

Venezuela: Is Trump Heading for Military Intervention?

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After Chávez' death in 2013 Maduro was elected president of Venezuela. Since then the US has resolutely been heading for a [regime change](#). The strategy to achieve this has run through several stages. Now we have come to the last stage in which the chances of a US military intervention are very high.

Economic pressure

At first Washington opted for of an economic warfare. In 2015 Obama announced [economic sanctions](#). In August 2017 Trump tightened them considerably with the intention of draining the country financially and preventing oil production and oil export. For a country that particularly depends on oil export, including to the US, the [sanctions hit hard](#). Until August 2017 the oil production in Venezuela was still lining up with Colombia's oil production, but after making the sanctions more strict, the oil production completely [plummeted](#).

A [senior official of the US State Department](#) states:

"The financial sanctions we have placed on the Venezuelan Government has forced it to begin becoming in default, both on sovereign and PDVSA, its oil company's debt. And what we are seeing because of the bad choices of the Maduro regime is a total economic collapse in Venezuela. So our policy is working, our strategy is working and we're going to keep it on the Venezuelans."

Few countries in the world, with the exception of Cuba, have experienced in times of peace an "[economic siege](#)" like the one the Venezuelans are experiencing today. [Alfred De Zayas](#), former UN reporter for Venezuela, clearly labels the economic sanctions as a crime against humanity.

"I think when the magnitude of the suffering that sanctions cause is as it was in Iraq or as is now becoming apparent in Venezuela, I can say that the sanctions against Venezuela entail a crime against humanity, which could be brought against the International Criminal Court as a violation of Article 7 of the Statute of Rome."

Failed colour revolution

But economic sanctions in themselves were apparently not sufficient, the Maduro government remained intact. At the beginning of this year the Trump government moved into a higher gear and tried to set up a 'colour revolution'.

The scenario was to thwart Maduro's second term of office by recognising someone else as a legitimate president. The choice fell on the [almost unknown](#), but young and mediagenic parliamentary president Juan Guaidó. A few days after Maduro was sworn in on 10 January, [Trump](#) announced that he was considering recognising Guaidó as president. On the same day – strengthened by this backing – the opposition took to the streets on the same day with the aim of ousting President Maduro and forming a [provisional government](#). The military were called upon to walk over. But the army stayed right behind the elected president.

The White House further increased the pressure. In a [video message](#) on 22 January, Vice-President Pence urged Venezuelans to take to the streets en masse in order to depose President Maduro. The next day Guaidó proclaimed himself interim president of Venezuela. The intention was that he would be recognized as interim president by the whole world or at least by a large part of it. And indeed, countries like the US, Brazil, Colombia, Canada promptly did recognize Guaidó. Later a lot of European countries did the same.

Yet, this diplomatic offensive wasn't an undivided success. Even not a third of all countries have expressed their support for Guaidó, and [the UN](#) continues to support Maduro. In the US-controlled [Organisation of American States](#), a majority of countries keep supporting Maduro.

The great pressure coming from the street, which the US had hoped for so strongly, isn't forthcoming as well. For the time being, there is no question of a massive and protracted popular uprising like the ones in 2013 or 2017. The Maduro government retains the support of important sections of the population and is still able to massively mobilise its supporters.

The military card

If economic, political or diplomatic means don't work, only the military option will ultimately remain. War is merely the continuation of politics by other means, Clausewitz already knew.

In the past Trump [hasn't excluded](#) foreign military intervention in Venezuela. He has recently repeated that again during a bellicose speech in [Miami](#).

In order to keep up with the public opinion, great powers invariably disguise military intervention as a [humanitarian mission](#). That is not different now. The strategy of the White House consists of sending aid convoys with medicine and food from Colombia, Brazil, Curaçao and Aruba. But, because there is supposedly "a lot of anarchy" in Venezuela, these convoys [will be armed](#). The White House knows very well that the Venezuelan army is never going to tolerate such convoys, whether armed or not, on the territory. The aim is for these convoys to lead to skirmishes which will escalate and ultimately legitimise a military intervention. In any case, the [Red Cross](#) has already stated that it doesn't wish to cooperate with these 'aid operations'.

Meanwhile the Pentagon has made all the preparation to a military intervention. During a press conference John Bolton, the US national security adviser, held a notepad with '[5,000 troops to Colombia](#)' written on it. Neither [President Duque](#) of Colombia nor [Admiral Faller](#) of the American Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) have contradicted this message. Early February [Special Forces](#) were flown to military bases in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. In the same period Admiral Faller visited [Brazil and Curaçao](#). A nuclear [aircraft carrier](#) and [six other warships](#) are stationed off the coasts of Florida. [Within a week](#) the US can deploy thousands of marines, fighter jets and tanks in Venezuela.

In that military build-up, Washington receives support from London. The United Kingdom is currently conducting [military exercises](#) off the coast of Venezuela, with the same battalion that led the landing in Iraq in 2003.

Whether the White House is effectively heading for a military confrontation will become clear in the next days and weeks. Meanwhile, many countries, institutions and [personalities](#), with [Mexico and Uruguay](#) at the forefront, continue to make every possible effort to find a peaceful solution through dialogue and mediation. If Trump, however, continues his war plans, we risk ending up in the disastrous scenario of Syria.

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