

Venezuela: Maduro targets ex-spy chief Figuera in outburst

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The Guardian, Sat 11 May 2019 02.33 BST

General Manuel Cristopher Figuera, who has fled the country, calls on Venezuelans to rise up and ‘build a new state’



Juan Guaidó, Venezuela's opposition leader, at the Popular Will party's headquarters, in Caracas on Friday. Photograph: Martín Mejía/AP

Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, has accused his former spy chief of being a CIA infiltrator who helped mastermind [last week's botched attempt](#) to topple him.

In [a televised address](#), Maduro claimed General Manuel Cristopher Figuera – the most powerful figure to join Juan Guaidó's failed 30 April uprising – had been recruited by US intelligence services in 2018.

This week Figuera released a video statement from outside [Venezuela](#) accusing Maduro and his circle of looting state wealth while “demanding more sacrifices” from citizens, whom he called upon to rise up “build a new state”.

Maduro said Figuera – until last week the the head of Venezuela's feared Bolivarian intelligence service, Sebin – was about to be detained when he defected to throw his weight behind Guaidó's unsuccessful revolt.

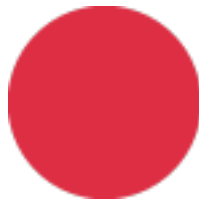
“Justice is coming, you traitor, you sell-out,” Maduro said.

The president, who inherited the leftist Bolivarian revolution after the 2013 death of Hugo Chávez, has presided over a catastrophic economic and social collapse in Venezuela and opponents accuse him of rigging the 2018 presidential election that secured him a second six-year term.

Since January, Guaidó has been leading a push to force Maduro out – with more than 50 governments now recognising the young head of Venezuela’s opposition-controlled parliament as the country’s legitimate interim president.



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But Maduro has continued to enjoy de facto power and, crucially, the support of China and Russia.

In the early hours of 30 April, Guaidó appeared outside an airbase in Caracas flanked by armed men, hoping to break the deadlock by sparking a military revolt against Maduro. Several key regime figures – including Venezuela’s defence minister, Vladimir Padrino López, the head of its supreme court, Maikel Moreno, and Figuera – had reportedly agreed to back Guaidó after weeks of secret negotiations.

But in the end only Figuera switched sides and the revolt fizzled out, forcing the former spy chief to flee the country.

On Friday Maduro said López and Moreno enjoyed his complete confidence and claimed they had helped him thwart the conspiracy by revealing Figuera’s betrayal.

Maduro also rejected claims by the US secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, that he had been ready to abandon Venezuela on 30 April until the Russian government stopped him.

“Never under any circumstance would I flee ... I will never surrender. I will never betray the people,” Maduro shouted to loud cheers from the audience.

“Look into my soul ... and draw your own conclusions about who I am,” Maduro added. “Do you think I’m a coward who runs away? Do you think I’m a puppet?”

For all Maduro’s swagger, analysts believe his position has been severely weakened by the apparent involvement of such close confidants in the conspiracy. “I see him as being extremely nervous ... This is a president who is absolutely immersed in uncertainty,” said Javier Ignacio Mayorca, an expert on Venezuelan security.

Juan Andrés Mejía, an opposition politician who is facing treason charges for his role in the failed uprising, said Figuera’s defection underlined the extent of military discontent with Maduro. “[Figuera] was the head of intelligence and he was one of the people behind this,” Mejía said. “It is clear that the alliance between the military and Maduro is not so stable as he pretends.”

Maduro’s administration has targeted a number of Guaidó-supporting opposition politicians in recent days but he has yet to move against Guaidó himself – a fact

many attribute to fears that doing so might trigger a strong reaction from his backers in the White House.

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