



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on February 19, 2014

Socialist Regime in Venezuela Kills Students, Arrests Opposition

With the Venezuelan economy in [full-blown meltdown](#) and massive protests escalating across the embattled nation, the socialist regime of “President” Nicolas Maduro has taken to deploying troops, mowing down student protesters, terrorizing critics, and even arresting leaders of the political opposition. Instead of addressing the root cause of the turmoil — socialism, corruption, soaring inflation, and tyranny — authorities in Venezuela are doubling down and shifting the blame, Chavez-style, onto a foreign “conspiracy” and right-wing “fascists.” At least several protesters have been shot dead so far, with dozens wounded.



As *The New American* has been reporting for years, Venezuela, despite massive oil revenues, has been mired in a downward spiral of chaos and economic devastation for over a decade. Following the election of socialist strongman Hugo Chavez, the once relatively prosperous nation promptly became a basket case. The situation has become dire, with shortages of everything from toilet paper to basic food staples exploding. The oil-rich regime cannot even keep the electricity on regularly in the capital, Caracas, much less throughout the rest of the nation.

In response to boiling anger and misery over out-of-control crime, murder, corruption, inflation, and tyranny, Maduro and his cohorts responded, as autocrats do, with more totalitarianism. From printing even more currency and arresting uncooperative Venezuelans to seizing more wealth and [disarming the public with help from the United Nations](#), the regime keeps piling on the tyranny as it flails around frantically trying to contain the growing uprising. Unsurprisingly, last week, the people of Venezuela not on government payrolls began a series of massive peaceful protests across the nation.

Maduro responded with brute force.

Ordering troops and regime employees out into the streets to counter the demonstrations, Maduro has denounced the protesters as terrorists, murderers, fascists, stooges of capitalists and the U.S. government, saboteurs, and more. Public-sector workers, including employees of the state oil behemoth, were reportedly ordered to dress in red and hold “pro-government” rallies. Police and National Guard forces, meanwhile, were apparently instructed to suppress the escalating protests against Maduro’s regime, a [close ally of the barbaric communist autocracy ruling over Cuba and other statist regimes across the region](#).

Amid clashes, at least five protesters have been killed, and more than 60 wounded, according to news reports. The regime, though, is bizarrely claiming that the opposition is somehow responsible for the deaths and the violence, even alleging that one of the regime’s supporters had also been killed. Around the world, human rights groups and foreign powers are now calling for a proper investigation into the



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killings. The truth, however, is becoming increasingly difficult to pinpoint, analysts say, because the regime has shut down virtually every independent media outlet in Venezuela.

Maduro also blasted foreign press outlets for what he claimed was a campaign of “manipulation.” Along with his apparatchiks, the “president” has also continued making allegations that the U.S. government is somehow involved in orchestrating the protests. “Nobody is going to come from abroad to pressure or disturb us,” Maduro said late last week. Obama administration officials dismissed the claims; and while it is well known that Washington, D.C., often secretly foments unrest and violence around the world, [vast amounts of evidence](#) suggest that the events in Venezuela have little to do with U.S. government scheming.

Among other tactics to crack down on the escalating unrest, authorities have also stepped up the campaign to arrest and terrorize critics and dissidents — a [pattern dating back to the regime of Maduro’s mentor and predecessor, Hugo Chavez](#). Maduro, for example, promised to “severely” punish anyone “conspiring” against his regime. An arrest warrant for prominent political leader Leopoldo López, meanwhile, a strong critic of the regime who was involved in organizing the demonstrations, includes charges of “murder” and “terrorism.” The regime even claimed it was “saving” López by arresting him.

López, who denies the charges, surrendered to authorities and was taken in by National Guard forces on February 18 as his supporters shouted “liberty” while being tear-gassed. “We are on the right side of history, on the side of justice, of truth,” he said in a video recorded before his arrest, denouncing the “justice” system and saying that the public was waking up. “Our cause has been and continues to be the departure of this government.” He also begged the opposition to remain peaceful before tens of thousands of outraged protesters flooded the streets of Caracas in response to his arrest.

Among other demands, protesters and López supporters are asking for the regime to liberate all political prisoners, end the oppression, and stop using violence against opponents, the arrested leader’s wife said in an interview with CNN en Español. Another senior leader in López’s Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, Carlos Vecchio, also has a warrant out for his arrest due to alleged involvement in the protests, according to news reports. Numerous other critics of the regime including journalists, businessmen, judges, and more [have also been arrested](#) in recent years.

Of course, it would hardly be the first time that Venezuela’s socialist regime has used bogus “terrorism” charges to neutralize its political opponents. As *The New American* reported in 2010, for example, longtime freedom advocate and former Venezuelan presidential candidate Alejandro Pena Esclusa [was arrested by the Chavez regime on trumped-up “terrorism” charges](#) as well. The anti-communist leader, who led an umbrella group for liberty-oriented organizations across Latin America, was among the many prominent political prisoners held in Venezuela.

Maduro said that citizens who wanted to oust his regime could sign a petition — as long as they provide their fingerprints and pictures, widely interpreted as a transparent threat. Analysts, however, suggested that the regime’s latest arrests of opposition leaders would only embolden the protesters. “Lopez is one of the most emblematic figures of the Venezuelan opposition who have been arrested,” Latin America policy analyst Juan Carlos Hidalgo with the liberty-minded Cato Institute told Bloomberg. “This is only going to fire up protesters. This is definitely taking the level of repression and antagonism from the government to a new level.”

Obama administration Secretary of State John Kerry claimed in a statement that the United States was



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“deeply concerned” about the rising tensions and violence in Venezuela. “Our condolences go to the families of those killed as a result of this tragic violence,” he said, adding that he joined various transnational bureaucrats from the UN, the EU, and other outfits in condemning the “senseless” violence. “We are particularly alarmed by reports that the Venezuelan government has arrested or detained scores of anti-government protestors.... These actions have a chilling effect on citizens’ rights to express their grievances peacefully.”

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) urged the Obama administration to go further than simply issuing statements by cracking down on criminal officials. “The President and his administration should vigorously enforce all existing U.S. laws to identify and sanction individuals engaging in these human rights violations,” said the Cuban-American senator in a statement. “Nicolás Maduro and his thugs should know that the world is watching, and that they will be held accountable for their cruelty and violations of human rights.”

The overtly dictatorial regimes ruling over Cuba and Venezuela are generally portrayed as isolated pariahs by the Western establishment press. However, as *The New American* and other publications have [documented extensively](#), it is a fact that both autocracies are mere components of a [much broader network of totalitarian forces currently dominating the region](#) — with [strong support from the U.S.-based globalist powerhouse known as the Council on Foreign Relations](#).

Whether the rest of Latin America will plunge into Venezuela-style chaos as tyranny spreads its [tentacles across the hemisphere](#) remains to be seen. Optimistic analysts and liberty-minded critics of the misnamed “pink tide” sweeping the region, though, say the accelerating trend toward Latin American despotism, if exposed, can still be stopped.

Photo shows anti-Maduro protester holding a Venezuelan flag confronting power, Feb. 18, 2014: AP Images

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