

Country Reports on Terrorism 2021:

Venezuela

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Overview: The United States recognizes the Interim Presidency of Juan Guaidó and the 2015 National Assembly. Nicolas Maduro continues to claim to be the leader of Venezuela and retains control and the loyalty of the Venezuelan Armed Forces (FANB). Members of the Maduro regime continue to engage in criminal activities and members of several Colombian FTOs — including the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), *Segunda Marquetalia*, and the National Liberation Army (ELN) — continue to operate in Venezuelan territory with relative impunity.

Clashes among terrorist organizations and between these organizations and elements of the FANB increased in 2021, especially in Apure state, bordering Colombia. Nonetheless, ELN, FARC-EP, and *Segunda Marquetalia* continued to expand their presence inside Venezuelan territory, according to local experts. On May 11, local NGO *FundaRedes* reported the presence of ELN in 17 of Venezuela's 23 states, as well as in the capital city of Caracas. *FundaRedes* reported FARC-EP and/or *Segunda Marquetalia* presence in 14 of the 23 states, as well as in Caracas.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: The regime's complicated relationship with terrorist groups continued to be characterized by both conflict and cooperation. The Venezuelan Armed Forces and the Venezuelan police Special Action Forces (FAES) began to clash more frequently with armed terrorist groups, especially with forces from the FARC-EP in Apure state led by Miguel Botache Santillana (alias Gentil Duarte) and Fabian Guevara Carrascal (alias Ferley).

- On February 15, the National Anti-Drug Office reported a clash between FAES and FARC-EP fighters that resulted in two FARC-EP killed, after the militants were reportedly caught unloading 192 cocaine pans in Muñoz municipality, Apure state. One officer was injured, while another man was arrested by Venezuelan forces.
- On March 21, the FANB and FAES launched Operation Bolivarian Shield 2021 in Apure state to root out the presence of FARC-EP; however, some observers have publicly speculated that elements of the regime were acting in alliance with ELN and *Segunda Marquetalia* to maintain control over lucrative smuggling routes. For more than two months, regime forces clashed with FARC-EP, resulting in at least 16 military casualties, 40 wounded, and 12 kidnapped by FARC-EP.
- The total number of casualties from the FARC-EP side remains uncertain, but Vladimir Padrino López, a regime member claiming to act as defense minister, said at least six were killed and another 30 detained. The FANB also reported dismantling nine camps, including one that produced cocaine. Local NGOs *Provea* and *FundaRedes* reported the extrajudicial killings of five Venezuelan citizens in Apure and 30 illegal detentions against regular citizens framed as members of irregular groups. These civil society groups alleged the FANB planted evidence to imply unaffiliated civilians were involved with armed groups and to demonstrate false successes.
- On April 23, an estimated 300 FARC-EP fighters launched an ambush against 28 FANB soldiers and two helicopters in La Capilla town. NGO *FundaRedes* reported the deaths of 12 soldiers, later confirmed by a statement released by the FANB. Through a video recorded on May 4, presumably filmed under coercion, eight kidnapped FANB soldiers requested that Venezuelan authorities negotiate their release in exchange for not

confronting the presence of the FARC-EP in Apure state. *FundaRedes* said in public statements that at least three encounters between the irregular group and Venezuelan authorities took place to discuss this proposal, but none were confirmed by the regime. On May 31, the FANB abruptly retreated from Apure.

- On June 1, the regime reported the release of the eight detained. On April 28, the interim government had passed a decree on the Apure events that accused the FANB of protecting *Segunda Marquetalia*, in violation of Venezuela's constitution and national security.

Members of *Segunda Marquetalia* including one of its leaders, Jesús Santrich, were reportedly killed in Venezuelan territory in 2021. In December, Colombian Defense Minister Diego Andrés Molano Aponte confirmed the death of Hernán Darío Velásquez, alias “El Paisa,” and Henry Castellanos Garzón, alias “Romaña,” in Venezuela.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There were no changes to Venezuela's counterterrorism legislation in 2021. The regime's usurpation of the judicial system and military/security services for its own illicit ends, rampant public corruption, and cooperation with criminal elements continued to provide ideal conditions for illegal activity. The regime continued to target political dissidents and civil society groups using terrorism charges.

In July, the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (called SEBIN) unjustly detained the founder and director of *FundaRedes*, Javier Tarazona, and two other *FundaRedes* members, Omar de Dios García and Rafael Tarazona. The three were held incommunicado from family or legal representation, without specification from regime authorities of the reason for their arrest, according to public reporting and Amnesty International. The trio subsequently were charged with treason, terrorism, and incitement of hatred in the “Third Control Court for Terrorism.” García and Rafael Tarazona were released on October 26, while Javier Tarazona remains in prison. The detention of Tarazona is linked directly to his work covering the Apure events.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Venezuela is a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF). Venezuela's FIU is a member of the Egmont Group. In 2021, the Maduro regime tried to implement new legal means to monitor and control human rights and humanitarian organizations under the guise of “antiterrorism” measures. In March, the Maduro regime published Administrative Ruling 001-2021, which requires NGOs to register with the Office Against Organized Crime and Terrorism Financing (or ONCDOFT). Upon registration, NGOs are required to provide documents such as their articles of incorporation, bylaws, a list of national and international donors, a list of their overseas headquarters, and a list of all beneficiaries of their services.

The regime pointed to CFATF recommendation 8, which requires that the laws and regulations that govern NGOs be reviewed so they cannot be used for the financing of terrorism, as the reason for the new requirement. NGOs objected to the new requirement, noting it held a base assumption that criminalized the work of NGOs by forcing them to register with an agency intended for antiterrorism efforts. In April, more than 700 civil society organizations denounced Administrative Ruling 001-2021 as unconstitutional and cited as dangerous the need to supply the regime with a list of their beneficiaries. In May, the requirement was amended and replaced by Administrative Ruling 002-2021, which excluded the need for a list of beneficiaries and lessened the penalties for noncompliance. The timeline to adhere to the new requirement also was changed, although the deadline for registering remained unclear. NGOs reported that compliance was not enforced in 2021.

Countering Violent Extremism: There were no known CVE efforts under way in 2021.

International and Regional Cooperation: Analysts continued to warn of increasing ties between the regime and Iran. Flights between both nations continued using sanctioned airlines Conviasa and Qeshm Fars Air, with reports that the flights may have been used to shuttle oil production materials and unspecified military equipment. In June, two ships that departed from Bandar-e ‘Abbās port in Iran were thought to be headed to Venezuela carrying weapons, before they diverted

to Russia late in their journey. On October 18, regime Foreign Minister Felix Plasencia visited Iran and met with President Ebrahim Raisi. The two sides reported discussing strategic relations as well as a roadmap for the two countries' relations over the next 20 years. Plasencia announced Maduro's intention to visit Iran in 2022.