

Venezuela seizes three Colombian combat boats and weapons



Caracas, May 9 (RHC)-- Venezuela's military has seized three abandoned Colombian light combat vessels that soldiers found on Saturday while patrolling the Orinoco River, several days after the government accused its neighbour of aiding a failed invasion.

The boats were equipped with machine guns and ammunition but had no crew, the defense ministry said in a statement, adding they were discovered as part of a nationwide operation to guarantee Venezuela's "freedom and sovereignty."

"The unmanned ships are Boston Wheeler model speedboats, each with two Evinrude brand 175 HP engines, armed with 50mm and M60 caliber machine guns, and their respective ammunition," the National Bolivarian Armed Forces, the FANB, reported.

"All this material is in custody... The Public Ministry and other Venezuelan institutions will carry out the corresponding investigations."

The discovery of this military material happened while the Venezuelan armed forces was executing the actions under the command of the "Bolivarian Shield," which is a military operation that President Nicolas Maduro's administration implements to prevent the country from being attacked by foreign aggressors.

"The patrol and search work continues throughout the national territory, as part of the operation Bolivarian Shield so as to guarantee the Nation's freedom, sovereignty, and independence," Defense Minister General Vladimir Padrino Lopez explained.

Venezuela has charged two former U.S. soldiers with "terrorism" and "conspiracy" for allegedly taking part in a failed armed incursion aimed at toppling Maduro.

Luke Alexander Denman and Airan Berry were among 31 people captured by the Venezuelan military, which said it thwarted an attempted invasion by mercenaries in the early hours of May 3rd.

Prosecutor General Tarek William Saab said on Friday they had been charged with "terrorism, conspiracy, illicit trafficking of weapons of war and [criminal] association", and could face 25-30 years in prison. Several attackers were reportedly killed in the ill-fated incursion.

Saab said Venezuela requested an international arrest warrant for the capture of Jordan Goudreau, a former U.S. Army veteran who leads a Florida-based company that says it offers paid strategic security services. Goudreau said in media interviews admitted that he organized the operation in Venezuela.

Maduro has accused U.S. President Donald Trump of being directly behind the invasion, which came at a time of high tension between Washington and Caracas, and Saab said on Friday the Venezuelans involved would be tried for "conspiracy with a foreign government."

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