

Trump retaliates after Venezuela's Maduro regime arrests opposition leader's chief of staff

by [Joel Gehrke](#)

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President Trump imposed sanctions on a Venezuelan bank in retaliation for strongman Nicolas Maduro's arrest of two aides to his political opponents, the State Department announced Friday.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's team expelled Venezuela's national development bank, BANDES, from the U.S.-run financial system, along with four subsidiary institutions. The blacklisting took place after regime security services seized Roberto Marrero, who serves as chief of staff to Juan Guaido — the top lawmaker whom Trump and other Western powers recognized as the country's interim president in January. The Maduro regime has also taken the driver of a top Guaido lieutenant into custody.

"The former Maduro regime continues its attack on democracy in Venezuela," State Department deputy spokesman Robert Palladino said Friday. "This action is in response to the unjustified raids of the homes of several Venezuelan leaders, including National Assembly Deputy Sergio Vergara, and the abduction of Roberto Marrero, Chief of Staff to interim President Juan Guaido and Vergara's driver, Luis Aguilar."

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The sanctions are retaliatory, but U.S. officials also justified them by reiterating that Maduro and his loyalists are lining their pockets with national funds. “This action targets a financial institution that the former Maduro regime uses to move money stolen from the Venezuelan people outside of Venezuela,” Palladino said.

A top regional diplomat argued that world powers have a “responsibility to protect” the Venezuelan people from Maduro, in part due to the arrest of Marrero that took place early Thursday morning.

“We want peace in Venezuela; today there is no peace in Venezuela,” Luis Almagro, the secretary general of the Organization of American States, said Thursday. “In Venezuela there is a war, a war declared against the Venezuelan people. There is a dirty war, there is a war that uses conventional and unconventional weapons, like very rights of the people.”

Almagro, the first international figure to call Maduro a dictator early in 2016, was invoking a United Nations doctrine developed to provide a legal basis for intervening to stop atrocities such as the Rwandan genocide and the Srebrenica massacre of Bosnian Muslims by Serbian forces after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The OAS chief stressed that he was not necessarily calling for a military intervention against Maduro, but he argued that it would be “immoral” to dismiss the idea permanently.

“Of course there is a use of force that is illegitimate,” Almagro said. “National sovereignty is not unconditional when it comes to the protection of human rights and the maintenance of a common human notion of dignity. In any case, the principle of the responsibility to protect must be analyzed for Venezuela.”

Sen. Marco Rubio, one of the most prominent supporters of Trump's attempt to oust Maduro, praised the sanctions after warning Thursday night that "Maduro is testing the international community's resolve" by arresting Guaidó's aide.

"President Trump is sending a clear signal to Maduro and his thugs after the wrongful arrest of Roberto Marrero, interim President Guaidó's chief of staff," the Florida Republican said Friday evening. "We will never cease working to stop members of the Maduro crime family from enriching themselves at the expense of the Venezuela people and their democracy."