

US seizes Venezuelan oil tanker in act of international piracy, as Trump escalates war preparations

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The US military seized a large oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela on Wednesday, a brazen act of piracy that marks a major escalation in the Trump administration's war preparations against the South American country.

Speaking at the White House, Trump announced the operation in the language of a gangster: "We've just seized a tanker on the coast of Venezuela, large tanker, very large, largest one ever seized, actually." When asked what would happen to the oil, Trump replied, "Well, we keep it, I guess."

The Venezuelan government characterized the seizure as "barefaced robbery and an act of international piracy" aimed at stripping the country of its oil wealth.

The seizure comes just one day after Trump told *Politico* that Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's "days are numbered" and refused to rule out sending US troops into the country. Trump has also threatened Colombian President Gustavo Petro, declaring that "Petro is next." The administration has authorized CIA covert operations inside Venezuela and has developed plans for targeting Maduro and seizing control of the country's oil fields.

On Tuesday, two US fighter jets circled the Gulf of Venezuela for approximately 40 minutes, coming within 20 nautical miles of Venezuelan territory in an unmistakable provocation.

The tanker seizure is a concrete step toward the regime change operation that Trump has openly proclaimed. Venezuela holds the world's largest proven oil reserves—more than 300 billion barrels, and the Trump administration is moving to strangle the country's economy while positioning military forces for direct intervention.

Attorney General Pam Bondi released footage of the

operation on social media, showing armed US forces rappelling from helicopters onto the deck of the tanker. She claimed the vessel, identified as the *Skipper*, had been "sanctioned by the United States due to its involvement in an illicit oil shipping network supporting foreign terrorist organizations."

The administration has offered no evidence to justify the seizure. The warrant authorizing the operation is sealed, and US officials acknowledged it was issued "roughly two weeks ago" based on the ship's alleged past activities smuggling Iranian oil. The White House did not respond when asked whether the United States had the legal authority to keep the oil.

The seizure must be understood in the context of the Trump administration's recently published National Security Strategy. The 33-page document, released on December 4, explicitly establishes a goal of "restoring American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere" while denying "non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets" in the region.

The seizure of Venezuelan oil makes clear that Trump's claim that he is intervening in Latin America to combat drug smuggling is a transparent fraud. In reality, Trump is seeking to cement US control over Latin America as a power base for war with China.

The National Security Strategy explicitly states that the United States seeks to ensure "the Western Hemisphere remains free of hostile foreign incursion or ownership of key assets" and supports "critical supply chains." The document makes clear that Latin America is to serve as a captive source of raw materials and labor for American corporations, insulated from

Chinese investment and trade.

China currently purchases roughly 80 percent of Venezuela's oil exports. The seizure of the *Skipper*, which according to TankerTrackers.com was carrying approximately 1.1 million barrels of Venezuelan crude, is aimed at strangling this trade and devastating Venezuela's economy. US officials said they expected additional seizures in the coming weeks.

The tanker seizure takes place amid a series of drone and missile strikes against civilian boats in the Caribbean and Pacific that have killed at least 87 people since September. The administration claims, without providing public evidence, that the boats are smuggling drugs. Since September 2, the United States has launched more than 22 such strikes. These strikes are war crimes under international law.

In the September 2 strikes that murdered 11 unarmed civilians, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth issued an explicit verbal order to "kill everybody," the *Washington Post* reported. Survivors of the initial attack, who waved for rescue not knowing they had been targeted, were deliberately killed in a second strike—a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions' protections for the shipwrecked.

The tanker seizure came on the same day the House of Representatives passed a record \$900 billion defense policy bill by a vote of 312-112. The legislation massively expands US nuclear weapons spending, including funding for the so-called "Golden Dome" missile defense system. The bill includes provisions that would withhold 25 percent of Hegseth's travel budget until he discloses all orders authorizing the boat strikes and releases unedited video of the operations—an absurd triviality that amounts to a minor inconvenience for a man clearly guilty of carrying out war crimes.

This toothless measure is intended as a cover for the total inaction by both parties as the Trump administration carries out murder on the high seas. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, when asked directly whether he opposes regime change in Venezuela, refused to state his opposition. "Ya know, obviously if Maduro would just flee on his own, everyone would like that," Schumer said.

Republican Senator Rand Paul, one of the few members of Congress who has made even the most tepid criticisms of the administration's actions, told NewsNation that the seizure "sounds a lot like the

beginning of a war." Democratic Senator Chris Coons noted that he has not received a detailed briefing on the administration's plans, stating he is "gravely concerned that [Trump] is sleepwalking us into a war with Venezuela."

But there is no "sleepwalking" involved. According to an analysis by RANE (formerly Stratfor Center for Applied Geopolitics), "In the coming weeks, the United States will probably escalate its military campaign to targeted strikes in Venezuelan land as the prospects of maintaining the status quo or retreating have declined."

RANE assessed that the "most likely scenario remains an escalation to U.S. airstrikes or special forces operations inside Venezuelan territory, as Washington tries to weaken Maduro and indirectly create the conditions for regime change in the long term."

RANE further noted that "given the increased U.S. military mobilization in the Caribbean, along with Trump's repeated statements that attacks on land are imminent and his administration's persistent criticism of Maduro, the likelihood of a scenario in which the United States only maintains ongoing kinetic strikes against boats or targets planes that are allegedly trafficking drugs is low."

The Pentagon has deployed more than 15,000 troops, a dozen warships, including the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, scores of aircraft and thousands of personnel to the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean. This represents the largest US military mobilization in the Caribbean since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.



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