

## How a revolution broke its own arm

Antonio De La Cruz

*Executive Director*

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*"If there is one institution that has truly adapted and advanced in the revolutionary process of 21st-century Bolivarianism, it is the FANB." - Vladimir Padrino López, Venezuelan Minister of Defense*

Among the darkest tragedies in Latin America—today epitomized by Venezuela—is the systematic transformation of the armed forces into political castes serving power, not the nation. Nothing corrodes a republic more profoundly than the politicization of its barracks. This is the story of how armies once created to protect sovereignty and constitutional order end up surrendering their ranks to the autocrat of the day—not out of loyalty, but fear, convenience, or crude servility.

In Venezuela, this transformation has reached its most grotesque form. Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López recently let slip a confession he likely never intended to make public. In a heated speech, he praised the military's ability to "adapt" to the demands of the so-called Bolivarian revolution. In doing so, he inadvertently revealed what the Maduro regime has worked tirelessly to conceal beneath layers of propaganda: the National Bolivarian Armed Forces (FANB) are no longer a professional body devoted to the republic—they are a domesticated tool of authoritarian control.

### A Broken Institution

Few outsiders fully grasp the internal fractures that run through Venezuela's military establishment. According to the human rights group Foro Penal, of the 920 political prisoners currently held in Venezuela, 169 are active or former members of the armed forces. Their crime: dissenting, or refusing to blindly participate in the regime's machinery of repression. These numbers, persistent for over a decade, are the clearest evidence that not all in uniform have been co-opted. Beneath the surface of coerced obedience lies a core of institutionalists—officers who quietly watch as the institution they once vowed to serve is rendered unrecognizable.

The Maduro regime, like any criminal autocracy, distrusts professionalism. Instead, it has adopted the Cuban model: turning military intelligence into watchdogs, sowing suspicion as a method of command, and distributing privileges not by merit but by party loyalty. The G2—the Cuban intelligence service and relic of Stalinist surveillance in the Caribbean—has been imported wholesale into Venezuela, a guard dog rather than a partner.

## **An Army Without a Soul**

The result is a hollowed-out military. At best, the FANB is a loose collection of fractured groups, generals competing for control of illicit enterprises, factions answering to rival loyalties. At worst, it is a repressive apparatus servicing a mafia state in decay. The Army has been stripped of doctrine; the Navy relegated to logistics; the Air Force rendered invisible. The National Guard has morphed into a political police force, obeying no unified chain of command but rather the conflicting agendas of civilian power brokers.

Who commands the FANB today? The answer is complex—and deeply unsettling. Maduro still has Padrino López at his side. But Diosdado Cabello, the regime’s feared enforcer, commands his own faction and clings to the National Guard as his last redoubt. Cuban advisors monitor, but do not command. And the Rodríguez siblings, civilian operators with military influence, pull strings behind palace walls. What remains is an army without a soul: fractured, surveilled, corrupted. And within that fragmentation lies a ticking bomb.

## **Decline Before Collapse**

Every enduring dictatorship eventually turns its military into a custodian of its own decay. Instead of guaranteeing democracy, the armed forces become its executioner. And yet, history offers a paradox: that same military, if it remembers its constitutional duty, can become an agent of redemption.

Today, Venezuela is ruled by a mafia regime that no longer governs—it merely manages fear, silences dissent, and surveils its own sentinels. Still, even within the broken, politicized, and closely monitored FANB, a seed of dignity endures. There are officers—quiet, sidelined, barred from the feast of power—who may one day refuse to let their country slip irretrievably into barbarism.

The question is no longer if the barracks will awaken.

*It is whether they will awaken in time.*