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Chronicle of a foretold coup: The attack on Venezuela and the narco-terrorism fairy tale

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Thousands of Venezuelans demonstrated their support for President Maduro in a demonstration held in Caracas on Sunday, Jan. 4, 2025. Photo: Ultimas Noticias.

Current developments in Venezuela may appear to be unfathomable—until one recalls the long history of imperialist interference in Latin America and the Caribbean. The events of the first week of January constitute an escalation of a long-standing campaign to overthrow the Bolivarian Revolution and resume control on the country with the largest known oil [reserves](#) in the world. The emerging world order and the strengthening of international organisations non-aligned with the interests of the United States (US) rush the US to increase the pressure on the Latin American region.

Latin America and the Caribbean are deeply marked by US imperialism. In the 200

years since the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the US military has [carried out](#) more than 100 interventions, invasions, and coups in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the 1970s, the CIA carried out a series of military coups throughout the region to overthrow left-wing and independent governments. In a secret program known as Operation Condor, the CIA [worked](#) closely with military dictators to suppress left-wing activists and prevent the rise of communism among the local populations.

Neoliberal policies implemented through the coup regimes and after—and under the influence of the Washington Consensus in the 1990s—deeply affected economic development in the region. As a [result](#), 50 million people in Latin America fell into poverty from 1970 to 1995, and the [external debt tripled](#) from \$67.31 billion (1975) to \$208.76 (1980), 60 percent of which was public debt, further stifling the possibility of economic development and pushing the countries into debt-traps. The effects of privatization and the destruction of the industrial structure continue to this day.

The popular leaders that emerged from people's rebellions against the neoliberal regimes and led the [Progressive Wave](#) in the Latin American region during the beginning of the 21st century were targeted by the CIA. Venezuela constitutes one of such cases.

Following President Hugo Chávez's inauguration in 1999, the United States systematically attacked Venezuela. After repeated refusals to submit to US leadership, in April 2002, supported by a sector of the Venezuelan military, the US carried out a [coup d'état](#) and kidnapped President Chávez. The Venezuelan people took to the streets *en masse* and halted the attack. The events of that April forced US imperialism to change its strategy and opt for a prolonged hybrid war aimed at weakening popular support for the Bolivarian Revolution.

The hybrid war on Venezuela consists primarily of economic sanctions and embargoes, and the persecution of popular leaders, along with the funding of anti-

Chavista propaganda and organisations, and the development of paramilitary groups to create an atmosphere of internal destabilization. In addition to the multiple assassination attempts, in 2019, the US did not recognise the electoral results, and [backed](#) the opposition candidate Juan Guaidó as president of Venezuela. The bombing of Caracas and the subsequent kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores on 3 January 2026 are the most recent blow in a series of systematic and increasing attacks spanning more than 20 years.

Trump [openly declared](#) that the US attack on Venezuela is about oil. Nonetheless, US officials, including Trump, have offered two other unconvincing reasons: the migration crisis and narco-terrorism.

Migrants and Drugs

Economic sanctions and the blockade against Venezuela caused a collapse in the population's living conditions, generating shortages, accelerated impoverishment, and large-scale [forced migration](#). The departure of more than [seven million](#) people over the past decade is due to the economic war.

Venezuelan migration has been used as a political instrument, presented as proof of the failure of socialism and the revolutionary project, while the sanctions responsible for the forced migration have been rendered invisible. Many Venezuelan migrants were initially classified as "[political refugees](#)" in the countries to which they migrated, reinforcing the narrative that they were fleeing a dictatorship and thereby legitimizing the imposition of further sanctions, creating a vicious dynamic. Venezuelan migration has also been used as a warning aimed at potential left-wing voters in Latin America.

Through hardline immigration enforcement [policies](#) promoted during the second Donald Trump administration, migrants have been criminalized: they are being rounded up, detained, and—some of them—forcibly transferred to the CECOT mega-

prison in El Salvador.

The criminalization of the migrant as a narco-trafficker fuelled the construction of a narrative about Venezuelan cartels. This led to the accusation that Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro was a leader of gangs known as Tren de Aragua or the non-existent Cartel of the Suns. The idea of drug trafficking provided the justification to attack small boats, 36 of them sunk through 35 illegal bombings that [killed](#) 115 people. It was this idea of narco-terrorism that was used to justify the attack on Venezuela on 3 January.

Trump brought together the War on Terror (the 2001 Patriot Act) and the War on Drugs (stretching back to the 1970s) to create this idea of 'narco-terrorism' and build legitimacy in the US for the attack on Venezuela not as a military invasion but as a police action. Trump now wants to [extend](#) this logic to Cuba, Colombia, and Mexico.

The attack on Venezuela came at a time when the country was slowly emerging from the worst of the social impact of sanctions. [Economic recovery in Venezuela](#) amid those sanctions occurred in a context marked by the emergence of the BRICS and the tightening of commercial and political relations with China, Iran, and Russia, which made it possible to smoothen the consequences of the US sanctions. At the same time, the deep scarcity crisis, particularly harsh in a country historically structured under a rentier model dependent on food imports, drove a reorganization of national agricultural production and food supply chains oriented toward building food sovereignty. In this process, the communes, together with the emergence of new national companies dedicated to producing food and other essential goods, energized the Venezuelan economy and enabled a rapid recovery after the crisis induced by the sanctions.

An organised response to the interference

The collective response to economic coercion is in line with that of recent events. The people took to the streets: [thousands of people in Caracas](#), in rural areas, and in other cities mobilized for the release of their president and in rejection of a US military intervention, backing the Bolivarian militias, the police, the Army, and the government. This resistance has been overlooked in international media.

Finally, the swearing-in of Vice President Delcy Rodríguez as the head of the government, together with the presence of the ambassadors of China, Iran, and Russia, as well as the installation of the National Assembly with the presence of Nicolás Maduro's son, demonstrate that the Bolivarian Revolution is not defeated and that speculation about internal betrayals lacks concrete basis.

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