

Burning Aid: An Interventionist Deception on Colombia-Venezuela Bridge?

By [Max Blumenthal](#)

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Sen. Marco Rubio and coup leaders claim the Venezuelan National Guard burned US aid trucks on the bridge in Colombia. But all available evidence points in the opposite direction.

The Trump administration's [coup against Venezuela](#) culminated on February 23 with US-backed opposition attempting to ram several trucks loaded with boxes of [USAID](#) "humanitarian aid" across the previously unused Francisco de Paula Santander bridge connecting Colombia to Venezuela.

The trucks failed to reach the other side — but that was never really the point of the stunt. As Father Sergio Munoz, a right-wing Venezuelan activist posted on the Colombian side of the border, explained to journalist [Dan Cohen](#), the humanitarian "aid" was a purely symbolic provocation aimed at discrediting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in international eyes and generating waves of destabilizing violence.

By the end of the day, the trucks lined up on the Francisca de Paula Santander bridge were flanked by gangs of guarimberos.



Photo courtesy: Telesur

These were the nihilistic masked youth who form the shock troops of the right-wing opposition, and who placed Caracas under siege with violent barricade protests, known as guarimbas, at several points between 2014 and 2017. A mob of guarimberos [burned to death](#) Orlando Figuera, a 22-year old black Venezuelan accused of supporting Maduro, on an eastern Caracas street in broad daylight, back in June 2017.

On the Santander bridge this February 23, the guarimberos rained down a hail of rocks and molotov cocktails on Venezuelan national guardsmen holding the line against the USAID trucks. Suddenly, the trucks caught fire and the masked youth began unloading boxes of aid before they burned. Within minutes, pro-opposition media reported that the Venezuelan national guard forces were responsible for the fires.

A reporter for the private anti-government channel NTN24 claimed without evidence that the Venezuelan security forces had caused the fires with tear gas:

Another false flag at the border with Colombia. A "reporter" from [@NTN24ve](#)

(opposition tv known for fake news) said a truck went on fire because the Venezuelan police launched tear gas. Let me know if you've seen tear gas burn a truck before [#Venezuela #HandsOfVenezuela pic.twitter.com/P5uRWEBgCd](#)

— taseenb (@taseenb) [February 23, 2019](#)

The claim was absurd on its face. I have personally witnessed tear gas canisters hit every kind of vehicle imaginable in the occupied Palestinian West Bank, and I have never seen a fire like the one that erupted on the Santander bridge.

In 2013, the San Bernadino Sheriff's Department deployed [special incendiary teargas canisters](#) ("burners") to torch the house where fugitive cop killer Chris Dorner had holed up. But it is highly unlikely that the Venezuelan national guardsmen had anything like this weapon in their arsenal when they confronted the rioters on February 23.

The total lack of evidence of Venezuelan culpability did not stop Cuban-American Senator Marco Rubio from tweeting this accusation from nearby in Cucuta, Colombia:

The whole world saw the regime use security forces & gangs to injure & kill unarmed civilians.

The whole world saw them set fire to 3 trucks carrying food & other humanitarian aid.

They will soon realize just how badly they overplayed their hand today.

— Marco Rubio (@marcorubio) [February 24, 2019](#)

Sen. [Dianne Feinstein](#), who is facing calls for her own resignation after video appeared of her [condescendingly browbeating](#) a group of environmentalist children, repeated Rubio's baseless allegation, using it to call for Maduro to step down.

By blaming the Venezuelan government for burning the USAID trucks, Rubio was clearly attempting to establish the casus belli he had been seeking. Yet neither he nor anyone in the "whole world" had seen the national guard set the fire, as he claimed. In fact, the evidence pointed in the exact opposite direction, suggesting that the masked opposition youth had torched the trucks themselves.

Colombian writer Humberto Ortiz produced footage from a pro-opposition channel showing what appears to be the exact moment when a guarimbero sets the aid on fire with a molotov cocktail:

Creo que [@NoticiasUno](#) nos puede ayudar a aclarar si la molotov lanzada por este muchacho pudo causar el incendio del camión.
[pic.twitter.com/UCR7x9qNkA](#)

— Humberto Ortiz (@graffitiborrao) [February 24, 2019](#)

Telesur reporter Madelein Garcia published photographs showing a guarimbero with a gas canister next to one of the burning trucks:

1. [#ÚltimoMinuto](#) en [#exclusiva @teleSURtv](#) aquí las evidencias de quienes quemaron el camión con supuesta ayuda humanitaria en [#Ureña](#), fueron los mismo guarimberos pic.twitter.com/4gv2K54NpE

— Madelein Garcia (@madeleintSUR) [February 23, 2019](#)

Drone footage also published by Garcia shows how far away the trucks were from Venezuelan national guardsmen when they caught fire, and demonstrates that they were clearly on the Colombian side of the border:

2. Ahora veamos las imágenes aéreas este fue justo el momento cuando quemaron los camiones pic.twitter.com/M66Wy7nOQM

— Madelein Garcia (@madeleintSUR) [February 23, 2019](#)

Even Bloomberg News, which has run a relentless stream of pro-opposition reports, published video showing guarimberos on the bridge making molotov cocktails, which could easily set a truck cabin or its cargo alight:

MORE: As a group of Venezuelans, most of them young, attempt to access the Venezuelan side of the border, a group is seen preparing molotov cocktails [#tictocnews pic.twitter.com/TG9JSxo5rh](#)

— TicToc by Bloomberg (@tictoc) [February 23, 2019](#)

Meanwhile, the International Red Cross [issued a statement](#) condemning Venezuelan opposition activists disguising themselves as Red Cross workers - a blatant breach of humanitarian protocol. A screenshot from pro-opposition NTN24 coverage shows a fake Red Cross worker near one of the burning trucks:

Not sure if the Venezuelan opposition activists disguised as Red Cross workers actually mean well pic.twitter.com/Gry9qc7EML

— Max Blumenthal (@MaxBlumenthal) [February 23, 2019](#)

Days ago, self-proclaimed interim president [Juan Guaido](#) announced that he would lead a “human wave” across the bridge and into Venezuela. But as darkness fell on February 23, Guaido found himself at a stormy press conference with other right-wing, US-aligned Latin American leaders. By his side was Colombian President Ivan Duque, who [repeated the evidence-free allegation](#) that Venezuelan security forces had burned the aid trucks.

Having failed miserably at every phase of the coup he had attempted engineer, Rubio ended the day with a Twitter tantrum that peaked with a call for “[multilateral actions](#)” against

Venezuela's government. What form that action could take is still unclear, but it will certainly be justified by a series of baseless claims about what took place on the Santander bridge.

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Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including best-selling [Republican Gomorrah](#), [Goliath](#), [The Fifty One Day War](#), and [The Management of Savagery](#). He has produced print articles for an array of publications, many video reports, and several documentaries, including [Killing Gaza](#). Blumenthal founded The Grayzone in 2015 to shine a journalistic light on America's state of perpetual war and its dangerous domestic repercussions.

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