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Obama declares Venezuela a threat to U.S. national security

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WASHINGTON, March 9 (Reuters) - U.S. President Barack Obama issued an executive order on Monday declaring Venezuela a national security threat, sanctioning seven individuals and expressing concern about the Venezuelan government's treatment of political opponents.

"Venezuelan officials past and present who violate the human rights of Venezuelan citizens and engage in acts of public corruption will not be welcome here, and we now have the tools to block their assets and their use of U.S. financial systems," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said in a statement.

"We are deeply concerned by the Venezuelan government's efforts to escalate intimidation of its political opponents. Venezuela's problems cannot be solved by criminalizing dissent." (Reporting by Jeff Mason and Roberta Rampton; Editing by Susan Heavey)

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