elements that carried out attacks against public infrastructure. These lasted only a few days after the vote and were easily repressed by the security forces, including through mass arrests.

In response to its latest failure in Venezuela, the different factions of the US ruling class are approaching a consensus to employ further economic devastation and potentially military force to oust Maduro and secure control over the world's largest oil reserves.

The Biden administration responded to the inauguration by raising the bounty for the arrest of Maduro from \$15 million

to \$25 million, as well as for other top officials, based on charges of “narco-terrorism” issued under Trump in 2020. The bounties, which are a clear incitement of violence against the Venezuelan leadership, were combined with new financial sanctions against eight Venezuelan officials.

On Tuesday, in an opinion article titled “Depose Maduro,” *New York Times* columnist Bret Stephens argued for a “U.S. military intervention of the sort that in 1990 swiftly ended the regime of the Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega” claiming that “American troops withdrew swiftly, and Panama has been a democracy ever since.”

He adds: “Every other option for political change has been attempted. How much more suffering are Venezuelans supposed to endure, and how much worse does this hemispheric crisis have to get before the nightmare finally ends?”

Applauding Trump’s choice for secretary of state, Marco Rubio, a Senator who has argued in favor of a military invasion to oust Maduro, Stephens concludes, “Ending Maduro’s long reign of terror is a good way to start their administration—and send a signal to tyrants elsewhere that American patience with disorder and danger eventually runs out.”

Formerly a Republican-aligned critic of Trump, Stephens was hired by the *Times*, which speaks unofficially for the Democratic Party, to promote the use of military violence to advance the interests of US imperialism.

As noted previously by the WSWS, in 2016, Stephens called for bombing Syria like the Balkans to oust Bashar al-Assad. The rapid collapse of the Assad government last month, with the complicity of its Iranian and Russian allies, has now emboldened those seeking a similar course in Caracas, thousands of miles farther from its Russian and Iranian allies.

However, the claim that US troops left Panama swiftly or even comparing this brutal aggression to an invasion of Venezuela can only be described as insanity. The 26,000 US troops that participated in the invasion of Panama outnumbered the Panamanian forces by five to one, but they still carpet bombed several neighborhoods killing thousands of civilians. The economic and human cost of an invasion of Venezuela would be incomparably higher as it has some 150,000 active troops and a fully combat-capable Air Force with a variety of fighter jets—not to speak of more than 12 times the territory and 10 times the population of Panama in 1989.

Despite its populist rhetoric, the Maduro administration represents the interests of a section of the national bourgeoisie dependent on global finance capital and is unable to make an appeal to workers in the United States or anywhere in Latin America. Its only response to US threats

is a combination of nationalist bluster and appeals to win the favor of Trump and Wall Street, such as promising an endless and heavily policed source of cheap resources and labor, as well as cooperation on mass deportations.

During his Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday, Rubio said that licenses exempting certain companies from the sanctions regime, allowing them to produce and sell Venezuelan oil, would be “re-explored.” Ending these licenses, particularly Chevron’s, would again deprive the government of the necessary foreign reserves for basic imports and services.

Rubio continued: “Because in Venezuela you have the Russian presence, you have a very strong Iranian presence. The Iranians are in fact beginning to build drone factories, the manufacturer of Iranian drones in our own hemisphere, not to mention the long practice of the Venezuelan regime of providing illegitimate passports to operatives of Hezbollah in our own hemisphere.”

The story about Iranian drone factories was also reproduced by Stephens in the *Times*, but neither cited its original source, and for good reason. It first appeared on January 10 in the far-right Argentine online publication *Infobae*, which consistently fails to meet basic journalistic standards. The report merely states that “It has been informed” and “As reported in detail to *Infobae*,” before making a series of claims about military and economic cooperation with Iran, including drone factories. By whom this publication was “informed” is anyone’s guess.

The threat of a massively unpopular and devastating war in the Western Hemisphere cannot be minimized. Earlier during the hearing, Rubio summed up the mentality of the US ruling class when he said: “The postwar global order is not just obsolete; it is now a weapon being used against us.”

Trump’s threats to secure control over Greenland, Canada, Mexico, the Panama Canal and Venezuela are all expressions of the turn by the entire ruling class toward the unrestrained use of military violence and brutality to reverse the decline of US global hegemony.



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