

US pulls all staff from Venezuela as Maduro blames blackout on 'demonic' Trump plot

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The United States has said it will withdraw all remaining diplomatic staff from Venezuela as Nicolás Maduro accused Donald Trump of masterminding a “demonic” plot to force him from power by [crippling the country's electricity system](#) with an imperialist “electromagnetic attack”.

The secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, announced the decision to vacate the US embassy in the crisis-stricken country's capital, Caracas, late on Monday.

“This decision reflects the deteriorating situation in #Venezuela as well as the conclusion that the presence of US diplomatic staff at the embassy has become a constraint on US policy,” Pompeo [tweeted](#).

Maduro's political foes and many specialists believe the calamitous nationwide blackout that struck last Thursday – and has yet to be resolved – is the result of years of mismanagement, corruption and incompetence.

“We are in the middle of a catastrophe that is not the result of a hurricane, that is not the result of a tsunami,” Juan Guaidó, the opposition leader battling to topple Maduro, [told CNN](#) on Sunday. “It's the product of the inefficiency, the incapability, the corruption of a regime that doesn't care about the lives of Venezuelans.”

But in a televised nationwide address on Monday night Maduro pointed the finger of blame at the White House in what critics condemned as a cynical attempt to deflect criticism of his regime's responsibility.

“The United States' imperialist government ordered this attack,” Maduro claimed in his 35-minute speech, only his second significant intervention since the crisis began last week.

“They came with a strategy of war of the kind that only these criminals – who have been to war and have destroyed the people of Iraq, of Libya, of Afghanistan and of Syria – think up.”

Maduro alleged the US had conducted the attack – in league with “puppets and clowns” from the Venezuelan opposition – in order to create “a state of despair, of

widespread want and of conflict” that would justify a foreign intervention and Venezuela’s military occupation.

But Maduro, who inherited Hugo Chávez’s Bolivarian revolution after his 2013 death, vowed that the supposed attack on Venezuela’s grid would be thwarted.

“Victory belongs to us,” he declared. “What you can be certain of is that sooner rather later, in the coming days, we will win this battle definitively ... We will win - and we will do it for [Venezuela](#). We will do it for our homeland. We will do it for you ... we will do it because of our people’s right to happiness.”

Ominously, he called on Venezuelan citizens and on pro-government paramilitary gangs known as colectivos to resist the “imperialist” onslaught. “The time has come for active resistance,” he said.

Maduro has been fighting for political survival since January when Guaidó declared himself Venezuela’s legitimate leader and was swiftly recognised as interim president by dozens of western nations including the US and Britain.

Maduro’s many opponents – who blame him for a devastating economic collapse that has triggered the most severe migration crisis in recent Latin American history – ridicule his claims that the outage is part of a White House conspiracy.

Anna Ferrera, a student activist in Caracas, said: “They go around and around saying this was sabotage and how the US always sabotages things and the empire is going against Venezuela. But they haven’t given any [credible] explanation.”

“They always make up stories to explain the flaws of the system ... this is outrageous,” added Ferrera, who said she feared many might accept Maduro’s version because the black out had knocked out communication systems across the country, giving his administration a monopoly on information.

Dimitris Pantoulas, a Caracas-based political analyst, said Maduro had appeared “worried, anxious and absolutely desperate” in his Monday night broadcast, suggesting the situation was dire.

“It is clear, from what he said, that the government does not control the situation (nobody does) and they do not have any plan or strategy,” Pantoulas [tweeted](#).

Maduro – who gave no evidence for his claims – gave little hint that an end was in sight to a crisis that [the opposition blames for at least 21 deaths](#) and many fear could plunge the country into violence and turmoil.

“They will insist in their attacks,” Maduro said, calling on Venezuelans to respond with “nerves of steel”.

Speaking to CNN hours earlier, Guaidó said: “Venezuela has truly collapsed already ... You can say with all responsibility that Venezuela has already collapsed.”