

# US deploys Marines, landing craft in escalating threat to Venezuela

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Washington is sending three amphibious assault vessels carrying a 2,200-strong Marine expeditionary force to Venezuela, anonymous US officials told the *Miami Herald* yesterday. They are to join a group of three US guided missile destroyers that reportedly arrived off the Venezuelan coast yesterday.

This shatters the flimsy pretext the Trump administration had earlier advanced to justify sending the three destroyers—namely, the claim that they would prevent ships in the area from trafficking drugs from Venezuela to the United States. The US Marine Corps is not an anti-narcotics police unit. The US government is clearly threatening to invade Venezuela as part of a decades-long regime change operation targeting that oil-rich country.

Asked about the naval deployments on Tuesday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Trump administration is ready to take any and all military measures against Venezuela. She repeated provocative and totally unsubstantiated US assertions, made with evident contempt for the Venezuelan people, that Venezuela's government is nothing more than a front organization for a drug cartel.

“President Trump has been very clear and consistent. He is prepared to use every element of American power to stop drugs from flooding our country and to bring those responsible to justice,” Leavitt said. “The Maduro regime is not the legitimate government of Venezuela; it is a narco terror cartel. Maduro, in the view of this administration, is not a legitimate president.”

Leavitt was echoing threats by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who on August 14 said, “the Cartel of the Suns, the Cartel de los Soles ... is a criminal organization that happens to masquerade as a government. The Maduro regime is not a government.

It's not a legitimate government. We've never recognized them as such. They are a criminal enterprise that basically has taken control of a national territory, of a country.”

However, despite Rubio's accusations, the US government has provided no court-tested evidence of narcotics trafficking by the Cartel of the Suns or even substantiated its existence. They have only named Maduro and parliamentarian Diosdado Cabello, the interior minister and vice president of the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), as the cartel's alleged leaders.

The US government is again resorting to the method of the Big Lie, seeking to create a pretext for war by telling lies so big that they seem impossible to refute. In the illegal 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, the lie—exposed soon after US and European forces occupied Iraq—was the claim that the Iraqi government had “weapons of mass destruction.” Against Venezuela, the charge is that it is run by a shadowy drug cartel about which Washington provides no information but which it will take drastic action to destroy.

The Venezuelan government, for its part, has denied that the Cartel of the Suns even exists and denounced pseudo-legal US threats against it. When, on August 7, US Attorney General Pam Bondi placed a \$50 million bounty on Maduro's head, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil denounced it as a “crude political propaganda operation.” Gil called it a “desperate distraction” from Trump's ties to the late convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein.

Maduro responded to the deployment of US destroyers off Venezuela's coast by calling to arms popular militias friendly to his government. He said, “This week, I will activate a special plan with more

than 4.5 million militiamen to ensure coverage of the entire national territory—militias that are prepared, activated and armed.”

Venezuelan Interior Minister Cabello claimed the operation is “a brutal campaign of psychological warfare” to incite terrorist acts by far-right extremists close to the US government. US officials “are desperate [and] are financing groups to execute acts of violence in the month of September,” he said. Apparently referring to events like the failed US-backed coup of 2002 against Maduro’s predecessor, Hugo Chavez, Cabello said: “We must tell the extremists that the civilian-military-police alliance will take apart their actions once again.”

Cabello downplayed the significance of the current threats, saying: “All these lies and this show will fall under their own weight. ... It is worth reminding the snake oil salesmen that this display is nothing new. They did this during Trump’s first term in office.”

The Venezuelan regime’s assessment is staggeringly complacent: The Trump administration, as it launches a global trade war, is also clearly seeking to consolidate its domination of the Western Hemisphere. It is particularly concerned that China’s surging trade with Latin America, at \$518 billion last year compared to \$800 billion for the United States, could ultimately undermine US imperialism’s hegemony in what it considers to be its “backyard.”

The Trump administration has not only called for the annexation of Greenland and Panama and slapped high tariffs on Brazil but rapidly escalated its military operations and interventions across the region, particularly against its Southern neighbor, Mexico. One report by US investigative journalist Ken Klippenstein pointed to the rapid increase in US military planning after the designation of cartels as “terrorist” organizations, which allows the full mobilization of the US military against them.

“Not only is Donald Trump uniquely focused on TCOs [transnational criminal organizations, i.e., cartels], having designated them terrorists in one of his first Executive Orders, but he has shown himself to be willing to take unilateral action despite potentially negative political ramifications,” one intelligence official told Klippenstein, who wrote: “He and the other sources say that military action could be unilateral—that is, without the involvement or approval

of the Mexican government.”

It is increasingly obvious that, with the continuing collaboration of the Mexican military, the US armed forces are preparing to unilaterally bomb targets across its country—going to war with Mexico in all but name. US Special Operations forces, according to Klippenstein, have received orders to identify “‘target packages’ for potential strikes and ‘direct action’ attacks” in Mexico. He added, “Direct attacks could also involve air or drone strikes.”

Washington’s operations in Mexico are indissolubly bound up with its global war plans. Some of these calculations were aired in remarks last year by US Northern Command leader General Gregory Guillot in remarks to the Senate Armed Services Committee. Identifying China and Russia as “competitors” whose influence in Latin America Washington should crush, Guillot said that the US Northern Command was seeking to work closely to integrate its operations with those of the Mexican military to block them:

The bonds between USNORTHCOM and our Mexican military partners are broad, resilient, and focused on expanding our combined capability to defend and secure North America from myriad state and non-state threats. Countering competitor influence in the region remains a key priority for NORTHCOM and our Mexican military partners, and as a direct result, the U.S. and Mexican militaries are more operationally compatible than at any point in our shared history.

Such operations face explosive opposition by the working class in Latin America, United States and internationally. Preventing US military escalation across Latin America requires building an international, socialist anti-war movement uniting across the Americas and beyond in a struggle against imperialism.



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