
Venezuela Promotes Official Sanctioned by US

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Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro snubbed the United States Monday by promoting an official sanctioned by President Barack Obama.

Military official Gustavo Gonzalez has been appointed to head the interior ministry – putting him in charge of overseeing domestic security. He had previously served as the head of the Venezuelan intelligence agency SEBIN, along with chairing a high level military coordination body, the CESPPA.

Maduro stated his decision to name Gonzalez interior minister was partly inspired as a response to an executive order by Obama to [impose new sanctions on Venezuela](#).

Maduro described the order as an “imperial U.S. aggression against one of our soldiers, a soldier of the homeland.”

In a statement issued Monday, Obama declared a national emergency considering Venezuela a “threat to national security” and issued sanctions on a list of seven Venezuelan officials, including Gonzalez, who are barred from entering the United States and doing business with U.S. citizens.

Obama’s executive order also freezes any property in the U.S. owned by any of the sanctioned officials.

The White House claimed Gonzalez was singled out for sanctions for overseeing “surveillance

of Venezuelan government opposition leaders” as the head of SEBIN.

Last month, the Venezuelan government said it had obtained evidence that a number of senior opposition figures had plotted a violent coup aimed at overthrowing Maduro, with U.S. support.

The White House also accused Gonzalez of presiding over a crackdown on opposition protests, and claimed SEBIN injured and repressed protesters.

A wave of anti-government unrest in early 2014 left around 40 people dead. Most of the casualties were government supporters or innocent bystanders, many of which were [killed by armed anti-government groups](#).

Opposition groups have accused SEBIN officials of being involved in the deaths of two protesters. The deaths occurred on Feb. 12, 2014, when opposition demonstrators allegedly threw rocks at security forces.

Eight SEBIN personnel were arrested in connection to ensuing clashes that left two of the protesters dead. The incident also prompted Maduro to fire SEBIN's then head Manuel Bernal and replace him with Gonzalez.
