

Trump seizes Russian-flagged tanker, plunders Venezuelan oil, threatens to attack Greenland

Andre Damon
8 January 2026

In the aftermath of Saturday's US attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, the Trump administration has unleashed a global looting operation, seizing a Russian-flagged tanker on the high seas in a stand-off with the Russian navy, announcing the plunder of billions of dollars in Venezuelan oil and categorically asserting that a military attack on the territory of NATO ally Denmark to seize Greenland is an "option."

On Wednesday, US forces seized two more oil tankers, bringing to four the total number of vessels now in US custody.

The tanker seizures are part of an ongoing campaign of blockade and war aimed at the domination of Venezuela and Latin America as a whole by US imperialism. In mid-December, Trump ordered a "total and complete blockade" of all oil tankers under US sanctions from entering or leaving Venezuela.

Wednesday's seizures involved two vessels: the Russian-flagged *Marinera*, intercepted in the North Atlantic south of Iceland, and the *Sophia*, a tanker operated by a Chinese company, seized near the Caribbean. The seizure of the *Marinera* marked a dramatic escalation of the US-Russia conflict, with US special operations forces boarding the tanker while a Russian navy ship and submarine were escorting it.

While a direct clash with Russian warships was avoided, the seizure was carried out as a major military operation, involving the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, known as the "Night Stalkers," supported by P-8 Poseidon submarine-hunting aircraft, F-35 jet fighters and AC-130J gunships.

The *Marinera*, formerly known as the *Bella 1*, had

been fleeing the US blockade for two weeks after repelling an initial boarding attempt in December. During its flight across the Atlantic, the ship changed its name, painted a Russian flag on its side, and registered with Russia—but none of this deterred the US military.

"No state has the right to use force against vessels duly registered under the jurisdiction of other states," Russia's Transport Ministry said.

On Tuesday, Trump announced that Venezuela would "give" the US between 30 million to 50 million barrels of oil—up to 15 percent of the country's annual production, valued at between \$1.5 billion and \$2.5 billion.

"This Oil will be sold at its Market Price, and that money will be controlled by me, as President of the United States of America," Trump wrote on Truth Social. Energy Secretary Chris Wright said Wednesday the US would sell Venezuelan oil "indefinitely."

"We're going to market the crude coming out of Venezuela—first this backed up, stored oil, and then indefinitely, going forward, we will sell the production that comes out of Venezuela into the marketplace," Wright said at a Goldman Sachs conference in Miami. He added that the US would bring in American oil companies to rebuild Venezuela's infrastructure.

Trump has issued threats against Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodríguez, who assumed office Monday after Maduro's abduction. "If she doesn't do what's right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro," Trump told *The Atlantic* on Sunday. *Politico* reported that US officials have demanded Venezuela halt oil sales to Russia, China and Iran.

White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said Wednesday Trump “reserves the right to use the United States military if necessary.” She added: “We obviously have maximum leverage over the interim authorities in Venezuela right now.”

Vice President JD Vance told Fox News: “The way that we control Venezuela is we control the purse strings, we control the energy resources, and we tell the regime, ‘You’re allowed to sell the oil, so long as you serve America’s national interest.’”

In a statement of criminal intent to wage war against a nuclear-armed power, Leavitt declared the United States is prepared to use military force against the European Union to seize Greenland, an autonomous territory of EU member Denmark. She said acquiring Greenland is a “national security priority” and that “utilizing the U.S. Military is always an option.”

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller said Monday the “formal position” of the United States is that Greenland should become American territory. “Nobody’s going to fight the United States militarily over the future of Greenland,” Miller sneered. His wife posted an image of the American flag superimposed on a map of Greenland with the caption “SOON.”

The threats against Greenland have deepened tensions between the United States and Europe. Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said a US action on Greenland would be the end of NATO. On Tuesday, leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Britain issued a joint statement declaring that Greenland’s future is a matter for “Denmark and Greenland, and them only.”

On Wednesday, the Danish defense ministry confirmed to the newspaper *Berlingske* that a 1952 directive requiring soldiers to “immediately” counter-attack invading forces remains in force. The directive states that “the attacked forces must immediately take up the fight without waiting for or seeking orders, even if the commanders in question are not aware of the declaration of war or state of war.”

The seizure of oil tankers on the high seas—acts of piracy under international law—and the imposition of a blockade constitute acts of aggressive war, precisely the crimes for which Nazi leaders were prosecuted at Nuremberg.

Democrats have centered their criticisms of Trump’s actions on procedural issues. Following Senate hearings

on Wednesday, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer lamented, “We need answers as to how long this is going to last. We need answers to how many troops, how much money, are there guardrails, things we don’t do, and a number of things that we had talked about were very troubling.”

Last month, Schumer stated his agreement with the necessity for some sort of regime change in Venezuela. “Obviously if Maduro would just flee on his own,” he said, “everyone would like that.”

The Democratic Party leadership has categorically refused to condemn the kidnapping of Maduro. Schumer responded to the attack on Venezuela by declaring that “Maduro is an illegitimate dictator,” while Hakeem Jeffries declared, “he’s a bad guy.” In December, Democrats joined Republicans in passing a record \$895 billion military budget, providing the funds for the very operations now being carried out.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact