

Venezuelan Military Reject Trump's Incitement to Rebel: 'Over Our Dead Bodies'

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The government also announced a rival peace concert and plans to supply food and medical attention to poor Colombians as the border heats up.

Venezuela's armed forces have responded angrily Tuesday to threats made against them by US President Donald Trump and calls to break the chain of command.

Speaking at a press conference held in Caracas and flanked by commanders from all of the branches of the military, Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez told press that Washington "Will not be able to install a "puppet" and anti-patriotic government, they will have to step over our dead bodies first."

Trump had warned Venezuelan soldiers that they risked "losing everything" should they continue loyal to Maduro at a press conference in Miami Monday. He once more urged them to recognise [National Assembly President Juan Guaido](#) as "interim president" and yet again refused to rule out direct military action against Venezuela, stressing that "all options are on the table."

"If [the Venezuelan soldiers] choose this path [of loyalty to the government] they will find no refuge, they will lose everything," Trump told reporters and Venezuelan immigrants in Florida.

Padrino called attempts to give orders to the Venezuelan armed forces "disrespectful," while also vowing that threats of sanctions and blackmail would not allow the US to "achieve its objective."

"When a president of another country comes and tries to give orders to [our] Armed Forces, he is underestimating them disrespectfully (...) It is incredulous," Venezuela's Padrino Lopez responded.

Venezuelan embassy in Costa Rica "taken" by Guaido's team

Guaido's efforts to seize power from Maduro have [continued on the diplomatic front](#), with reports on Wednesday morning that his appointed representative to Costa Rica, Maria Faria, had "taken control" of the Venezuelan embassy in San Jose.

“We have come to the Embassy to advance with the process of transition which is being led by Venezuela’s National Assembly and President Juan Guaido,” she told press in San Jose. Existing embassy staff were working “irregularly,” she went on to affirm. It is unclear if any confrontation with embassy staff took place.

Venezuelan Foreign Minister Jorge Arreaza issued a statement rejecting the actions taken by the opposition sympathizers of Guaido, reminding Costa Rica that his team enjoy diplomatic immunity and invoking Costa Rica’s responsibilities under the Convention of Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Convention.

He urged San Jose to “assume the correct side of the international conventions and to avoid a violent situation stimulated by factors of the Venezuelan opposition.” For their part, Costa Rican authorities criticised the move, with Vice-Foreign Minister Lorena Aguilar calling it “unacceptable” and a break of diplomatic norms. Aguilar went on to express her “strong rejection” of Faria’s actions for not respecting the 60 days that had been given to the Venezuelan diplomatic corps to leave the country.

Following his formal recognition by around [25 percent of the world’s governments](#), Guaido’s team has proceeded to name “diplomatic representatives” to a number of European countries Tuesday, including the UK (Paolo Romero), Belgium (Mary Ponte), the Netherlands (Gloria Notario), Germany (Otto Gebauer), France (Isadora de Zubillaga), Portugal (Jose Rafael Cotte), Spain (Antonio Ecarri), Sweden (Leon Poblete) and Austria (Williams Davila). He also named representatives to Australia, Luxembourg, Romania, Andorra, the Dominican Republic, Malta and Denmark. In late January, Guaido [named representatives to a number of Latin and North American nations](#).



María Faría (centre, black jacket) took control of the Venezuelan Embassy in Costa Rica alongside a team of legal advisors (Courtesy, La Nacion).

More aid pledged

A number of [European countries](#) also pledged to support Washington’s efforts to deliver humanitarian aid across the Venezuelan border this upcoming February 23, donating a total

of US \$18 million between them.

In a press conference held in Caracas, the ambassadors of France, Spain, the UK, Italy and Germany all reaffirmed their support for attempts to bring in humanitarian aid, which have been shunned by the [United Nations](#), War Child, Oxfam and the [Red Cross](#) as being “politicised.” President Maduro has refused to allow the “aid” to enter, claiming that it is a spark for US [intervention](#).

Adding to the White House’s efforts, Germany is to pledge €5 million, Italy US \$2 million and the UK US \$8.5 million to the aid plans led by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), it was reported Tuesday. Brazil also announced it will be warehousing aid in its border town of Pacaraima.

On Tuesday, Venezuelan authorities closed the maritime and aerial border with the Dutch Antilles, which have been reported as a third collection point for “aid.”

The measure comes as part of Operation Sentinel, which the Armed Forces use to protect the country’s sovereignty across the national territory.

Rival concerts planned

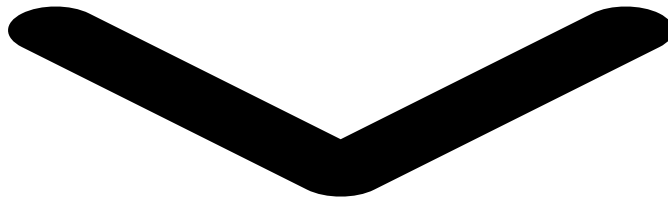
To support efforts in bringing aid across the border into the country, Venezuela’s opposition is organising a large international concert in the Colombian city of Cucuta on Saturday, only eight kilometres from the Venezuelan border. The concert, which is being financed by British media mogul and Virgin CEO Richard Branson, is being branded as “Live Aid for Venezuela.” Latin singers Alejandro Sanz, Nacho, Luis Fonsi and Maluma have all confirmed that they will be performing.

Guaido had previously [vowed that aid would enter on February 23](#) “no matter what,” but speaking to press on Monday he said that “if it’s not on [February] 23, it will be on the 24.”

Branson’s initiative has also drawn criticism, with Pink Floyd legend Roger Waters stating that it “has nothing to do with humanitarian aid at all.”

“It has to do with Richard Branson ... having bought the US saying, ‘We have decided to take over Venezuela, for whatever our reasons may be’ ... Do we really want Venezuela to turn in to another Iraq or Syria or Libya? I don’t and neither do the Venezuelan people,” Waters said in a message on social media.

Pro-government forces are also organising a large two-day “peace” concert on the Venezuelan side of the border this weekend, allegedly at the request of “artists who love the country.”



Vladimir Padrino López, speaking alongside a number of military commanders of the Venezuelan armed forces (@EjércitoFANB / Twitter)

The Bolivarian concert will be close to the Simon Bolivar International Bridge in the border town of San Antonio, and has received the backing of a number of Venezuelan and international artists. It will be held under the slogan “No one wants war.”

The government’s concert will be accompanied by a range of social programs which Venezuelan President Maduro is planning to set up which will focus on poor citizens of Colombia’s Northern Santander region and it’s capital Cucuta.

The government has also pledged to distribute 20,000 [subsidised CLAP food boxes](#) to the Colombian border community between Friday and Sunday, and to provide free medical appointments with the assistance of the Cuban medical mission in Venezuela, including paediatricians, surgeons and dentists.

Venezuelan authorities quoted data from the [Colombian National Administrative Statistics Department](#) which indicate that poverty in North Santander province of Colombia runs at 40 percent, extreme poverty at 8.5 percent. It also states that there are more than 20,000 children working in the streets and that 15 percent of children have chronic malnutrition in the province.

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