

US Secretary of State Pompeo Enlists Allies to ‘Return Democracy’ to Venezuela

US allies Brazil and Colombia have repeatedly voiced support for regime change efforts.

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US Secretary of State [Mike Pompeo](#) met with allies in a tour of Latin America this week, in which he talked about stepping up US-led efforts against Venezuela.

The Trump administration has been increasingly hostile towards the Caribbean nation, escalating sanctions and even threatening a military “option.”

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro is due to start his second term on January 10, having won [re-election](#) on May 20, but Washington and several right-wing regional governments have refused to recognize the election and may look to further isolate Caracas in coming days. For its part, Venezuela has repeatedly denounced what it terms US-led destabilization efforts.

Tensions have likewise heightened with some of Venezuela’s Latin American neighbors, especially Brazil and Colombia, with flashpoints surrounding Venezuelan [migration](#) and an increased military presence along the shared borders.

Pompeo’s tour, which was also meant to address concerns about China’s growing presence in the region, started in Peru. Following a meeting with Peruvian Foreign Minister Nestor Bardales, the former CIA director stressed the need to “increase pressure” on the Venezuelan government.

Pompeo then flew to Brasilia for the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro. In meetings with Brazil’s new president and Foreign Minister Ernesto Araujo, he discussed joint efforts against the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela.

Pompeo later told the press that he and his Brazilian allies shared a “deep desire to return democracy” to Venezuela.

A former army captain during Brazil’s military dictatorship, ultra-right Bolsonaro took office on January 1 following his election victory in October. In his first speech as president, he vowed to “value Judeo-Christian traditions” and that Brazil would be free from “socialism, a giant state and political correctness.”

Venezuela featured prominently in Bolsonaro’s electoral [campaign](#), in which the politician repeatedly accused the center-left Workers Party of seeking to bring “Venezuela-style socialism” to Brazil. Most recently, Bolsonaro’s vice-president, retired general Hamilton Mourao, commented in December that a coup would take place in Venezuela and that Brazil

would lead a “force for peace.”

Pompeo’s latest stop was the Colombian city of Cartagena, where he held a meeting and joint press conference with Colombian President Ivan Duque.

The US official stated that the discussions had centered on how to collaborate in order to help Venezuelans “recover their democratic heritage,” while adding that Colombia was a “natural leader” in these efforts.



Kurt Tidd, head of U.S. Southern Command meets with Colombian President-elect Ivan Duque in Doral, Fla., July 14, 2018. Photo | SOUTHCOM

For his part, Duque stated that “all countries that defend democracy should unite to reject Venezuela’s dictatorship,” adding that humanitarian assistance was required to deal with Venezuelans arriving in Colombia. According to UN figures, 2.6 million Venezuelans have left the country since 2015, with over 1 million heading to Colombia.

A protégé of former president Alvaro Uribe, Duque has [repeatedly](#) met with US officials to discuss efforts to increase pressure on Venezuela. Venezuela and Colombia do not have diplomatic relations since Duque refused to appoint an ambassador to Caracas after being elected in June 2018.

In addition, Bolsonaro and Duque reportedly held a phone conversation in which one of the topics was the need to cooperate in search of “solutions” to the Venezuela crisis.

In response, the Venezuelan government blasted Pompeo’s tour as another instance of US meddling in its internal affairs. In a Foreign Ministry communiqué released on Wednesday, the Venezuelan executive “categorically rejected Secretary Pompeo’s interventionist attitude.”

Caracas likewise slammed Pompeo’s meeting with Duque, denouncing US efforts to “subjugate the sovereignty and self-determination of the Venezuelan people” and warning

against the possible use of Colombian territory to launch an aggression against Venezuela.

Venezuelan authorities also took aim at Duque's controversial statement thanking the US for their "crucial" support for Colombia's independence 200 years ago, despite historians having yet to corroborate this alleged historical detail.

President Maduro commented on the current state of Latin American relations during a recent interview with Ignacio Ramonet on state broadcaster VTV. Maduro claimed that right-wing projects in the region are "not viable," and lamented that Bolsonaro was "handing Brazil over to US transnationals on a silver platter."

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Featured image: Colombian President Ivan Duque hosted US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Cartagena this week. (Colombian Presidency)

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