

Venezuelan envoy to UN says Washington preparing for military invasion of Venezuela



New York, January 30 (RHC)-- Venezuela's envoy to the United Nations says the United States is preparing for a "military invasion" of his country, amid Washington's recent move to impose sanctions on the state-owned oil firm PDVSA in its harshest financial challenge yet to President Nicolas Maduro.

Jorge Valero, Venezuela's permanent ambassador to the UN, made the comment at a the UN-sponsored Conference on Disarmament in New York on Tuesday, questioning whether U.S. President Donald Trump's administration had the moral authority to "impose a diktat" on Caracas. Valero's remarks were in direct response to the U.S. deputy ambassador to the UN, Cynthia Plath, who said minutes earlier that Washington was "committed to holding accountable those responsible for Venezuela's tragic decline."

U.S. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham recently revealed in an interview with HBO that Trump had asked for his opinion about "using military force" in Venezuela against Maduro. The South Carolina senator added that he had urged Trump to be cautious since the military intervention in the South American country "could be problematic."

There have been growing tensions in the wake of a move by Washington to lead the charge to recognize opposition figure Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's president over the incumbent Maduro and calling on other countries to follow suit. Thirty five-year-old Guaidó, an unknown figure until recently, proclaimed himself "interim president" of Venezuela on January 23rd. Minutes after the bizarre move, Donald Trump recognized him as the leader of the country.

Britain, Germany, France, and Spain have already given an eight-day ultimatum to Caracas that they would also recognize Guaidó as president if Maduro failed to call a new election within the given period. On Saturday, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza lambasted that ultimatum as "childlike," the same day U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the world to support Guaidó and reject "Maduro and his mayhem."

Other countries, including Russia, Turkey, China, and Iran, have expressed support for the elected government in Venezuela and condemned outside interference in the country.

Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro rejects an ultimatum made by a number of European countries that calls for a new election in the Latin American state.

Venezuela's incumbent president retains the loyalty of the armed forces, though the country's top military envoy to Washington, Colonel José Luis Silva, on Saturday defected to Guaidó, calling on other military officers to back the pretender, who is also recognized by Canada and other regional powers.

On Monday, Washington put further pressure on Maduro's government when U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin jointly announced that the US had blocked all assets of PDVSA under its jurisdiction and banned deals with the firm.

Furthermore, the US State Department on Tuesday announced that it had certified the authority of Guaidó to control certain assets held by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York or any other U.S.-insured banks, describing his self-proclaimed presidency as the "legitimate government."

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