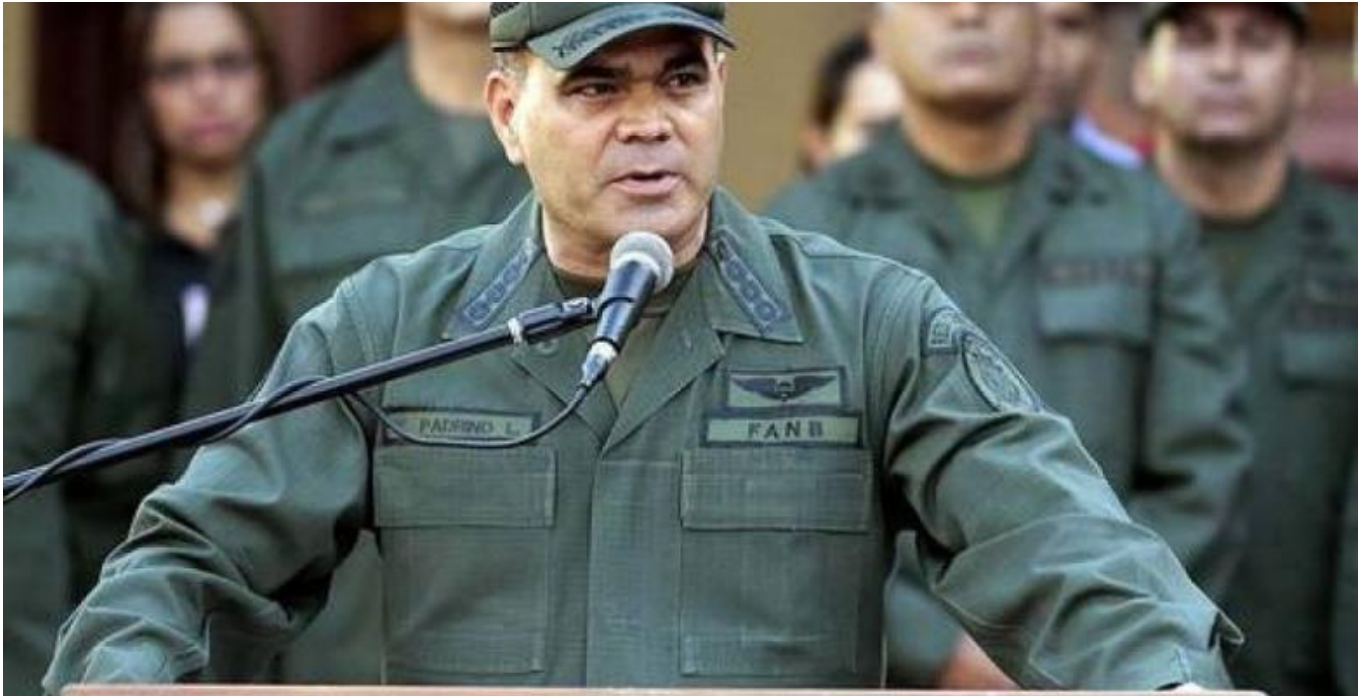

Venezuelan Army Calls Removal of Bolivar and Chavez Pictures an "Insult"

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Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino read out an FANB statement, which spoke of its united and "deep indignation over the disrespectful manner, full of arrogance and scorn with which the removal of the photos has been ordered."

At the ceremony in Caracas at the Cuartel de la Montaña, attended by government representatives, several army officials and soldiers, Padrino called the removal of the pictures "an insult to the FANB, to military pride and to the entire country."

The statement added Simon Bolivar is the "father of the nation" and a "sacred symbol" for Venezuelans and his portraits "have and always will, invite admiration and respect."

The text also called the Supreme Commander Hugo Chavez a distinguished son of the nation, grounded in "Bolivar's ideology and action," who set out to "rescue a people oppressed by an oligarchy."

Ramos Allup defended his decision to have the pictures of Chavez and current President Nicolas Maduro removed, saying it was an outrage to the independence of the legislative power.

He also clarified his instructions to cart away pictures of national hero Bolivar were only directed against the ones that were a simulation of his face as a result of an analysis of his bones ordered by Chavez, and did not affect any of the Liberator's original paintings.

The new AN president reiterated the only portrait that will remain during his tenure is the original depiction of Simon Bolivar, and not "a fake copy made by a computer."