Pentagon moving massive naval force towards Venezuela

Patrick Martin
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The Trump administration is mobilizing the largest naval force in the Caribbean Sea since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, in open preparation for a massive and illegal war against Venezuela.

Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced Friday that at Trump's order, he was redeploying the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford, the largest such vessel in the world, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caribbean. This follows Thursday's operation, when two US B-1 bombers flew along the coast of Venezuela in a brazen show of force.

This in turn followed the series of attacks on small boats in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific Ocean, in which US military forces have destroyed 10 small fishing boats, killing at least 43 people. Bodies with missing limbs and horrific burns have begun to wash up on the shores of Trinidad and Tobago, the island nation which is only six miles off the coast of Venezuela at its closest point.

It will take about a week for the aircraft carrier and its associated ships, called a carrier group, to transit the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean and take up a station off the coast of Venezuela. But air strikes and other attacks on targets within Venezuela could begin at any time, as Trump gloated that nearly all boat traffic in the region has stopped, and that the US would shift its focus to attacks on land.

By the beginning of November, then, the US flotilla off of Venezuela will include an aircraft carrier with 70 fighter jets and attack helicopters, a helicopter carrier with another 30 tilt-rotor aircraft and attack helicopters and nearly 2,000 Marines, the spearhead of an assault landing force, a guided-missile cruiser, six or more destroyers and other support ships.

Needless to say, this is not a force aimed at interdicting drug smugglers. Its sole purpose is to invade Venezuela, a country of more than 30 million people, twice the size, geographically, of Iraq, and one and a half times the size, geographically, of Afghanistan. Roughly half the country, the southern half, is tropical jungle, part of the Amazon basin, mainly bordering on Brazil.

A report in the right-wing British newspaper *Daily Telegraph* linked the threats against the government of President Nicolas Maduro to Trump's campaign against immigrants within the United States:

> Some sources close to the Trump administration point out that assembling an invasion fleet may be helpful for Mr Trump to solve a separate policy headache: immigration. Declaring war could help with the revival of the Alien Enemies Act, last used to intern Japanese, German and Italian nationals during World War Two, to detain and deport Venezuelan nationals en masse. Under the 17th-century law [actually 18th century], a president can target citizens of a hostile nation in times of declared war or if an enemy government mounts an "invasion or predatory incursion."
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> Early in his second term, the president dusted off the war-time law but was later blocked by the court of appeal. The two architects of the Venezuela campaign are Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, and, interestingly, Stephen Miller, the man known as "Trump's Brain" on all things immigration. Venezuela and the drug boats thus become a complex fusion of Trump's great fixations: national security, immigration and the need to revive American dominance.

In the event of a full-scale war against Venezuela, the legal position of Venezuelan migrants inside the United States would change abruptly. Trump has already invoked the Alien Enemies Act, although this has been limited in certain ways by the courts. It is quite likely that Venezuelan nationality would result in immediate arrest and detention, regardless of any other legal considerations, such as Temporary Protected Status. Given the number of Venezuelan migrants, likely several million, now in the US, a huge number of immigration agents, police and troops would be required to detain them, and only massive concentration camps could house them.

A report in *The Atlantic* magazine at the weekend described a "tense meeting" between Admiral Alvin Holsey, then the chief of the Pentagon's Southern Command, heading operations in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America, and Secretary of War Hegseth, over the strikes against small boats. Soon afterwards, Holsey announced his retirement, only one year into his three-year term in that top position.

The magazine reported:

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> Once the Ford arrives, the U.S. will have roughly as many ships in the Caribbean as it used to defend Israel from Iranian missile strikes this summer.
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> As U.S.-military assets in the region have accumulated, the administration's language about deposing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro has grown more threatening. A person close to the White House told Semafor this week that the administration would cooperate with Congress on its plans for military action only when "Maduro's corpse is in U.S. custody."

According a report Saturday in the *Washington Post:*

> The Pentagon in recent weeks also has deployed the MV Ocean Trader, a civilian ship converted into a floating Special Operations base that can dispatch troops on short notice. The ship's presence in the Caribbean coincided with the deployment of select aircraft from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, an elite helicopter unit that supports the most dangerous missions in the world.

These forces could be used for raids against land targets in Venezuela, as Trump has threatened, or even a decapitation strike against the Venezuelan leadership in Caracas. A US destroyer, the USS Gravely, and the Marine unit are to visit Trinidad this week, putting them only six miles from the Venezuelan coast.

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted Robert O'Brien, Trump's national security adviser in the final two years of his first term: "Moving a carrier into theater is the clearest statement the United States can make that the crisis is serious … the combat power that the Ford task force can generate is sufficient to defeat the [Nicolás] Maduro regime's military, which would be the key step to installing the country's legitimately, elected president, Maria Machado in office."

The last description is remarkable, since Machado was disqualified from running in 2024 and therefore never received a single vote. She has never appeared on the ballot in any presidential election. But her Nobel Peace Prize made her the likely front-woman for a new US-backed regime in Venezuela.

The Democratic Party has been largely silent on the Trump administration's buildup towards an illegal war against Venezuela. Much of the legal rationale being prepared by the White House is based on the "signature strikes" authorized by the Obama administration, which justified missile strikes on people whose activities supposedly fit the "signature" of Al Qaeda terrorists, even if their actual identities were unknown. In similar fashion, Caribbean fishermen are being portrayed as fitting the "signature" of drug smugglers.

Earlier this month, Democratic Senators Adam Schiff (Calif.) and Tim Kaine (Va.) sponsored a resolution to stop the strikes. The vote failed 48-51, with Rand Paul (Ky.) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) being the only Republicans to support it. The only Democrat to vote against it was John Fetterman (Pa.).

In a remarkable interview on "Meet the Press" Sunday, Democratic Senator Ruben Gallego of Arizona was asked if the Trump administration attacks on alleged drug boats are consistent with international law. He replied, "No, it's murder … If this president feels that they're doing something illegally, then he should be using the Coast Guard. If there's an act of war, then you use our military, and then you come and talk to us first. But this is murder."

His "Meet the Press" interviewer, Kristen Welker, did not raise an eyebrow over this characterization, but simply passed on without comment. Gallego then went on to discuss the Democratic Party's posture in the government shutdown, demanding that Trump agree to negotiate. Neither Gallego nor Welker indicated that there was any contradiction between calling Trump a murderer and seeking to sit down with him at a conference table.

Meanwhile, Gallego's fellow Democrat from Arizona, Senator Mark Kelly, speaking on the ABC News "This Week" program, would only characterize the boat strikes as "questionable," and suggest that Trump should have consulted with Congress before taking such actions.

The disparity only underscores the essential solidarity of the Democrats and Republicans as parties of American imperialism. Democratic presidents like Obama and Biden, like Trump today, routinely engaged in drone missile murder and other acts of imperialist butchery, like the US-NATO bombing of Libya and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

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