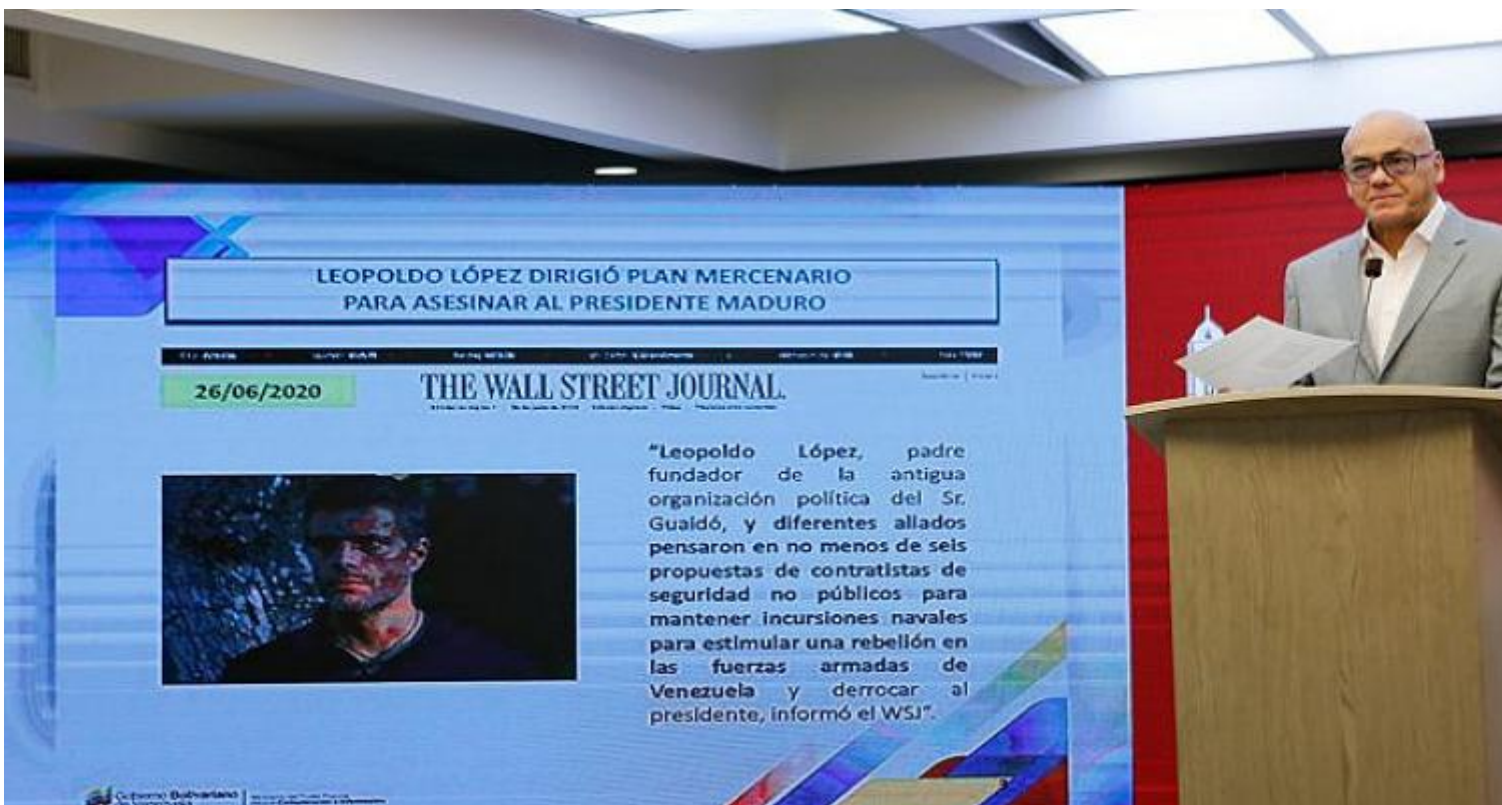


Venezuela slams Spain for harboring criminal opposition figure



Caracas, June 28 (RHC)-- Venezuela has voiced a strong protest against Spain for harboring an opposition figure involved in planning a recent incursion to kidnap President Nicolas Maduro.

Leopoldo Lopez, who is under Spain's protection at the country's embassy in Caracas, has been identified as the mastermind of an abortive incursion to kidnap Maduro in May.

"Does the Spanish ambassador know that Leopoldo Lopez has held and continues to hold video conferences with the sole purpose of going on with his plans to assassinate President Nicolas Maduro?" Venezuela's Communications Minister Jorge Rodriguez said. He described Lopez — who is considered to be the mentor of opposition leader Juan Guaido — as a "criminal."

Back in May, a group of mercenaries attempted to intrude into the northern Venezuelan state of La Guaira on speedboats in a gung-ho operation to kidnap Maduro. Venezuela's military foiled that attack, killing eight of the armed men and arresting several others, including two U.S. citizens who were working as paid mercenaries.

In an article titled “Venezuelan Opposition Guru Led Planning to Topple Maduro,” The Wall Street Journal recently described how “López and allies shopped for mercenaries” among different private security firms, looking for ex-military contractors willing to take part in a coup against the Maduro government.

Guaido plunged the country into political turmoil after he unilaterally declared himself “interim president” of Venezuela in January last year. Later, with Washington’s assistance and receiving help from a small number of rogue soldiers, he launched a botched coup attempt against the elected government.

Leopoldo Lopez, who had been under house arrest since 2014 for inciting violence during anti-government protests, fled to the Spanish Embassy in Caracas in April 2019 and has lived there ever since, as the Spanish government refuses to hand him over to Caracas.

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