

Venezuela Calls for Defensive Military Exercise

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Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro called on the Venezuelan population to participate in a “defensive military exercise” this weekend in light of the declaration of Venezuela as a “threat to national security” by the United States.

“Venezuela must be prepared, we must preserve (the country) as a land of peace,” Maduro said Tuesday.

U.S. President Barack Obama declared Venezuela [an “unusual and extraordinary threat”](#) to the United States earlier this week, prompting fears that the U.S. is laying the foundation for a military intervention in Venezuela. The Venezuelan leader pointed to the fact that such a declaration have been passed prior to invasion of countries by U.S. forces, including before invading Panama in 1989, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the 2011 bombing of Libya.

Maduro underscored that Venezuela poses no threat to any nation.

“Venezuela is not and will never be a threat to the U.S. nor to any other country in the world because we are a peaceful, humanist people, that has international policy that seeks understand and the integration of peoples throughout the world,” said Maduro.

The Venezuelan president has long insisted that the threats to peace in the country come from the domestic opposition and their allies in the United States who have sought to oust elected governments since former President Hugo Chavez was elected in 1998. From the 2002 coup

against Chavez and [the recently thwarted coup plot](#), to opposition led violence last year that [claimed 43 lives](#), the country's right-wing opposition and its U.S. backers have continuously been a threat to democracy.

Following the 2002 U.S.-backed coup against him, Maduro's predecessor Chavez created what is known as the National Bolivarian Militia, which is composed of ordinary civilians who receive military training. Chavez repeatedly stated that the Bolivarian Revolution was a peaceful revolution, but also one that was armed and prepared to defend itself.

"Venezuela is not, and can never be Libya nor Iraq, Venezuela is Venezuela, a land of peace, and we must keep it that way," said Maduro.

[Analysts have speculated](#) that U.S. President Obama's declaration is a prelude to a military aggression, such as those launched in Iraq and Libya.

Vladimir Padrino Lopez, the Venezuelan minister of defense, reaffirmed the Venezuelan armed forces' loyalty to President Maduro, saying that the armed forces offer their "most emphatic and forceful rejection of those who wish to meddle in the internal affairs of our country."

On Wednesday, the Venezuelan National Assembly [passed an enabling law](#) that allows President Maduro to act to protect the peace against recent threats made by the Obama administration.

Meanwhile, regional leaders from the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) are planning a meeting for next week to respond to the U.S. threat against Venezuela.

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