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Maduro: US trying to ‘defeat’ Venezuela govt with sanctions, we’ll fight back

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Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has accused the US of trying to “defeat” and “intervene in” his government, after Washington labeled Caracas a national security threat and implemented sanctions against seven of its officials.

“President Barack Obama, representing the US imperialist elite, has personally decided to take on the task of defeating my government and intervening in Venezuela to control it,” Maduro said in a national TV address. “That’s why they have taken today’s measure.”

Maduro called the move a “colossal mistake” and “imperialist arrogance” similar to that of former US leaders such as Richard Nixon and George W. Bush. He stressed on Monday that will be asking the National Assembly for decree powers through a so-called Enabling Law to “preserve peace” and “fight imperialism.”

Moreover, Maduro called the sanctioned officials “heroes.”

“I congratulate them,” he said, adding “it’s an honor” to be included on the US sanctions list. Maduro even named one of the sanctioned officials – national intelligence head Gustavo Gonzalez, the new interior minister.

US President Barack Obama signed and issued the executive order, which the White House

claims targets Venezuelan officials who participated in human rights abuses.

“Venezuelan officials past and present who violate the human rights of Venezuelan citizens and engage in acts of public corruption will not be welcome here, and we now have the tools to block their assets and their use of US financial systems,” White House spokesman Josh Earnest said in a statement.

“We are deeply concerned by the Venezuelan government’s efforts to escalate intimidation of its political opponents,” he added.

The full list of Venezuelan officials sanctioned includes Gonzalez, the head of state intelligence service, Manuel Perez, the director of the national police, a former National Guard commander in charge of state mining firm CVG, Justo Noguero, three military officers and the state prosecutor.

Washington and Caracas have been at odds with each other since Venezuela's iconic former leader Hugo Chavez came to power in 2000. The two had not had full diplomatic representation since 2008.

The most recent escalation involved Maduro announcing a new mandatory visa requirement for all Americans visiting the country on March 1. He referred to the move as a reciprocal measure and now all Americans will have to pay tourist visa fees equal to what “a Venezuelan pays to travel to the US.”

At the same time, Maduro asked to review and reduce the number of US diplomatic staff in the country, after allegations of “conspiratorial meetings” against Venezuela.

Earlier in February, Maduro accused America of being behind the attempted coup in Venezuela.

“The northern imperial power has entered a dangerous phase of desperation, going to talk to the continent’s governments to announce the overthrow of my government. And I accuse Vice-President Joe Biden of this,” Maduro said.

Later that month, Venezuela’s leader announced that the country successfully defeated an alleged US-sponsored coup, adding that a plot involved an attack on the presidential palace or another top target.