

## Venezuela accuses U.S., Israel, in alleged coup plot with assassinations and kidnappings

[Anthony Faiola](#)

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Venezuela's top government spokesman Wednesday called the country's former spy chief a "traitor," a "mercenary" and a "slave" to the United States, and accused him of working with opposition leaders not only to overthrow the government but also to kill President Nicolás Maduro, his wife and other senior government officials.

Communications Minister Jorge Rodríguez said authorities had foiled a plot this month that would have involved an invasion by Israeli, Colombian and American agents, the seizure of military bases, a raid on the central bank and the assassination or kidnapping of several senior officials.

Rodríguez made the claims less than 48 hours after The Washington Post published an [article based on hours of exclusive interviews with Gen. Manuel Ricardo Christopher Figuera](#), the former head of Maduro's feared SEBIN intelligence agency.

Figuera, who defected in April to join an opposition uprising, described a regime that operated more like an organized criminal enterprise than a functioning government, with pervasive Cuban influence and corruption at the highest levels.

He also alleged new details of the [failed April 30 uprising](#), which he said included the defense minister and the chief justice of the supreme court before they backed out. (Both men have denied involvement and remain in their positions.)

[\*Maduro's ex-spy chief lands in U.S. armed with allegations against Venezuelan government\*](#)

Figuera, now in the United States, rejected Rodríguez's claims Wednesday.

"They are trying to paint us as criminals and not as heroes," he said.

He added that Rodríguez is "trying to discredit me and make me look like a mercenary, because they know that I have morals and that I cannot be accused of the atrocities committed by this criminal enterprise and the bad governance of Maduro and his band of outlaws."

The Colombian government has denied the charge of a plot, as does the United States.

"Maduro, who clearly no longer trusts the Venezuelan military, is desperately repeating the same tired, baseless accusations," Garrett Marquis, a National Security Council spokesman, said Thursday.

Opposition leader Juan Guaidó, the leader of the country's National Assembly, dismissed Rodríguez's account as fiction.

"Once again, another novel by the regime," said Guaidó, who is recognized by the United States and more than 50 other countries as Venezuela's rightful leader. "We are used to it, just as we are used to persecution by the dictatorship. It's the only response they have left."

Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon called the claims "utter nonsense."

[Leer en español: El exjefe de inteligencia de Maduro llega a EE. UU. con acusaciones en contra del gobierno venezolano](#)

During a 90-minute news conference at Miraflores, the presidential palace, Rodríguez played excerpts from what he said were video calls between coup plotters, and referred to a map and photographs of alleged participants. He said authorities had seized 140,000 machine gun cartridges that were to have been used in the plot.

Rodríguez also said Guaidó paid Figuera hundreds of thousands of dollars to free opposition leader Leopoldo López and former police official Iván Simonovis from prison, while leaving a fellow opposition leader, retired Gen. Raúl Baduel, behind bars due to an internal rift. He said Baduel wanted to oust Guaidó and lead a transition himself.

López made a surprise public appearance with Guaidó at the La Carlota military base in Caracas on the morning [of the April 30 uprising](#). Simonovis escaped from prison and is now in the United States.

"The hero of The Washington Post, the key intelligence chief Manuel Cristopher Figuera, ended up being not only a traitor and a slave of the Americans but also a mercenary," Rodríguez said.

Figuera said Wednesday that he never requested nor received money to liberate any prisoner. He said Guaidó signed and he himself authorized pardons for all three men, and he hopes Baduel is liberated soon.

Figuera said no Israeli groups were involved in any negotiations that he was a part of, and he was aware of no plans to assassinate Maduro or any other official.

Rodríguez alleged that the conspirators had divided tasks among three combat groups. One would seek to kill Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, as well as senior official Diosdado Cabello and former Caracas mayor Freddy Bernal. Another would kidnap Interior Minister Néstor Reverol and take over military counterintelligence headquarters and two military bases. The third planned to kidnap Gen. Gustavo

González López, who was named head of the intelligence police after Figuera defected and escaped to neighboring Colombia.

Rodríguez said the plotters planned to rob the central bank to finance “terrorist acts.” He alleged that the Colombian and Dominican governments had offered support.

Figuera denied the claims.

“They know they have made too many mistakes, and they seek alternative facts to negate the morality of those of us who decided to stand on the right side of history,” he said.

He added: “They offend the people with its inconsistency of their declarations. They are an insult to intelligence.”

He called Rodríguez a psychiatrist and an “expert manipulator,” with “all the tools needed to lie efficiently.”

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