

US Special Envoy Abrams Welcomes Venezuela's Former Intelligence Chief to the US, Reaffirms Trump's Commitment to Ousting Maduro

The press conference came as the Venezuelan military called for respect from those looking to break it.

By [Paul Dobson](#)

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*United States Special Envoy to Venezuela **Elliott Abrams** has publicly welcomed Venezuela's ex-intelligence chief to the country after he deserted and joined efforts to oust **President Nicolas Maduro**.*

Manuel Cristopher Figuera, who served as chief of the Bolivarian Intelligence Services (SEBIN) from October 2018 to April 2019, arrived to the US on Monday.

He has recently been sacked and [expelled](#) from the Venezuelan armed forces following his participation in the [failed putsch](#) led by self-proclaimed "Interim President" **Juan Guaido** on April 30, authorising the release of Guaido's ally Leopoldo Lopez, who was under house arrest for his role in the violent 2014 street protests.

Speaking at a press conference Tuesday, [Abrams](#), who is known for his leading role in the Iran-Contra scandal and advising George W. Bush in the lead up to the Iraq war, explained that he was "happy" with Cristopher Figuera's arrival as it "makes it easier to talk to him," adding that he "has many interesting things to say about Maduro."

He also alleged that US authorities had no role in bringing him to the country. Cristopher Figuera claims to have been in hiding under the protection of the Colombia government in Bogota since his desertion. The US [sanctions](#) against him were also lifted in May following his assistance to Guaido's efforts.

While the ex-SEBIN chief is yet to make any public comment from the United States, a recent interview done in Bogota was published on Monday by the [Washington Post](#), in which Cristopher Figuera claims to have a "treasure trove" of information for US authorities about the inner workings of the Venezuelan government.

According to the Washington Post, Cristopher Figuera claimed to have knowledge of government corruption schemes, [Hezbollah](#) and ELN activities in the country, Cuban influence on Maduro, attempts by ministers to form private armies and that Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez and Supreme Court President Maikel Moreno were party to the April 30 putsch. He goes on to explain how he was convinced by a Guaido envoy to join the events of that day.

While Cristopher Figuera alleges to hold evidence to back up these accusations, both Padrino Lopez and Moreno have [publicly rejected his claims](#), suggesting at the time that Figuera had been “bought” by US authorities.

“I’m proud of what I did (...) I thought I would be able to make Maduro see sense. I couldn’t,” the ex-intelligence chief told the Washington Post. “I quickly realized that Maduro is the head of a criminal enterprise, with his own family involved,” he continued.

Abrams also took the opportunity to downplay rumours that US President Donald Trump is losing interest in efforts to oust the Maduro government, pointing to a recent meeting between Trump and Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during which the issue was discussed, as well as the recent launch of the US Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort to South America.

“The notion that there is at the highest levels of the government a diminution of interest [in removing Maduro] is just simply false,” he told press, before adding that the number of countries which recognise Guaido would soon increase, but without offering any further details.

The [Washington Post](#) reported last week that Trump was “losing patience and interest in Venezuela” following successive defeats for opposition leader Guaido, quoting an anonymous former government official. The report also claimed that Trump believed that his team “got played” by Guaido regarding the situation on the ground and real prospects of seizing power.

Abrams’ comments also came on the heels of a [corruption scandal](#) engulfing the Venezuelan opposition which many analysts claim has affected Guaido’s credibility. The scandal centers on the embezzlement of humanitarian “aid” funds by his team, and has led Venezuelan prosecutors to open an [investigation](#) against the opposition leader.

Venezuelan armed forces demand respect

Abrams’ comments coincided with a public [statement](#) from the head of the Venezuelan Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB), Vladimir Padrino Lopez, calling for respect from foreign leaders betting on a rupture in the institution.

The kickback came after Colombian **President Ivan Duque** called on the FANB to “rupture” and to back Juan Guaido.

In an interview with Europa Press over the weekend, Duque reaffirmed that, in his opinion, the overthrow of Maduro should not be democratically done but rather brought about by the armed forces.

“I have been very clear, beyond a foreign military solution, what is needed today is to secure the rupture of the Venezuelan military forces, and that these military forces place themselves on the side of the [National] Assembly and of President Guaido, that they are protagonists in saving their country,” Duque commented, before adding that in his opinion “The military forces in Venezuela are totally fractured.”

In response, the FANB statement called on Duque to show respect and “not waste his time trying to fragment our unity, discipline, morality or loyalty.”

“What would be the reaction of the Colombian government if someone suggested that the military forces of their country broke up and stopped recognising him as president?” the communique asks.

Regarding accusations that the FANB is “fragmented,” the Venezuelan military responded that “This is typical of those who are blind and desperate, who refuse to understand the failure of every effort to break up the nation.”

Opposition leaders and US officials have repeatedly called on the Venezuelan armed forces to break the chain of command and support Guaido’s efforts in ousting the Maduro government, with promises of “amnesty” and lifting personal sanctions.

The armed forces have, however, repeatedly reiterated their commitment to the Venezuelan constitution, including by not allowing right wing forces to violate the country’s border on [February 23](#) as well as following April 30’s failed putsch, when Maduro led exercises in several military bases.

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