

## Maduro Hunts Guaido's Allies, Exacting Revenge for Uprising

By Andrew Rosati and Alex Vasquez  
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Diosdado Cabello, right, with Nicolas Maduro. Photographer: Adriana Loureiro Fernandez/Bloomberg

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A week after an audacious attempt to topple Venezuelan autocrat Nicolas Maduro, his regime is cracking down on those it holds responsible, searching homes, issuing arrest warrants and sending opposition leaders into hiding.

Top allies of Juan Guaido, the head of the powerless legislature who says he is the nation's rightful president, are circulating among safe houses, holing up in embassies and preparing for life on the run since the detention this week of National Assembly Vice President Edgar Zambrano by the Sebin secret police.



Juan Guaidó, right, with Edgar Zambrano.

Photographer: Marco Bello/Bloomberg

“We’re living in brutal persecution,” [Freddy Superlano](#), a lawmaker who supports Guaidó, said from a location he wouldn’t disclose. “We are hiding, and we will be doing so for a while.”

Guaidó is calling his supporters back into the streets, but they must brave one of the most aggressive roundups of government foes to date. In recent years, the ruling socialists have been quick to jail elected officials, and Venezuela’s high court this week called for the prosecution of 10 lawmakers. Zambrano, like many of those pursued, appeared April 30 with Guaidó and two dozen defecting soldiers on an east Caracas highway in an overture to the armed forces to revolt.

### ‘Illegal Arrest’

On Friday, the U.S. responded to the regime by imposing sanctions on two shipping companies that haul Venezuelan oil and warned security forces they would be punished for taking part in repression. The Treasury Department said [in a statement](#) that the punishment was “a direct response to Sebin’s illegal arrest of National Assembly members.”

The U.S. facilitated the botched uprising and has explicitly warned against touching Guaidó, so Maduro is trying to punish his rivals without incurring the nation’s full fury.

He also must walk a fine line at home as the economy crashes and his approval plummets toward a [single digit](#).

For two months, Guaido and other opposition leaders held secret talks with high-ranking regime officials, but, according to the Trump administration and the opposition, some reneged on a power-sharing deal at the last minute. On April 30, Guaido and his team appeared outside a Caracas airbase before dawn, but the uprising sputtered hours later when top military brass ignored the call to abandon the regime and security forces retook the streets.

The opposition leader has few fresh methods to maintain pressure on Maduro. On Thursday, Guaido called for the Organization of American States to study “all options” and asked his supporters to, yet again, keep the faith in the streets.

The government “wants to persecute congressmen to try to make itself seem stronger,” Guaido told reporters at his Popular Will party headquarters in Caracas. “This will not stop us.”

#### Secret Police Deployed

Late Wednesday, Zambrano, 63, was leaving his Democratic Action party’s main office in eastern Caracas in an armored vehicle when dozens of Sebin agents surrounded the area. After he refused to exit his car, they hauled it away with the lawmaker still inside and live-tweeting as he was pulled by a tow truck to the agency headquarters, known as El Helicoide.

Venezuela’s Supreme Court said Friday that Zambrano had been formally charged with treason, conspiracy and instigating rebellion, and would remain in prison as the trial proceeds. His lawyer, Doria Benahim, said in a interview with Union Radio, that his defense hadn’t been able to communicate with him since he was taken to a preliminary hearing late Thursday evening and did not know where he was being held.

#### ‘Halt Attacks’

Nearly a dozen of Venezuela’s neighbors, the so-called Lima Group, called Zambrano’s detention “arbitrary” in a statement Thursday, while the office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights [called on](#) authorities “to halt attacks on the National Assembly and its members.”

Twenty-eight search warrants have been issued against civilians and soldiers, according to Alonso Medina, a lawyer with the Coalition for Human Rights and Democracy in Caracas. The congressmen are under investigation for supposed crimes including treason, rebellion and criminal intent for backing Guaido.

Three lawmakers have taken refuge in the Argentine and Italian embassies in Caracas, while others are in hiding. Many are regularly changing vehicles, avoiding public meetings and say intelligence police are posted in front of their loved ones' homes. Several lawmakers said threatening messages were scrawled out in graffiti overnight at their homes.

'Don't Respect Anything'

"We are obliged to safeguard ourselves," congressman Luis Florido said Thursday by phone from a location he declined to disclose. "These people don't respect anything."



Leopoldo Lopez outside the Spanish ambassador's residence in Caracas on May 2.  
Photographer: Carlos Becerra/Bloomberg

Leopoldo Lopez, Venezuela's best-known political prisoner and Guaidó's mentor, fled to the Spanish ambassador's residence last week after leaving house arrest to join the insurrection.

All this year, Guaidó -- recognized by the U.S. and about 50 other nations as Venezuela's legitimate head of state -- and his supporters have spearheaded demonstrations they say are aimed at restoring order in a nation [wracked by hyperinflation, hunger and corruption](#).

## 'All Options' Open

The 35-year-old lawmaker invoked Venezuela's charter to launch an interim government in January and rapidly won international recognition after Maduro began another six-year term following 2018 elections that were widely regarded as rigged.

Authorities stripped the opposition leader of his parliamentary immunity [last month](#) after he violated a court order by touring Latin American nations that support regime change in Venezuela. While they have stopped short of touching him directly and instead moved against much of his inner circle, there's a growing sense among the opposition that he could be among the next targets despite the potential international repercussions.

In March, Sebin agents [broke down](#) the door of Guaido's chief of staff, Roberto Marrero, in a pre-dawn raid and detained him on accusations that he was the ringleader of a "terrorist cell." And last month, congressman Gilber Caro, a Guaido confidant who had served almost a year in El Helicoide, was [picked up off the streets](#) and returned to jail. He has not been formally charged.

[Foro Penal](#), a Caracas legal group, says there are 857 political prisoners in Venezuela. Over 130 people been arrested and remain behind bars since the April 30 unrest, the group says.

The U.S. has slapped wide-reaching sanctions on regime officials and key industries, and said "all options are on the table" to force Maduro out of the Miraflores Presidential Palace.

The [sanctions were lifted](#) for ex-Sebin chief Manuel Cristopher Figuera, who defected last week and fled the country. On a video that circulated Thursday, he called for his comrades to follow him.

"Enough with blaming the world for our country's disgraces," he said.

— *With assistance by Fabiola Zerpa*

(Updates with U.S. sanctions in fifth paragraph.)

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