

# **BREAKING: VENEZUELA HAS WORSE HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS THAN SAUDI ARABIA ... ?**

President Obama imposed sanctions on a number of Venezuelans yesterday, including – among others – the woman prosecuting Caracas Mayor Antonio Ledezma Diaz, Katherine Nayarith Harington Padron. Apparent intelligence officers seized Ledezma on February 20, and since then, Nicolas Maduro, has been tying Ledezma's seizure to a purported coup plan launched by exiles in the US, but also using the tools of American hegemony.

President Maduro played the audio of a conversation held between Carlos Manuel Osuna Saraco, a former Venezuelan politician living in New York, and a soldier, in which Osuna dictates the statement that the rebel soldiers should read out during the coup.

The Venezuelan leader informed viewers that he would soon call upon the United States to extradite the suspect Osuna for trial in his home country.

Maduro also noted that in addition to the call from Osuna's base in New York, there was a second phone call from Miami.

Ledezma was in constant coordination with Osuna in New York via telephone.

[snip]

Maduro also showed a copy of a new "100-day Plan for Transition", designed by the coup plotters and the opposition, which stipulated a series of measures which would be implemented by the planned governing junta.

The plan would take effect immediately after the coup, calling for early elections and the privatization of all public services.

The transitional government would request all of the current Venezuelan officials to turn themselves into the police within a period of 180 days. It also requested every Cuban worker within the government to turn themselves in unarmed to their local police station.

The plan also contemplated a role for the IMF, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank to intervene in the Venezuelan economy.

In response, the US has been saying Maduro is making this whole coup thing up, even accusing him of making up some of the intelligence he was showing to make his case.

And then, even while claiming Maduro was making shit up about the US engaging in economic war and using its tools of hegemony to conduct regime change in Venezuela, President Obama used its dominant financial position to undermine Maduro's regime.

The order imposing sanctions, like all such orders, makes a convoluted explanation for why the US has to use its purported capitalistic tools against foreigners. First, because Venezuela poses a threat to US national security.

I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, find that the situation in Venezuela, including the Government of Venezuela's erosion of human rights guarantees, persecution of political opponents, curtailment of press freedoms, use of violence and human rights violations and abuses in response to antigovernment protests, and arbitrary arrest and detention of antigovernment protestors, as well as

the exacerbating presence of significant public corruption, constitutes an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States, and I hereby declare a national emergency to deal with that threat.

It then defines sanction targets as those who undermine democratic processes, engage in violence or human rights abuses (including – though purportedly not limited to those involved in anti-government protests), those that limit freedom of expression, and those involved in public corruption.

(ii) any person determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State: (A) to be responsible for or complicit in, or responsible for ordering, controlling, or otherwise directing, or to have participated in, directly or indirectly, any of the following in or in relation to Venezuela: (1) actions or policies that undermine democratic processes or institutions; (2) significant acts of violence or conduct that constitutes a serious abuse or violation of human rights, including against persons involved in antigovernment protests in Venezuela in or since February 2014; (3) actions that prohibit, limit, or penalize the exercise of freedom of expression or peaceful assembly; or (4) public corruption by senior officials within the Government of Venezuela;

The fact sheet on these sanctions also argues Venezuela is the among the most corrupt countries in the world (but doesn't mention that it ties with Yemen, and beats out Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as allies like Uzbekistan – all of also which rank much worse for human rights abuses than Venezuela.

In other words, the Administration is claiming that Venezuela's corruption and human rights abuses present a much bigger threat to the US than a string of countries we've already destabilized that are worse in terms of corruption and human rights, as well as (in the latter category) Egypt and Saudi Arabia's more severe human rights abuses.

All of which is receiving more scrutiny than it normally would, not least because the claim that Venezuela is a threat to US national security is so obviously bullshit.

As an official whose identity couldn't be revealed because Obama's is the Most Transparent Evah™ explained the other day, it's actually normal for the government to claim that sanction targets are a threat to this country.

So I can start off and say in terms of how unusual this is, most of our sanctions programs began with the declaration by the President of a national emergency that results – that's a threat to the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States. And so most of the sanctions programs that we have, from Iran to Syria, Burma, across the board, rely on these same types of national emergency declarations.

So in that sense, it's a usual part of the process. And we have somewhere between 20 and 30 sanctions programs, depending on the way you measure them, that are based on these same types of national emergency declarations.

Either the same or another SAO insisted that this is not about the US bigfooting in Venezuela.

Can I just also – let me just say that there's been a lot of commentary about interference in internal affairs of

other countries by the Venezuelan government. The actions we take today are clearly sovereign actions by a country about its own financial system. These actions we take are sovereign decisions about who comes into the United States. They're not actions taken to involve ourselves in another country.

Other countries – notably Russia and China – are both affirmatively rolling out measures to counter our dominance in the financial world, in ways that could significantly undermine our obviously selective choice for sanctions targets. Whatever else these Venezuela sanctions do, they will also likely elicit more scrutiny of just how illegitimate our use of sanctions is (and to a significant extent, has long been).