

Declaring “I don’t need international law,” Trump moves to seize more oil tankers in the Atlantic

Andre Damon
8 January 2026

US President Donald Trump asserted unlimited presidential powers to wage war all over the world in an interview with the *New York Times* published Thursday, declaring, “I don’t need international law.”

Asked what limits exist on his power as commander-in-chief, Trump replied: “Yeah, there is one thing. My own morality. My own mind. It’s the only thing that can stop me.”

Trump made this assertion of unlimited presidential authority five days after US forces launched drone and missile strikes on Caracas and other Venezuelan cities, killing 100 people, before special operations forces kidnapped President Nicolás Maduro. Since the attack, the Trump administration has threatened Cuba, Colombia, Iran, Russia, China and even the European Union, declaring its intention to use military force to seize Greenland from NATO ally Denmark.

On Tuesday, Trump announced on Truth Social that the US would seize between 30 and 50 million barrels of Venezuelan oil, worth up to \$3 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.

The *Times* interview was published as the US Navy pursued oil tankers linked to Venezuela, Iran, Russia and China fleeing the Caribbean across the Atlantic. On Wednesday, US forces seized two more tankers in international waters—the Russian-flagged *Marinera* in the North Atlantic between Scotland and Iceland, and the *M Sophia* in the Caribbean.

The seizure of the *Marinera* was a major military operation. The tanker had been escorted by Russian warships after a Russian flag was painted on its hull and registered with Moscow. The US mobilized P-8 submarine-hunting aircraft, AC-130 gunships and F-35 jet

fighters to support Coast Guard forces boarding the vessel. A direct clash between US and Russian forces was avoided. The US Navy is now pursuing additional tankers that sought to escape the illegal US blockade of Venezuela, with vessels fleeing hundreds of miles into the Atlantic.

“Any actions taken by Venezuela’s interim government are going to be dictated by the United States of America,” White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters in Washington on Wednesday. Energy Secretary Chris Wright, speaking at a Goldman Sachs conference in Miami on Wednesday, declared that the US would oversee the sale of Venezuela’s oil “indefinitely.”

Trump’s threats span the globe. In his interview with the *Times*, he reiterated his threat to use military force to annex Greenland, a territory of NATO ally Denmark. He refused to say whether he valued Greenland or the NATO alliance more. “It may be a choice,” he said. “Ownership is very important.” On Monday, Leavitt confirmed that “utilizing the US Military is always an option” in seizing Greenland from Denmark.

The threats against Greenland have provoked sharp responses from European governments. German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul told reporters in Lithuania on Monday: “Since Denmark is a member of NATO, Greenland will, in principle, also be subject to NATO defense.” On Tuesday, Denmark’s military intelligence service classified the United States as a security risk for the first time.

That same day, the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and Britain issued a joint statement with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warning the United States they would “not stop defending” the values of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, speaking at

a symposium late Wednesday, issued the sharpest condemnation yet from a European head of state. “There is a breakdown of values by our most important partner, the USA, which helped build this world order,” Steinmeier said. “It is about preventing the world from turning into a den of robbers, where the most unscrupulous take whatever they want, where regions or entire countries are treated as the property of a few great powers.” He added, “Attempts are being made to push even medium-sized states—and that includes us—to the margins of history, while small and weaker states are left completely unprotected.”

French President Emmanuel Macron, addressing France’s diplomatic corps at the Élysée Palace on Thursday, echoed Steinmeier’s warnings. “The US is an established power, but one that is gradually turning away from some of its allies and breaking free from the international rules that it was until recently promoting,” Macron said. “Multilateral institutions are functioning less and less effectively. We are living in a world of great powers, with a real temptation to divide up the world.”

The US attack on Venezuela came just weeks after the publication of the 2025 National Defense Strategy, which declared the Western Hemisphere an “American sphere of influence” in which the United States would “not tolerate” the presence of “extra-hemispheric powers.” The document, released in December, identified China as the “pacing threat” and called for the US military to secure “energy dominance” through control of strategic resources in Latin America and the Middle East. The Venezuela operation is the first implementation of this doctrine.

Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, writing on his Substack on Wednesday, reported that the objective of the Venezuela operation is “to cut off China, America’s economic rival, from its ongoing purchases of Venezuela’s cheap heavy crude oil.” China is the largest importer of Venezuelan oil. “The next target, I have been told, will be Iran, another purveyor to China whose crude oil reserves are the world’s fourth largest,” Hersh wrote. He characterized the Venezuela operation as “the opening shot in a US energy war on China.”

On Thursday, the US Senate voted 52-47 to debate a War Powers resolution that would require Trump to seek congressional authorization for continued military operations in Venezuela. But the resolution will have no serious effect, as House Speaker Mike Johnson said he would not take it up.

The Democratic leadership has repeatedly declared that

it can do nothing to stop Trump’s flagrant violations of the Constitution and international law. Those Democrats who have made mild criticisms of Trump’s actions in Venezuela invariably preface their remarks with vitriolic condemnations of Maduro as a thug and a dictator—a label they do not apply to Trump—together with praise for the US military. In that vein, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said, “We’re in the euphoria period of acknowledging across the board that Maduro was a bad guy and that our military is absolutely incredible.”

In December, the Democratic congressional leadership joined Republicans to pass the \$901 billion National Defense Authorization Act, the largest military budget in US history. Minority Leader Jeffries, Minority Whip Katherine Clark and Democratic Caucus Chair Pete Aguilar all voted in favor, providing the funding for the very military apparatus now seizing tankers, blockading Venezuela and preparing for war with China and Iran.

Trump has now called for a \$1.5 trillion military budget for fiscal year 2027—a 66 percent increase. “America MUST have the strongest Military in the World, and it’s not even close!” Trump wrote on Truth Social on Monday. “We will CUT the waste, but we will BUILD the power. \$1.5 TRILLION!” According to the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, this would add \$5.8 trillion to the national debt over 10 years.

Such a budget will require a frontal assault on the social rights of the working class—the gutting of Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and every remaining social program—and a frontal attack on democratic rights. In his interview with the *Times*, Trump “reiterated that he was willing to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy the military inside the United States.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact