



Newsletter of the Hands Off Venezuela campaign [www.handsoffvenezuela.org](http://www.handsoffvenezuela.org)

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# No coup, no sanctions US and UK: Hands off Venezuela

What we are witnessing in Venezuela is an attempt at regime change organised and directed from Washington by the Trump administration. On January 24, the president of the opposition dominated National Assembly, at a street rally, proclaimed himself as the "legitimate president" of Venezuela. Within an hour, he had been recognised by the US. Guaidó made an appeal to the Armed Forces to side with him and remove Maduro from power. This call was repeated by a string of US officials. This is an attempted coup and one which has the full backing of US imperialism.

In fact, Juan Guaidó was an almost completely unknown figure in Venezuelan politics when he was invited to Washington for meetings in December 2018. That is where the plan was hatched. The United States has been attempting to put an end to the Bolivarian revolution for over 20 years, particularly since the short-lived coup against president Chávez in April 2002.

This has nothing to do with concerns about the "humanitarian crisis" in Venezuela, nor about the so-called "restoration of democracy". You just have to look to countries like Haiti and Honduras to realise that these claims are hypocritical. In both Haiti and Honduras there is a real humanitarian crisis, with thousands going hungry and fleeing poverty and violence, only to be met by barbed wire, detention camps and now the building of a wall at the US border. Elections in Honduras in December 2017 were declared fraudulent by the Organisation of American States and there have been massive protests against the government

in Haiti. However, we do not hear any US officials demanding regime change, imposing sanctions nor threatening military intervention in either of these countries. Why? Because they already have governments which are compliant with the dictates from Washington.

The real reasons for the current US-led assault against Venezuela are three-fold. First of all, Washington wants to put an end to the Bolivarian revolution, which has been a thorn on its side ever since president Chávez was elected in 1998. Second, US multinationals want to get their hands of Venezuelan oil and natural resources, as was openly admitted by National Security Advisor John Bolton. Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world and is only a short distance from the US. Finally, the US wants to send a clear message to the peoples of the region that the whole of the American continent is its backyard, a throwback to the Monroe Doctrine. Putting an end to the Bolivarian revolution would be just a first step towards crushing the Cuban revolution, as US officials have openly explained.

It is now three months since the attempted coup started. The US has exercised enormous pressure on Venezuela. They have imposed crippling oil sanctions which affect hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil per day in exports. They have cajoled over 50 countries to recognise Guaidó. They have attempted to breach the Venezuelan border with Colombia using the excuse of delivering humanitarian aid on February 23. They have issued repeated threats to the Venezuelan Armed forces. They have



seized billions of dollars worth of Venezuelan assets in the US. The Bank of England is illegally withholding \$1.2bn in Venezuelan gold.

So far, the coup is not going according to plan. Despite all the boasting and claims Guaidó is not an inch closer to the Miraflores presidential palace. No high ranking official of the Venezuelan Armed forces with command of troops has joined the coup. Tens of thousands of Venezuelans have participated in mass rallies against US imperialist intervention, though you would not have seen any reports of these in the BBC news. Latin American countries with governments which are supportive of the US strategy (Chile, Brazil, Colombia, etc) have all rejected moves towards military intervention.

Clearly, the United States miscalculated. They underestimated the level of opposition to a US-sponsored coup. Even many in Venezuela who are critical of Maduro's government

performance are completely opposed to Washington's meddling with their internal affairs.

The fact that the coup plans have stalled does not mean that the Trump administration has given up. Sanctions are already having a crippling impact on the economy. They will continue and perhaps be toughened. Trump has also tightened the screws of the Cuban embargo as a way to put pressure on a key ally of Venezuela. US officials have threatened India, which had increased its purchases of Venezuelan oil. There is now talk of a naval blockade imposed by the US.

It is the duty of socialists, the labour movement, anti-imperialists and consistent democrats must mobilise to oppose this attempted coup. It is for the people of Venezuela to decide who the Venezuelan president should be, not for Trump nor May. Our stance should be clear:

**No coup, no sanctions,  
US and UK  
Hands off Venezuela**

# The BBC and Venezuela: bias and lies

The BBC programme Revolution in Ruins: The Hugo Chavez Story, broadcast on 16 January, sought to prepare viewers to accept and support any moves against Maduro, as the inheritor of Chavez's legacy. And within a week, an attempted coup had begun!

They tried to present the problems facing Venezuela as the outcome of the dictatorial characters of Chavez and Maduro. No attempt was made to explain the economic, social, and political context of the Bolivarian Revolution. And of course no mention was made of the regime of sanctions imposed by the USA.

Right from the outset the programme claimed that Chavez's 14-year presidency was a "precursor to many of today's populist leaders". Under Chavez, the documentary claimed, it was a story of "incredible short-term achievements in health and education" but also a "ruthless pursuit of power". This set the scene for the rest of the programme.

Despite having the largest oil reserves in the world, the country has collapsed. There is chaos, poverty and violence. It is the most dangerous country in the world. Chavez had been obsessed by the "pursuit of power". The population had been "seduced and controlled by one person". The worst side of

Chavez's personality had come to the fore.

This was the narrative peddled by the so-called 'objective' BBC. We are asked to believe that all of Venezuela's problems have been caused by the dictator Chavez! It shows the depths to which the BBC has sunk.

To support its view it had eight interviewees, in addition to the narrator. The majority were anti-Chavez. Even Eva Golinger, who had been an adviser to and supporter of Chavez for 11 years, made accusations of a sexual nature against Chavez. Whether the incident she related happened or not we do not know, as only she and Chavez were present, and Chavez died in 2012 so he cannot defend himself.

In the 1998 presidential elections, Chavez got 56% of the vote, despite the favourite to win being a former beauty queen. But, said one commentator, Raul Gallegos, "What Chavez were you getting? Would he be the military authoritarian figure?" And a 'learned' university professor, Margarita Lopez Maya, states that Chavez had "no political experience".

It gets worse. But the BBC has to refrain from telling outright lies. Half-truths will suffice. The oil company PdVSA, although owned by the state, was in effect a state within a state, where

many of the oil revenues were siphoned off by the board of directors to benefit the oligarchy, while the mass of the population lived in poverty suffering hunger and malnutrition. Yet, claims Gallegos, "it was well run" but it "surrendered to Chavez".

Chavez's "grip on power tightened" when he took control of PdVSA, which had been dominated by the opposition elite. But to opposition supporters this looked like a "communist takeover". Chavez was apparently even to blame for the unsuccessful coup in April 2002, as demonstrators had supposedly been killed by snipers "on both sides"! This was a blatant lie, as the TV footage at the time showed.

The programme claimed that as Chavez's presidency unfolded he became "intoxicated with power" or that "power went to his head". Yet what the programme could not hide was the fact that in his last presidential election in October 2012, "the whole country voted for a man they knew was dying and they still voted him into office". Isn't it annoying when facts get in the way of a good story.

What the BBC could and would never understand was that Chavez had a symbiotic link to the popular masses because he expressed their desire to rid Venezuela of poverty, homelessness, hunger and illiteracy.

The programme was therefore in its entirety a character assassination of Chavez. In passing, Jeremy Corbyn was also shown to be guilty by association, as Chavez in turn was shown to be greeting Ahmadinejad of Iran,

Gaddafi of Libya, Hussein of Iraq - and of course Corbyn!

Imperialist intervention

Finally, in three areas, the programme mentioned issues that if they had been developed might have painted a more truthful picture of what happened under Chavez. He "bypassed traditional media" and spoke directly to the people in his programme Alo Presidente. No mention from the BBC that most of the media was privately owned, and that much of it had from the outset of Chavez being elected president called for his overthrow. What would happen to the mass media in the UK if it openly called for the overthrow of an elected government?

Secondly, in using oil revenues to fund social programmes (misiones) Chavez decided that "traditional methods of funding social projects were too slow and bureaucratic" so he bypassed the state structures. For socialists, the criticism is that you cannot use a capitalist state to move society in the direction of socialism. In Venezuela as in all other attempts in history to change society, you cannot use the existing state. It is, in Marx's words, the executive committee of the ruling class.

Lastly, in its conclusion, a commentator, Miguel Tinker Salas, said that "the poor will always be part of the political dialogue in Venezuela". A lasting legacy of Chavez and the Bolivarian Revolution is that millions of ordinary Venezuelans have been awoken to political life. They, along with the 1.6 million people in armed militias, will be the bulwark against any attempt at military intervention by imperialist powers.

So the BBC remains exposed with half-truths and misleading quotes ("critics claim" - which critics?; "many blame him (Chavez)" - how many?).

**Darrall Cozens, HOV**

## Join Hands Off Venezuela!

The international broad-based Hands Off Venezuela campaign was established in 2002 to generate awareness about Venezuela, especially within the trade union and Labour movements. Our main task is to mobilise public opinion against imperialist aggression towards Venezuela.

The basic aims of the campaign are to:

- Give full support to the Venezuelan revolution, which has repeatedly proved its democratic credentials.
- Defend the revolution against the attacks of imperialism and its local agents the Venezuelan oligarchy.
- To counteract the media distortions and lies about Venezuela.

To get your trade union or other organisation affiliated, here are the recommended annual affiliation fees: National trade unions: £500, regional bodies: £250, branches/trades councils: £50, others: £25. Membership fees for individuals are: waged: £7.50 and unwaged: £5 (suggested)

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### Some achievements of the Bolivarian Revolution

- **Free university education expanded** from 800,000 students in 1998 to 2.6 million in 2013
- **Poverty reduced** from 48% to 27%, extreme poverty down from 22% to 10%
- **Illiteracy eradicated** in 2005, when 1.5 million learnt to read and write
- **19 democratic elections** held, 18 of which were won by the Bolivarian revolution
- **Malnourishment reduced** from 21% to 5%
- Privatised utilities and state enterprises **renationalised**
- Beneficiaries of **old age pensions increased** from 380,000 to 2.1 million
- Number of **doctors** per 10,000 inhabitants increased from 18 to 58
- **Trade Union and Labour rights** strengthened