

# US sends troops under cover of Venezuelan earthquake, as death toll surges

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26 June 2026

Forty-eight hours after the most powerful earthquakes to strike Venezuela in 125 years, the United States has seized upon the humanitarian catastrophe to accelerate its military consolidation of control over a country it invaded just six months ago. Under the cover of disaster relief, Washington has dispatched warships, warplanes and a commanding general of the Marine Corps to Venezuela—a deployment whose scale and character have no purpose in a genuine humanitarian operation.

By Friday afternoon, the official toll stood at 920 dead, 3,360 injured, and 383 buildings totally or substantially destroyed. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has received unconfirmed reports that the number of missing could reach 50,000.

Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration estimates that up to 6.76 million people may have been affected by the earthquakes, but the true scope of the disaster remains unknown.

In La Guaira, declared a disaster zone following the twin earthquakes of June 24, residents have been left to dig through rubble with machetes, hammers, crowbars, hydraulic car jacks and their bare hands. Many sectors still had no heavy machinery, no water, no rescue specialists and no rope. The smell of decomposing bodies, families report, has become unbearable. Rescuers describe the agony of hearing children crying beneath the debris until the sounds stop.

Children are arriving at hospitals alone, identified only by a strip of adhesive tape on their arm with a name written on it. “Most arrive without relatives,” one doctor told AFP, speaking anonymously because she was not authorized to speak to the press. “The paramedics pull them from the rubble, put them in an ambulance, and bring them here because the hospitals in La Guaira are completely overwhelmed.” A hospital orderly confirmed to AFP that the morgue is full.

There is growing unrest, with people taking matters in their own hands to carry out rescue efforts and secure their mere survival.

In the Catia La Mar district, residents surrounded a civilian pickup truck distributing bread and water. People had converted a pharmacy parking lot into an improvised shelter. Initial reports from La Guaira describe people taking staple foods and other basic necessities from destroyed warehouses and shops. People have forced trucks to stop at their neighborhoods to help remove rubble.

These are not scenes of a society receiving the necessary aid.

Argentine geologist Andrés Folguera told the A24 network that had seismic building codes been enforced and urban planning adapted to the known active fault lines, the deaths would have been far fewer—and that based on the scale of the destruction, the final toll could reach into the tens of thousands.

## Washington deploys for conquest, not rescue

Into this vacuum of state capacity, the United States has sent not a relief agency, having already dismantled USAID, but a military command. Two US warships—the USS Fort Lauderdale and the littoral combat ship USS Billings—have been dispatched to Venezuelan waters. C-17 Globemaster and C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, along with fixed and rotary wing aircraft, are en route under US Southern Command authority.

Late Thursday evening, Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Jarrard of the Marine Corps arrived on the ground in Caracas to direct what Washington is calling its humanitarian response.

On the Venezuelan side, Acting President Delcy Rodríguez has appointed Maj. Gen. Juan Ernesto Sulbarán Quintero, commander of the Bolivarian National Guard, as the Sole Authority for the Emergency. The state of La Guaira has been placed under military administration.

The configuration is stark: only six months after a US special forces operation abducted the Venezuela's sitting president Nicolás Maduro, the commanding general of the US Marine Corps and the commander of the Venezuelan National Guard are now in control. It is a military occupation wearing the mask of disaster relief.

Reuters has observed that Rodríguez is using the crisis to “stamp her authority on a fractured government” with a national unity message. The political analyst Ricardo Rios of the Caracas-based consultancy Poder & Estrategia was direct about what that unity actually means: “It’s a situation that is going to be very well exploited to increase the presence of the United States and its control over Venezuela. And also, for Rodriguez to lean on the United States as her primary ally.”

The historical precedents are unambiguous. The 1972 earthquake in Nicaragua and the 1985 earthquake in Mexico each contributed to the eventual unraveling of the Somoza dictatorship and the PRI's political monopoly respectively, as the regimes' failure to protect the population exposed the rottenness of the social order. The lesson Washington drew from those experiences—and applied with devastating clarity after the 2010 Haiti earthquake—was that military occupation in the immediate aftermath of disaster is the most effective mechanism for consolidating imperial control and preempting social revolt.

Trump has announced \$150 million in relief funds and the lifting of certain sanctions. The search-and-rescue teams and military medics being deployed possess real skills, and their efforts will no doubt save lives on the ground. But this must be placed in its full context. It was Trump who, in 2017, escalated the sanctions that Obama had put in place after declaring Venezuela a “national security threat.” It was the Trump and Biden administrations that maintained and deepened an economic and naval blockade that caused Venezuela's economy to contract by roughly 80 percent in a decade, driving more than 8 million people to flee the country. Excess death estimates from that decade of economic strangulation run into the tens of thousands. Where was the aid then?

The European powers and regional governments that either collaborated with Washington's campaign of

economic strangulation or stood silently by as it unfolded—cannot pose as disinterested humanitarians.

Rosa Luxemburg, writing in 1902 about the eruption of Mount Pelée that destroyed the city of Saint-Pierre in Martinique and killed 40,000 people, captured the character of such moments with a precision that has not aged a day.

The same imperial powers that had drenched Madagascar, the Philippines, Cuba, and South Africa in blood rushed to offer aid to Martinique's survivors. Luxemburg called them what they were: “weeping carnivores” and “beasts in Samaritan's clothing.” The same governments that inflicted far more death through deliberate policy than any volcano or earthquake now arrived to perform the role of rescuers.

Luxemburg's essay concluded with a vision of a different reckoning—a “volcano” of social revolution that would “sweep the whole sanctimonious, blood-splattered culture from the face of the earth,” after which, on its ruins, humanity would at last confront its only true enemy: “blind, dead nature.”

The distinction she draws is decisive. Nature is not malevolent. It is indifferent. The earthquake does not choose its victims. It is the social order—which concentrates wealth at the apex while leaving the majority in substandard housing and infrastructure, without functioning hospitals or emergency services—that turns a natural event into a class crime.

The earthquake that has devastated La Guaira is inseparable from the social earthquake produced by a century of imperialism, decades of Chavista bourgeois nationalism and the open colonial plunder now underway. The fight for the victims of the earthquake is the fight against the capitalist system that produced this catastrophe.



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