

# Spain lines up behind US-led destabilization campaign against Venezuela

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Spain, the former colonial power in Venezuela with substantial investments in the country, has lined up behind the escalating US-led destabilisation campaign against the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

For decades, successive US governments have intervened in Venezuela's affairs, sponsoring coups, like the failed attempt to overthrow the late president Hugo Chavez in 2002, and funding and promoting a right-wing opposition that has organized violent campaigns aimed at destabilizing and bringing down the elected government.

In March, President Barack Obama stepped up the US campaign against Venezuela, formally declaring a "national emergency" to deal with what he termed "the unusual and extraordinary threat" posed to the US by the Venezuelan government citing alleged human rights abuses, violence against opponents and public corruption.

In April, former Spanish Prime Ministers Felipe González (1982-1996) and José María Aznar (1996-2004) joined 23 former Latin American heads of state to sign the Declaration of Panama, which echoes virtually word for word the line emanating from Washington. It declared that in Venezuela, there is "obvious absence of independent justice, there is harassment and persecution of those who demonstrate and express dissent about the above mentioned government, there are repeated acts of torture by State officials, the existence of armed pro-government groups, and a total environment of impunity."

González also agreed to assume the legal defence of the two jailed main opposition leaders—Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma. López, one of the principal Venezuelan recipients of funding through the US National Endowment for Democracy, has been jailed since February 2014 on charges of incitement to riot,

arson and other offences. Ledezma, a veteran right-wing politician and Caracas mayor, has been charged with conspiracy in relation to an alleged plot to carry out terrorist bombings and other attacks.

The fraudulent and hypocritical character of the Panama Declaration is exposed by the anti-democratic history of the governments of both Spanish prime ministers.

During González's 14-year premiership, his Socialist Party (PSOE) government was involved in a "dirty war" against the armed Basque separatist organisation ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom). Aiming to kill ETA's leadership through state-sponsored assassination squads (GAL, Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups), the campaign led to the murder of 29 people and another 30 wounded, most of them on French territory.

González's professed democratic credentials are also exposed by his reaction to the 1989 bloodbath in Venezuela, when the right-wing government of president Carlos Andrés Pérez unleashed the military against the mass protests opposed to the International Monetary Fund's austerity programme, leading to the deaths of 3,000 people. González refused to condemn the massacre, instead phoning Pérez to offer him 600 million dollars to "help him in those critical moments".

Aznar's track record is equally repugnant. In 2002, his Popular Party (PP) government supported the military coup that temporarily ousted Chavez and put pressure on other countries to endorse the US State Department calls for recognition of the "transitional government" of Pedro Carmona.

According to the Inter Press Service News Agency, Carmona "phoned Aznar and met with the Spanish ambassador in Caracas at the time, Manuel Viturro de la Torre, who was accompanied to the meeting by the

US ambassador Charles Shapiro. While Chavez was being held in a military barracks before being restored to power by his supporters and loyal troops, PP parliamentary spokesman Gustavo de Aristegui published an article in the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* endorsing the coup.”

Nearly one year later, the Aznar government, despite the opposition of nine-tenths of the Spanish population, fully supported the illegal US-led war against Iraq, claiming that Iraq’s non-existent weapons of mass destruction represented a military threat to Spain. Spanish troops were then deployed to Iraq in August 2003 as part of the US-led coalition forces, routinely involved in torturing prisoners.

Aznar and his PP government bear their share of responsibility for the deaths of an estimated one million people in that war and its aftermath, and the destruction of an entire society.

That González and Aznar are not acting merely as individuals is shown by the involvement of the Spanish government and Congress in the campaign against Maduro.

In February, PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy met with Leopold López’s wife, Lilian Tintori, and the following month met with Ledezma’s wife, Mitzy Capriles.

Last month, Congress passed a law calling for the immediate release of all “political prisoners in Venezuela”, supported by the ruling PP, the PSOE, Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD), the Catalan nationalist CiU bloc, and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV).

This same Congress, however, raised not a word of criticism against a man proven to have blood on his hands who visited Spain two weeks later. General Al-Sisi, the head of the counter-revolutionary regime in Egypt, was accorded full honours, meeting with the king and Rajoy. Al-Sisi was responsible for the murder of at least 1,000 demonstrators opposed to the July 2013 coup he led against President Mohamed Mursi, who was subsequently sentenced to 20 years imprisonment. Another 1,212 Egyptians have been sentenced to death, and tens of thousands more are languishing in Egyptian prisons.

The PP government has no moral legitimacy to attack Venezuela’s human rights record. It has imposed the Citizens Security Law, commonly called the “Gag

Law”, and changes in the Criminal Procedure Code that legitimise mass surveillance. It has legalised on-the-spot deportation of migrants, which violates international law. At the same time, TV and radio channels under the government’s control have become propaganda pieces that glorify its “achievements”.

These latest developments have led to Maduro accusing Madrid of “supporting terrorism” in Venezuela and of being behind “an international conspiracy to overthrow the government”, and Rajoy of belonging to a “group of corrupt [leaders], bandits and thieves”.

However, Maduro has no answer to the intrigues against Venezuela other than repeated attempts to reach an accommodation with US imperialism. His so-called “Bolivarian Socialist” government continues to provide uninterrupted oil supplies to the US, and transnational banks operating in Venezuela enjoy some of the most profitable conditions in the world.

Maduro is seeking to further militarise his government and acquire more dictatorial powers, which will inevitably be turned against the increasingly impoverished Venezuelan working class and poor in defence of capitalist private property and the interests of the bourgeois layers that form the real social base of his government.



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