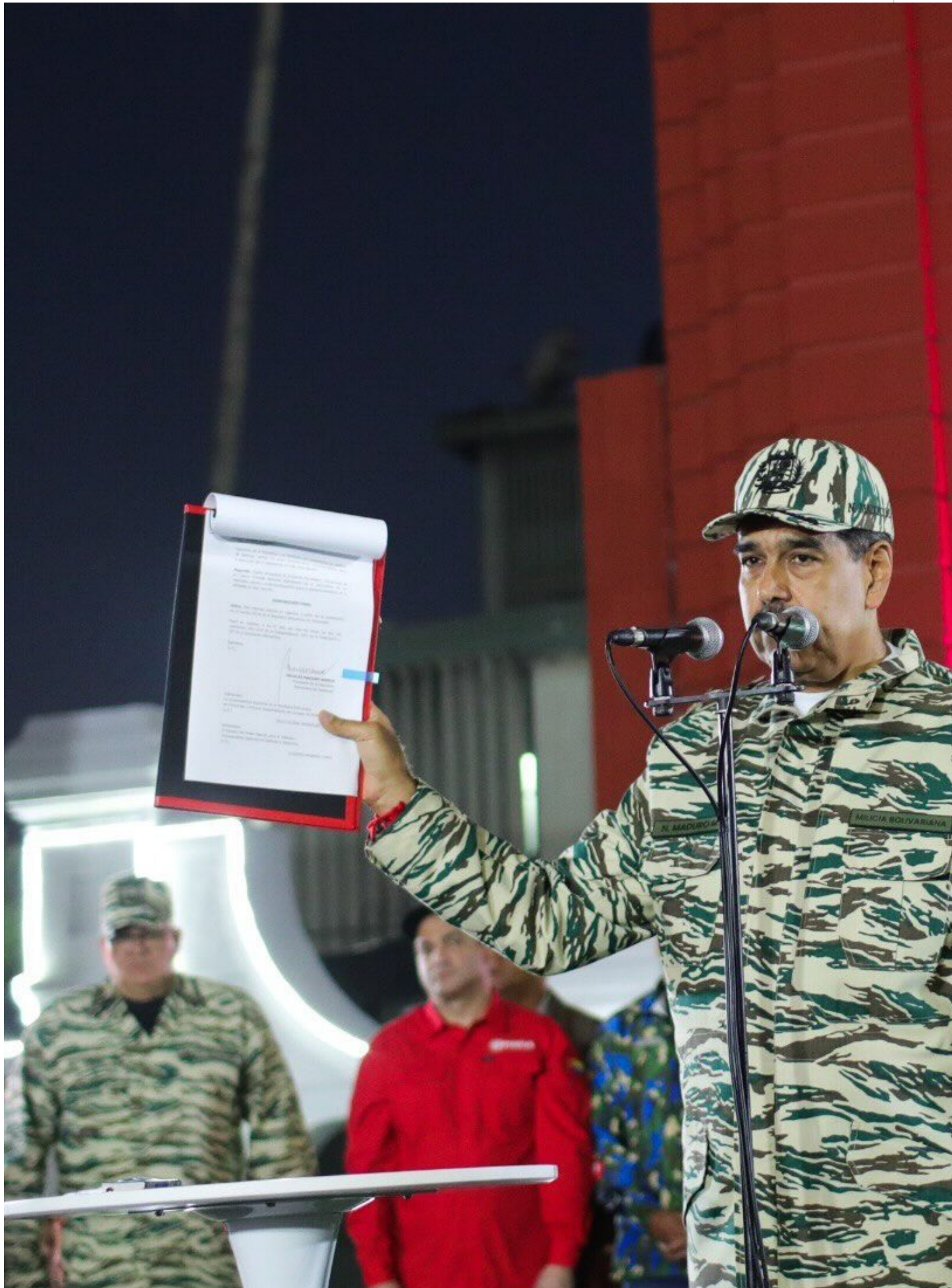


*Venezuelan president affirms  
U.S. nationals among group of  
mercenaries detained*

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Caracas, January 8 (RHC)-- Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has announced the arrest of a group of foreign mercenaries, including Colombian and U.S. citizens, who were plotting to prevent his inauguration later this week.

Maduro said on Tuesday that the group was planning “terrorist acts” ahead of the inauguration ceremony on Friday, describing them as two Colombian “hitmen,” three mercenaries from the war in Ukraine and two U.S. citizens. He said the detained Americans were “very high level,” but he did not provide further details or evidence of the arrests.

“Just today, we’ve captured seven foreign mercenaries, including two important mercenaries from the United States,” he said in a broadcast on state television, before declaring a mass deployment of police and military across the country. “I am sure that in the next few hours, they will confess,” he added.

Maduro, who is set to take office for a third term on Friday following last July’s contested election, said the group was captured in unspecified parts of Venezuela.

In remarks delivered from the Miraflores presidential palace, he also said that security forces had captured a total of 125 foreign mercenaries from 25 different countries. He said they had entered the South American nation “to commit terrorist actions against the Venezuelan people.”

Neither the U.S. Department of State nor Colombia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately responded to requests for comment.

The latest arrests came just hours after U.S. President Joe Biden met with Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez at the White House in Washington, DC.

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