



Many Venezuelan Soldiers Wavering and Some Are Deserting

Venezuela's Marxist dictator Nicolás Maduro, who has increasingly become isolated in the face of turmoil at home and diplomatic and economic pressure from other nations, relies largely on the support of the nation's military to remain in power. Though Maduro has so far held a tight grip on his military, cracks in his control are appearing. Maduro has been using the military to stop aid coming into Venezuela from across the border in Colombia, and some soldiers being forced to stop the aid are deserting.



AP reported that when the Venezuelan opposition attempted to bring humanitarian aid into the country on February 23, troops loyal to Maduro refused to let the trucks carrying food and medical supplies cross the border. However, many of the soldiers ordered to stop the aid defected. More than 320 mostly low-ranking soldiers deserted and crossed the border in a span of four days.

Many of them went to the border city of Cúcuta, Colombia, which was the staging area for aid supplies flown in from the United States. UPI reported on February 16 that a U.S. shipment of humanitarian aid from Miami had landed in Cúcuta, but the Venezuelan military used two containers and a liquid-tank carrier to block travel lanes of a bridge connecting Venezuela to Cúcuta earlier in the month.

AP reported that Cúcuta has become a refuge for 40 Venezuelan soldiers who abandoned their posts and fled across the border.

The report noted that the young National Guard troops who deserted have been sleeping on thin mats on the floor. "I was tired of people seeing me as just one more of them," the report quoted Sergeant Jorge Torres, who was referring to Maduro's socialist government. "I'm not."

A [February 17 article in *The New American*](#) explained why, with all the pressure being applied on Maduro by the United States (which has placed sanctions on purchases of Venezuelan oil), and by Venezuela's neighbors, who are calling for him to step down and hold "free, fair, and honest" elections for his replacement, the dictator still remains in control.

The article cited Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), who firmly believes that the only reason Maduro's military hasn't deserted him is because of Cuban infiltration. Said Rubio: "They [Maduro's military] are ... loyal ... because the Cubans are spying on them. The Cuban intelligence agencies quickly pick up ... any of these military officers [who] are being disloyal or expressing doubts — and those guys are arrested."

Rubio said that because of Cuban infiltration, "There has been a massive purge of Venezuelan military officers over the last two years.... It wasn't because of corruption.... It was because the Cubans caught them and reported them."



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on February 27, 2019

AP noted that opposition leader Juan Guaidó has proposed granting amnesty to military officers who back him, but that the low-ranking soldiers who have defected say such a plan is all but impossible. Although the number of soldiers deserting is increasing, they represent a small percentage of Venezuela's 200,000-man army.

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