

Who Was Behind the Incompetent Venezuela “Invasion?”

On May 3, a group of around 60 mercenaries attempted an amphibious landing at Macuto, on Venezuela’s Caribbean coast. They were quickly defeated and 13 of them — including two Americans, Airan Berry and Luke Denman — captured.

US president Donald Trump has denied any association with, knowledge of, or involvement in the affair on the part of the US government.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on the other hand has pledged to use “every tool” to get Berry and Denman released and returned to the US — a curious position for a US diplomat, given that the two seem to have been taken while violating Venezuelan law on Venezuelan soil.

The details behind the slapstick “invasion” remain somewhat murky, but a few aspects are reasonably well documented:

First, that the planners of the operation were Jordan Goudreau — former US soldier and owner of “security” firm Silvercorp — and former Venezuelan general Cliver Alcala Cordones.

Second, that the services of Silvercorp were retained by a “Strategic Command” answering to Juan Guaido, a Venezuelan opposition figure recognized by his country’s National Assembly, and by 59 other regimes, as the country’s “acting president.”

Third, that the goal of the landing, dubbed “Operation Gideon” seems to have been to abduct the other claimant to the country’s presidency, Nicolas Maduro, overthrow his regime, and deliver him to US authorities for trial on recent “drug kingpin” charges.

At first glance, it’s easy to believe Trump’s denials of involvement. The whole operation was a comedy of errors from conception through execution. There was never any chance that 60 mercenaries were going to make a successful landing, move inland, capture Maduro, and spirit him out of the country, even with the help of another 300 troops supposedly already in Venezuela.

But even a cursory look at US history says this kind of thing happens all the time.

The US military messes up. Think Little Big Horn, the downing of Francis Gary Powers over the Soviet Union, or the “Desert One” fiasco during the Iran hostage crisis.

The US intelligence community overestimates its ability to extort presidents into following

up failed paramilitary actions with official military force. Remember the Bay of Pigs? Maduro does.

American politicians get caught in weird, officially unsanctioned, criminal schemes. Consider, for example, Richard Nixon's "Plumbers" and the Watergate burglary.

Yes, "Operation Gideon" looks, in retrospect, like a Monty Python sketch. But so do a lot of government, or government-sponsored, or government-approved, projects.

Is it coincidence that between the time Guaido contracted with Silvercorp and the launch of the operation, the US government provided "law enforcement" cover in the form of drug charges and a \$15 million bounty on Maduro's head?

If you and I landed at Lyme Regis with a plan to abduct Boris Johnson, or at Santos Beach intending to capture Jair Bolsonaro, would Mike Pompeo be keen to get us repatriated, or would he leave us to the mercies of the British or Brazilian justice systems?

Was "Operation Gideon" a comedic interlude, or just the latest failed US intervention in Venezuela?