



# Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro survives alleged drone attack in Caracas

Maduro is making unsupported claims it was “far-right” forces and Colombia.

By Emily Stewart | Updated Aug 5, 2018, 11:33am EDT



Security forces take security measures around the site after an explosion was heard while Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro was attending a ceremony to celebrate the 81st anniversary of the National Guard in Caracas on August 4, 2018. | Anadolu Agency / Getty Images

**Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro** survived an alleged assassination attempt via drone on Saturday when a flying device carrying explosives detonated during a speech he was delivering in Caracas. Maduro, an unpopular leader who has presided over one of the **worst economic collapses** in Latin America in recent history, blamed the “far right,” including Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, for the attack.

Here’s what happened: Maduro on Saturday evening was addressing the crowd at a military parade celebrating the 81st anniversary of the National Guard when a flying device approached and exploded, according to Venezuelan officials.

Footage of the event, which was broadcast on live television, shows Maduro look up mid-speech, while his wife Cecilia Flores, who is standing behind him, flinches. For a few seconds, no one appears to react, as they seem to be processing what’s happened. “Seconds later, there was a second explosion,” Maduro said in a national address recounting the incident. Then, the crowd disperses and people flee.

**#BREAKING** Speech by Venezuela President **#Maduro** cut off during a military parade, soldiers seen running [pic.twitter.com/1mPcrSiDYV](https://pic.twitter.com/1mPcrSiDYV)

— Guy Elster (@guyelster) August 4, 2018

Some images on Twitter capture the chaos and aftermath.

Quisieron poner a prueba lealtades-de la Fuerza Armada y del pueblo sobre todo- y ya ven que somos infranqueables a la hora de defender nuestro proceso revolucionario y a nuestro líder @NicolasMaduro El fascismo No pasará. [pic.twitter.com/Nsa0fY4fOc](https://pic.twitter.com/Nsa0fY4fOc)

— freddy ñañez (@luchaalmada) August 5, 2018

Venezuela's Maduro: Drone attack was attempt to kill him <https://t.co/9ndjIMjscR> [pic.twitter.com/PJvFp8FHKn](https://pic.twitter.com/PJvFp8FHKn)

— Boston Herald (@bostonherald) August 5, 2018

Seven members of the National Guard were harmed in the attack, Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez **said** at a press conference after the incident. He added that Maduro was unharmed and in a “**perfect state of health.**”

“This was an attempt to kill me,” Maduro **later said** in a retelling of what happened. “Today they attempted to assassinate me.”

Firefighters at the scene disputed that account, however, **telling the AP** a gas tank had exploded nearby.

Maduro, 55, said he believed the attempted attack was part of a right-wing plot against him that was working with opponents in Bogota and Miami, including Santos, the outgoing Colombian president. He provided no evidence to back up his accusations. The Colombian government called Maduro’s charges “**absurd.**”

Other countries expressed support for Maduro after the attack, including **Turkey, Syria, Nicaragua,** and **Russia.** Bolivian President Evo Morales in a series of **tweets** expressed solidarity with Maduro and described the attempt as a “crime against humanity.”

A little-known group called Soldiers in T-shirts claimed responsibility for the act, saying they planned to fly two drones at the president, but the devices were shot down. **The AP couldn’t verify the claims,** and the group didn’t respond to a message from the outlet when it reached out for comment.

National Security Adviser John Bolton said in an appearance on **Fox News Sunday** that the United States had “no involvement” in the incident. “If the government of Venezuela has hard information that they want to present to us that would show a potential violation of US criminal law, we’ll take a serious look at it, but in the meantime I think what we really should focus on is the corruption and oppression in the Maduro regime in Venezuela,” he said.

## **The political situation in Venezuela is bad**

Maduro, a former bus driver who took over as president after former President Hugo Chavez died in 2013, has overseen a **catastrophic economic collapse** in Venezuela.

The socialist economy, once thriving, has spiraled since global oil prices dropped in 2014. Venezuelans

suffer from widespread food and medicine shortages, and the **majority of the country is living in poverty**. Seventy-five percent of the country's population lost an average of **19 pounds** of bodyweight between 2015 and 2016, and the International Monetary Fund **expects inflation** in Venezuela to reach 13,000 percent in 2018. **Thousands of Venezuelans** are fleeing the country.

And yet, Maduro remains in power. He **won reelection in May** due to a largely rigged election. He **banned** two of the most popular opposition leaders, Leopoldo Lopez and Henrique Capriles, from running against him, and implied that any Venezuelans who didn't vote for him could lose government food subsidies.

His election is likely to worsen the economic crisis in Venezuela: Instead of electing a reformer who might enact the measures necessary to pull the country out of the state it's in right now — reforms such as addressing its currency exchange policy and diversifying the economy away from oil dependence — the country now has Maduro for another six years. And he remains defiant — in the face of opposition, or alleged assassination attempts.

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**Update:** Story updated with comments from John Bolton.

# Venezuela braces for fallout from apparent drone attack on Maduro

<https://www.facebook.com/anthony.faiola>

by Rachele Krygier and [Anthony Faiola](#) August 5 at 2:31 PM [Email the author](#)

CARACAS, Venezuela — Venezuela braced on Sunday for more possible arrests and potential military purges one day after the government said President Nicolás Maduro had survived an apparent assassination attempt in which drones carrying explosives targeted him in the midst of a nationally televised address.

Interior Minister Nestor Luis Reverol said six “terrorists” had been detained Sunday. He said all the “material and intellectual authors inside and outside of the country” have been identified. He did not provide any further details.

Maduro was unharmed in the incident, which officials said had injured seven soldiers in an extraordinary scene captured on video that showed hundreds of Maduro’s troops seemingly fleeing in panic at the sound of an explosion. Saying a “shield of love” had protected his life, the president accused “far right” extremists linked to Colombia and Venezuelan dissidents living in the United States for the alleged attack during an impassioned speech delivered three hours after the incident.

Although some opposition leaders said they doubted the government’s version, two residents of a nearby building said Sunday they saw the drone, and watched it explode.

“We saw the drone that looked like the size of half a bicycle. It came from the sky and we thought it was a boy playing with it,” said Pedro Peña, 62, who was in a seventh floor apartment with Gladys Miquelena, 56.

Seconds after they saw it, it exploded, he said. “We were scared. It sounded like a bomb.”

There had been reports of a gas leak and explosion, but witnesses dismissed those.

“It was not a gas leak. We have direct gas,” said Catherine Pita, 24, another neighbor. “It was a drone that hit the building and caused the fire. One girl was hit by flying glass on the head and was taken to the hospital.”

**Reverol said there had been two drones, which he identified as M600s.** Neither, he said, reached its intended target area before detonating.

Maduro went so far as to blame Colombia’s President Juan Manuel Santos by name for the attack, prompting Santos’ office to issue an “emphatic denial.”

“The suggestion that the Colombian president is responsible for this supposed attack against the Venezuela president is absurd and lacking in all foundation,” Santos’ office said in a statement. “It is already the custom of the Venezuelan leader to permanently blame Colombia for any type of situation.”

A senior State Department official declined to comment on the incident beyond saying the department was following reports from Caracas.

Maduro said that several suspects had been apprehended. But the government did not disclose their identities, nor did it release further evidence from the scene.

Experts called on the government to release further video footage and evidence.

A video of the incident at 5:40 p.m. Saturday showed first lady Cilia Flores looking up from beside Maduro and putting her hand to her heart, appearing frightened, after an apparent explosion. Maduro is then abruptly cut off during his address to his National Guard. A camera then trains on lines of military personnel in formation in the center of Caracas. Seconds later, the soldiers, as well as figures standing behind barricades, run to one side and Maduro’s voice could be heard saying, “Let’s go to the right.”

“From the footage of the stage and the military scattering, it looks like they saw something,” said David Smilde, a Venezuela expert with the Washington Office on Latin America, a think tank. “But if the government or

someone else does not put out some footage of these drones or the explosions, it should be considered highly suspect. They film everything they do from multiple angles. So it is hard to imagine that they would not have footage of this if it actually happened.”

Venezuela’s opposition leaders cast doubts on the government’s version of the attack. They accused it of looking for an excuse to round up the growing number of army deserters while distracting the public from an economic crisis in which hunger and malnutrition are growing and disease is spreading as hospitals lack even basic medicines.

Seven journalists covering the story were stopped by security forces and interrogated for hours, according to Venezuela’s National Union of Media Workers. All were freed, but some had their cameras confiscated, the union said.

“We were doing videos from our car because it was raining and then we tried to go near Bolivar Avenue to show the situation when national guard and military intelligence approached us,” Neidy Freitas, a reporter for the live-streaming news site VivoPlay said in a video posted on the outlet’s Twitter account. “One of them got in our car... He almost sat on top of me,” she said. “He took my phone, told me to turn off the camera. It was intimidating.”

People who live near where the incident took place said they heard two explosions.

“It remains to be seen if it really was an attack, a chance accident or some of the other versions circulating in the media,” the Ample Front, a coalition of parties and civil society groups, said in a statement. “The responsible thing would be to wait for investigations to be made, but it’s hard to believe what the regime’s bureaucrats say.”

Juan Pablo Guanipa, removed governor of the state of Zulia, tweeted the video of the moment the speech was interrupted, and said, “These images leave us two conclusions. That the regime of Maduro knows it has so much rejection from the people and the military that it puts up an attack to see how much Venezuelan and international solidarity he can gather. And that the armed forces are scared and not willing to defend his life. ”

The incident sent shock waves through Venezuela, a country already on edge. The South American nation is in the thick of a roiling political and economic crisis. With inflation spiraling toward 1 million percent and shortages growing more acute, dozens of officers and soldiers have been arrested by the government in connection with alleged coup plots.

In June 2017, an intelligence police commander flew a helicopter over government institutions and threw grenades at the country’s Supreme Court building. The commander, Oscar Pérez, was executed in January after publishing dramatic videos of his confrontation with military personnel.

Meanwhile, hundreds of soldiers have deserted their posts since Maduro - a former bus driver and the successor to Hugo Chávez, who died in 2013 - won an election in May that opposition leaders and dozens of countries, including the United States, called fraudulent. Maduro has sought to rally his loyalists to defend the nation after suggestions by President Trump that a military solution remains on the table to force Maduro to restore democracy.

Analysts suggested Maduro was likely to use the incident to conduct further purges against military troops suspected of disloyalty.

“He’ll use the incident to radicalize; likely, to purge the military, strengthen his personal guard, and embellish the narrative about being under attack from the U.S. and Colombia and others in a bid for sympathy and support,” said Eric Farnsworth, vice president of the Americas Society and Council of the Americas, a business and culture organization.

A group called “Soldiers in T-Shirts,” who describe themselves as dissident soldiers, took responsibility for the attacks through a Twitter handle that has 90,000 followers.

“The operation was to fly two drones loaded with C4 [explosive] with the presidential stage as the objective. But guard of honor snipers overtook the drones before they reached the target. We demonstrated that they’re vulnerable. We didn’t achieve it today, but it’s a matter of time. #PatriotMilitarymen,” the group tweeted around 7 p.m.

Maduro’s popularity has fallen to less than 30 percent as Venezuelans have become unable to meet their most basic needs.

Maduro, who was speaking at an event celebrating the 81st anniversary of Venezuela's National Guard, was in the middle of a pledge to lead the country toward an economic recovery when the apparent explosion occurred.

"This was an attack to kill me," he said. "Already, the first investigations show that those intellectually and financially responsible for this attack live in the United States of North America, in Florida. I hope the government of Donald Trump is willing to combat terrorist groups that want to attack presidents of peaceful nations."

Faiola reported from Miami.

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