

Washington masses warships near Venezuela as US officials warn of attack

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A U.S. naval flotilla of at least eight warships and carrying some 4,500 personnel is currently massing near Venezuela's coast amid open threats to attack the country, which boasts the largest oil reserves in the world.

While officially the deployment has absurdly been cast as an "anti-narcotics" operation, the Trump administration is making it abundantly clear in statements to the media that the fleet is part of yet another regime-change operation against a Venezuelan government allied with Beijing and Moscow.

Speaking to *Axios*, one administration official said Friday: "This could be Noriega part 2... The president has asked for a menu of options. And ultimately, this is the president's decision about what to do next, but Maduro should be s***ting bricks."

The official was referring to the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama with 27,000 troops to capture one man, President Manuel Noriega, a long-time CIA "asset", based upon allegations of drug trafficking. The operation, which bombed working-class areas of Panama City, killed hundreds and possibly thousands of civilians.

Earlier this month, with similar accusations of being the leader of the nonexistent "Cartel de los Soles," the White House doubled its reward for the arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro from \$25 million to an unprecedented \$50 million. Shortly before, the U.S. Treasury had designated the alleged cartel as a foreign terrorist organization.

Further merging the long-planned overthrow of Maduro with unfounded drug claims, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt responded to a question about the mission's goals by declaring Maduro the "fugitive head of a drug cartel" and not Venezuela's legitimate President.

Another U.S. official told *Axios*, "This is 105 percent about narco-terrorism, but if Maduro winds up no longer in power, no one will be crying."

The operation has nothing to do with drug interdictions. Only a tiny fraction of drugs moving northward from South America are shipped from Venezuela, as acknowledged by numerous experts, including from the UN and even U.S. intelligence agencies.

In the context of years of economic crisis following a drop of oil prices, the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations had

already subjected Venezuela to devastating economic sanctions. These policies were the prime cause for wiping out over 80 percent of the economy, provoking an exodus of over 7 million Venezuelans and causing tens of thousands of deaths from poverty and disease.

As Washington imposes shattering tariffs against India, Brazil and other countries aimed largely at isolating China and Russia, the potential for a military operation against Venezuela long demanded by Trump and his circle of fascist advisers cannot be ruled out, despite the catastrophic consequences for South America and beyond.

In July, Trump signed a directive ordering the Pentagon to prepare the use of military force against cartels in Latin America, including the "Cartel de los Soles."

Evan Ellis of the U.S. Army War College told the *Financial Times* that the current naval deployment allows the Pentagon to deploy "a lot of forces on the ground pretty quickly" and carry out a "snatch-and-grab operation to bring Maduro to justice."

Mexico, Canada, Italy, the UK, and France have already been approached by Secretary of State Marco Rubio to join the military deployment against the "Cartel de los Soles," that is, the effort to overthrow Maduro, according to diplomatic sources speaking with Spanish daily *ABC*.

The French government of President Emmanuel Macron has confirmed its backing, with Overseas Minister Manuel Valls announcing plans to send warships to its colony Guadeloupe in the Lesser Antilles close to Venezuela.

Trinidad and Tobago, the island nation closest to Venezuela's coast, has expressed support for the operation, giving Washington permission to freely use its waters and territory.

Rubio plans to travel to Mexico and Ecuador in a fourth trip to Latin America, confirming that U.S. imperialism is focused on securing control of what it views as its "own backyard" in preparation for war against China.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has sought to balance verbal opposition to the deployment in the Caribbean with promises to collaborate fully with the Pentagon in fighting cartels.

In Ecuador, which serves as a transit point for most of the drugs coming out of South America, far-right President Daniel

Noboa, a Trump ally, has organized a referendum on welcoming foreign military bases. He has likewise followed Washington's lead in declaring the phantom "Cartel de los Soles" a terrorist organization, thereby justifying military aggression against Venezuela.

According to publicly available information reviewed by *Newsweek* Friday, guided-missile destroyers USS Jason Dunham and USS Gravelly and littoral combat ship USS Minneapolis-St. Paul are already surrounding Venezuelan waters. Two amphibious transport docks, the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima and the P-8 maritime patrol aircraft are standing by near Puerto Rico, facing Venezuelan waters; two more guided missile destroyers are standing by off Panama; and the nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine USS Newport News is powering south off the East Coast of the United States. The vessel is armed with Tomahawk missiles, which can be fitted with nuclear warheads.

This armada includes a 2,200-strong Marine expeditionary force.

Within Venezuela, the fascistic leader of the U.S.-backed opposition, María Corina Machado, has cheered on the U.S. bounty and military deployment against Maduro. Indicating that pressure could push the Venezuelan military to support a "transition," she recently told *Fox News*, "We Venezuelans are deeply grateful to President Trump for his unwavering support to freedom and justice and his decisive actions to dismantle this criminal, terrorist enterprise."

The response by Maduro has combined moves ostensibly meant to defend against a potential U.S. operation with statements and gestures minimizing the threat and leaving open the door to an agreement with Trump.

Maduro sent several warships and drones to patrol Venezuelan waters and reportedly armed and placed millions of half-trained militia members on standby. Last week, he denounced Washington for seeking "regime change, a military terrorist attack," and called on other citizens to join the militia. Thousands reportedly lined up in Caracas to enlist during the weekend, although numbers were not as high as expected.

During military exercises Thursday, Maduro denounced "the *gringo* imperialists" for wanting to steal the country's "riches" and declared: "There is no way they will enter Venezuela... Today, after a 20-day siege, we are stronger than before."

However, as noted by the *Washington Post*, even as warships head to the Caribbean, the Maduro government has continued to accept two U.S. deportation flights per week and welcomed Chevron tankers taking oil to the U.S. Last month, Trump reissued a license exempting Chevron from sanctions for operating in Venezuela.

On Thursday, Maduro thanked his Colombian counterpart Gustavo Petro for deploying 25,000 troops supposedly to join 15,000 Venezuelan security forces to secure the shared border against drug gangs. He has also appealed to the UN and other countries in the region to help defend Venezuela.

Petro for his part has denounced the U.S. military deployment as an attempt to overthrow the Maduro government and take Venezuela's oil, and stressed that the Cartel de los Soles does not exist, except as a fictitious pretext for regime change. At the same time, his government has claimed that in discussions with U.S. officials there is no perceived intention to attack Venezuela.

During a CELAC summit in Colombia last week, Brazilian officials reportedly discussed with their Venezuelan counterparts an operation to extract the Venezuelan leadership and fly them to Brazil to prevent them from being detained by the U.S. Southern Command, as reported by *Defesanet*.

These behind-the-scenes discussions show that the imperialist onslaught to recolonize Latin America can only be defeated independently from and in opposition to the local ruling elites and their "left" nationalist representatives, which ultimately depend economically on imperialism and seek its support to defend their rule against the working class.

While Maduro constantly seeks a rapprochement with Washington, Petro maintains Colombia's role as a NATO global partner and the operational integration and allegiance of the Colombian military and police with the U.S. military-intelligence apparatus. Petro has denounced the U.S. deployment in the same breadth as he celebrates the participation of the Colombian police in arrests by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security on U.S. soil.

As explained in a recent statement by the Socialist Equality Group of Brazil:

The ICFI [International Committee of the Fourth International] unconditionally denounces the criminal attacks of US imperialism against Venezuela and the other oppressed countries of Latin America. But imperialist aggression can only be defeated through the methods of class struggle.

The battle against imperialism must be waged under the following banners: US troops out of Venezuelan waters and the streets of Washington! Unity of the working class in the imperialist and oppressed countries!



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