

Purge of military, government advances US regime change operation in Venezuela

Andrea Lobo
24 March 2026

The Chavista regime in Caracas headed by Washington's proxy, acting President Delcy Rodríguez, carried out a sweeping overhaul of the government and military command in recent days dressed up fraudulently as an expression of "national sovereignty."

After Washington restored diplomatic relations and reopened its embassy in Caracas earlier this month, what is unfolding is the consolidation of the US-orchestrated coup d'état launched with the January 3 bombing campaign and kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

Rodríguez, who was Maduro's vice president, has named a new defense minister and new chiefs for all branches of the National Bolivarian Armed Forces, including the operational command, army, navy, air force, National Guard and the militia.

Just this month alone, she has carried out replacements in the ministries of Defense, Transport, Hydrocarbons, Electric Energy, Labor, Housing, Higher Education, Tourism and Culture. She had already changed the heads of the ministries of Industry, Communications, Ecosocialism and Water, and the Office of the Presidency.

The bulk of these reshuffles were announced on March 18, with Rodríguez having now made 13 cabinet changes—nearly half of the 32 portfolios. Two days later, on March 20, she announced "new commanders of the Strategic Regions of Integral Defense" (REDI), reshaping the territorial military leadership across the country.

Rodríguez claims that these changes are aimed at guaranteeing "sovereignty, peace, stability and territorial integrity." But the real aim is to consolidate a new power structure directly subservient to US imperialism.

One analysis in the Spanish daily *El País* notes that the military reshuffle is "aligned with the orientation of the cabinet, conceived to retain power and guarantee institutional loyalty." A well-known political observer, speaking to the same paper on condition of anonymity, bluntly stated: "I think that change in the Ministry of Defense could not have been possible without the approval of the United States." Another analyst, Trino Márquez, observed that "Delcy Rodríguez is seeking to define her profile, to remove the 'Madurista' characteristics from her administration."

In other words, eleven weeks after the bombing of Caracas and the abduction of Maduro and Flores, Washington is completing its coup by effectively hand-picking the cabinet and high command through its puppet Rodríguez.

Márquez points out that Rodríguez's first major decision to dissolve the "shadow" of Maduro was removing from his key role Colombian businessman Alex Saab, long accused by US authorities of corruption and money-laundering, but who was charged with circumventing US sanctions.

But the most politically significant step in erasing Maduro's imprint was the replacement of Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López, who had held the post for twelve years and was a central pillar of Maduro's clique.

Padrino has been replaced by General Gustavo González López, a US-trained officer who has specialized in intelligence services and is particularly close to powerful Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello. Despite being sanctioned by the United States in recent years, González López was sent in the 1990s to the notorious School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, for "advanced training" and courses in psychological operations.

Cabello himself, long described as the man who truly controls the security forces, remains at the helm of the Interior Ministry despite a US bounty of \$25 million on his head still in place. He is accused of co-leading with Maduro the so-called Cartel of the Suns, a fictitious entity invented by Washington. Reuters reported that Cabello had held talks with US officials months before the January 3 attack to protect key figures in the US-backed opposition, something he has denied.

What is indisputable is that he has given full support to the sweeping structural changes to the economy and state announced by Rodríguez, which include the appointment of his daughter, Daniella Cabello, as Tourism Minister.

The swearing in of the new military chiefs took place just one day after Rodríguez met with a delegation from the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, alongside Laura Dogu, the chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy who has effectively overseen the regime's transformation step by step.

In addition to that delegation, top-level US political, military and intelligence figures have streamed through Caracas since January 3, including senior State Department officials

responsible for Latin America, Pentagon representatives involved in Southern Command planning, the CIA chief and other and high-ranking members of the intelligence community tasked with “stabilization” and “security cooperation” in Venezuela.

These appointments are not only about purging “unreliable” elements and reshaping the internal balance among rival Chavista factions; they are also meant to reassure global capital with a reliable guarantor of property rights and repression against the working class.

Earlier this month, delegations from Chevron and Shell visited Caracas as they negotiated major deals to expand oil and gas production. Chevron CEO Mike Wirth said Monday that he has seen “progress,” but insisted on further changes to Venezuela’s hydrocarbons regime, with Reuters reporting that executives want contracts placed under US law and subject to international arbitration. These demands build on a new Hydrocarbons Law that already grants foreign companies operational autonomy and the right to sell oil directly, while slashing state royalties.

Trump has given political expression to these corporate appetites, suggesting in a social media post that Venezuela should become the 51st state of the United States. The transformation of Venezuela is aimed at subordinating the country to the US strategic confrontation with China, Russia and Iran, formerly key allies of Caracas.

Reflecting this scramble, business associations have organized at least three investor junkets to Caracas this month alone, featuring meetings with “high-level movers and shakers” in the interim government, as reported by Reuters.

The tone of these delegations is one of barely concealed euphoria at the prospect of exploiting a devastated working class. Years of US sanctions, coupled with the Maduro government’s enforcement of brutal austerity and de facto dollarization, have reduced the Venezuelan economy to roughly a fifth of its previous size, contributed to more than 100,000 excess deaths and forced some 8 million people to flee as refugees.

One investor, Jesse Cole, president of Sky Drop Capital—which shut its Venezuelan manufacturing plant in 2011—told Reuters: “It’s a coiled spring of opportunity. The Venezuela I left, I don’t think is the Venezuela I’m returning to.”

The “opportunity” in question rests on starvation wages, shredded social services and a militarized state apparatus now being refitted to protect foreign capital.

The vast reshuffling of the state and the parade of investors show that the bourgeois nationalists who built their entire project on denouncing the “sellout” (“entreguista”) layers of the Venezuelan bourgeoisie are now handing over the country’s key resources to imperialism. The World Socialist Web Site does not defend “national sovereignty” in a positive sense as a defense of the bourgeois nation-state, but condemns

the current handover of the economy to Washington from the standpoint of the independent interests of the working class.

Workers must not cede to any faction of the ruling class the struggle against imperialism or, for that matter, the defense of a given country against foreign domination. The bourgeois nationalist cliques in power use control of resources above all to exploit workers and maintain their security forces as the ultimate line of defense—not for the people, but for capitalist rule.

The current accommodation of the Chavista establishment to Trump vindicates in the negative the Theory of Permanent Revolution. In the epoch of imperialism, the bourgeoisie in belatedly developed countries is incapable of resolving the basic tasks of democratic development—national independence, land reform and democratic forms of rule—because it is organically tied to world finance capital and terrified of the revolutionary aspirations of “its own” working class. These tasks fall to the proletariat, which must take power on the basis of an international socialist program whose fate, like that of the October 1917 Russian Revolution, depends on the extension of the struggle to the advanced capitalist centers.

This question is of burning urgency today. The drive to “abolish the 20th century” and reimpose colonial shackles on oppressed nations across Latin America, Asia and Africa—through wars, coups, blockades and “shock therapy”—is inseparably linked to explosive economic turmoil, sweeping attacks on social and democratic rights, and the turn toward fascist forms of rule in the United States and other imperialist centers.

The program to fight the US-Chavista regime-change operation in Venezuela is not a return to the bankrupt nationalist illusions of “Bolivarian socialism,” but the conscious, independent mobilization of Venezuelan workers, together with their class brothers and sisters throughout the Americas and internationally, for workers’ power and the socialist reorganization of society.



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