



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 20, 2019

Maduro's Thugs Keep Him in Power While He Loses Support

Despite the Trump administration ratcheting up sanctions against Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro, he remains firmly in control. Even his most dependable support from the slums — the *barrios* — [is fading](#), and yet he remains the supreme authority. His exports of crude oil to U.S. Gulf Coast refineries has ended and yet he continues to rule. Recent sanctions applied to a Venezuela-based gold company were followed by the promise by the U.S. president of getting “a lot tougher” if necessary. Inflation has destroyed the bolivar, and still Maduro dominates the government he has illegally seized.



Many have blamed Maduro' recent loss of popularity among the poor on the *colectivos* — motorcycle gangs of armed thugs trained and supplied by Cuba — that have invaded the *barrios* to quell incipient resistance and blatant opposition to Maduro with force and the threat of force.

In 2017, however, Maduro unleashed another arm of his military, a Special Actions Force of his nationalized police: *Fuerza de Acción Especial de la Policía Nacional Bolivariana*, or FAES. Created to “fight crime and terrorism,” FAES is instead the unheralded but highly effective tool of unlimited violence that keeps Maduro in charge. This from the *Caracas Chronicles*, an opposition website dating back to 2002, [describes how they operate](#):

They arrive at night. They break down doors and windows, they sweep residential areas with gunfire and deploy snipers on the roofs. “The commandos are coming!” “It’s FAES! It’s FAES!”, while jackboots run up the barrio stairs. Long, heavy weapons, black tactical camouflage, always masked, because death is faceless.

They break into your room and drag you from your house. If you resist, they murder you in your own living room. They don’t care that your family’s right there watching, they don’t care that the neighbors can hear when they beat you senseless with steel tubes filled with cement. Silent and deadly, the FAES — the Spanish acronym for the Bolivarian National Police’s Special Action Forces — are police Death Squads in all but name.

One need only ask Cecilia Buitrago how effective this roving gang of murderers is. She was the mother of a street vendor, Jhonny Godoy, who posted a video of himself waving a Venezuelan flag and shouting: “Who are we? Venezuelans! What do we want? Maduro gone!”

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Two days later, FAES raided his home. Let the *Wall Street Journal* tell what happened next:

(bit)Masked police dragged Mr. Godoy from his house, his mother [Cecila Buitrago] protesting, and



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took him to a nearby alley. He was shot in the foot and stomach and had a diaper stuffed in his mouth, which neighbors interpreted as a message to other would-be rebels considering speaking out against Maduro.

“I hear lots of shots, and my son cry out “Jehova! Jehova!,” Cecilia ... told Mr. [Juan] Guaidó in a meeting shortly after the killing.

The corpse was returned to the family two days later, and [Cecilia] remains in hiding.(eit)

Jhonny is just one of an estimated 3,717 extrajudicial killings — murders — FAES has performed in the last two years, according to Families of Victims Committee, a local human rights group. Liliana Ortega, the head of that group, said, “We’re hearing more cases of people who are targeted because they took part in protests. It’s a form of social control to inhibit or discourage these areas from rising up.”

The real number of murders is even higher, reports Keymer Avila, a researcher for the Central University’s Institute of Criminal Science: “According to official figures, 4,998 died in 2017 at the hands of [Maduro’s] state security forces, approximately 14 people a day. What the country is suffering is a slow massacre.... If we use these figures we could estimate that the [Bolivian National Police are responsible for] 30 percent of murders in the country.”

This revelation puts President Trump into the position of having to raise even higher his bar of sanctions to oust the odious dictator from his seat of power in Venezuela. It’s becoming clearer by the day that the final remaining “option” — the military option — is the one that will be necessary to ensure Trump’s desired outcome.

Exercising this option makes Brian Padden nervous. Writing for Voice of America, he said, “The possible use of U.S. military force to oust Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro raises concerns about the possible costs in lives and unintended consequences that may come from committing American troops to fight and die in another foreign conflict.”

Photo: AP Images

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