

'5,000 troops' to Colombia

by Eli Rosenberg and Dan Lamothe via jane - Washington Post *Tuesday, Jan 29 2019, 8:12pm*
international / prose / post

National security adviser John Bolton appeared to disclose [clearly no accident] confidential notes written on a yellow pad Monday that included a plan to send U.S. troops to Colombia amid escalating tensions with Venezuela.

During a [briefing](#) at the White House to announce sanctions against Venezuela's oil industry, Bolton held the notepad against his jacket with its pages facing outward.

Scrawled in tight print at the top of the cover page were two items: "Afghanistan -> Welcome the Talks," an apparent [reference](#) to ongoing peace negotiations with the Taliban, and "5,000 troops to Colombia."

Pentagon officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the situation, said the Defense Department hadn't received any orders to this effect.

Asked about the handwritten notes that were visible to cameras, the White House pointed to statements made by Bolton and his boss, President Trump, in recent days that "all options are on the table" regarding Venezuela.

The plan raised more questions about the potential for military action in Venezuela. If enacted, the troop movement would mark a major escalation of U.S. involvement in South America, though it is unclear what exactly the service members' roles would be.

The hospital ship USNS Comfort deployed to the Colombian port of Riohacha to treat Venezuelan migrants in the fall, but it has since returned home. The U.S. military has collaborated with its Colombian counterpart for years, providing training on everything from counterinsurgency to securing aircraft crash scenes.

Tensions between the United States and Venezuela — a constant for more than a dozen years — have surged to crisis levels in the past week, after the United States recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó as the country's president. Guaidó, the head of the country's National Assembly, had invoked the constitution to declare himself Venezuela's president last week.

The diplomatic crisis has continued as the United States defied an order by President Nicolás Maduro to evacuate its embassy staff from the country.

It is not clear whether the disclosure of Bolton's notes was the result of a mishap or an intentional decision.

"We continue to pursue all paths to disconnect the illegitimate Maduro regime from its sources of revenue and ensure that interim President Guaido and the Venezuelan people have the resources and support they need to bring democracy back to Venezuela," he tweeted Monday evening as images of the notes circulated on social media.

It would not be the first time that notes or a briefing had been inadvertently released to the public after being captured on camera in the Trump White House. Kris Kobach, the former secretary of state of Kansas and a Trump ally, was photographed holding a document for a “strategic plan,” for the Department of Homeland Security during the transition in 2016, with the text visible above his hand. The plan included hard-line anti-immigration proposals such as reducing the intake of Syrian refugees to zero.

Trump’s speeches have been marked up with notes in handwriting — including, at times, the president’s. In July, the margins of a speech he gave after a widely criticized appearance with Russian President Vladimir Putin drew a flurry of coverage after observers spotted the phrase “[THERE WAS NO COLUSION](#),” written in all caps, with the word “Collusion” misspelled, on the document.

Anne Gearan and Paul Sonne contributed to this report.

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