

# Under guise of relief, Pentagon deploys 2,000 troops to Venezuela, securing semicolonial foothold

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Two weeks after twin earthquakes of magnitudes 7.2 and 7.5 struck northern Venezuela on June 24—the strongest to hit the country in over a century—more than 3,600 people have been confirmed dead, 16,700 injured, and tens of thousands remain missing.

Dozens of bodies are being thrown into mass graves after briefly passing through an improvised morgue at La Guaira port. International search and rescue teams have left, and local agencies have all but abandoned their already limited efforts. Those still searching for the missing amid the rubble have been forced to rely on their own means—collecting thousands of dollars to rent a crane, digging with their hands, shovels and ropes.

'There is no support,' one man whose sister was buried in a collapsed Caracas apartment building told the *Christian Science Monitor*. 'The effort is being made by us, the families.' These actions have relied on WhatsApp groups and Instagram accounts.

The government of acting President Delcy Rodríguez has dispatched police not to dig but to intimidate, rifles in hand, filming survivors. Volunteer rescuer Wilmer Cruz was arrested for denouncing the government's response and released only after public pressure.

The *New York Times* cited a man who spent ten days searching for survivors between slabs of concrete, who said he was no longer afraid to speak out. 'Why would I be afraid, if I was born to die?' he told the paper. The *Times* then noted nervously:

The public outrage could also complicate the Trump administration's strategy of supporting Ms. Rodríguez so the United States can benefit from Venezuela's resources... this public outcry could also spur a crackdown, leading to questions about how the United States would respond to any repression.

Even before the earthquakes, polling by Meganálisis found that 71.2 percent of respondents believed Trump cares more about oil than about their freedom, while Rodríguez garnered 93 percent disapproval. International Crisis Group analyst Phil Gunson described the government's earthquake response as 'anything from totally non-existent to at best completely inadequate.'

The fear of a social eruption that Venezuelan authorities cannot contain explains the massive military deployment now underway far better than any urgency to save lives.

## A military occupation dressed as relief

US Southern Command Commander General Francis Donovan announced this Wednesday that 'the US military, the Department of War, has roughly 2,000 teammates in the area on land, air, and sea around Venezuela.' The day before, Donovan had told Reuters that 900 US servicemen and women were on Venezuelan territory. The rapid escalation in force numbers, alongside Donovan's expressed hope that the mission would build stronger 'military-to-military' relations with Venezuela, makes clear that the humanitarian framing is a Trojan Horse.

The operational footprint is that of a military occupation. After carrying out repair works on a runway, the US Air Force's Contingency Response Element has been conducting 'airfield management, air traffic coordination, communications, and security' at the Simón Bolívar International Airport. SOUTHCOM press releases have documented the arrival of multiple military transport aircraft, while MQ-9 Reaper drones and combat helicopters have conducted intelligence reconnaissance over Caracas and other affected areas.

US forces have also taken a position at La Guaira port with

the docking of the amphibious warship USS Fort Lauderdale. The USS Billings remains positioned in Venezuelan territorial waters. A Marine Corps combat logistics company, with transport trucks, off-road vehicles and ambulance support has been deployed. The deployment and larger official response is being directed by Marine Maj. Gen. Kevin Jarrard.

US chargé d'affaires John Barrett declared the Venezuelan government 'fully compliant' with all US requests, adding: 'We will continue to work with the Venezuelan people to adjust these needs, including sanitation, water, energy generation, and we will continue along that path as long as it takes.'

The US government, in other words, is framing its indefinite military presence in the broadest possible terms. The precedent is Haiti: Washington responded to the 2010 earthquake there with a large military deployment that became a prolonged neocolonial intervention.

But the cynicism is even more glaring in Venezuela's case. The same power that spent two decades imposing sanctions that gutted the country's oil revenues, collapsed its public health system, drove more than 8 million people into exile and left the housing stock in the state of disrepair that turned the earthquake into a mass casualty event now presents itself as Venezuela's savior.

The earthquake military deployment is the next logical step in a process of seizure that began with the January 3 military abduction of President Nicolás Maduro. Since then, the CIA, SOUTHCOM and FBI have turned Caracas into an unofficial base of operations. Oil export revenues are routed through and controlled by the US Treasury Department.

In May, US warplanes flew provocatively over Caracas. In June, US and Venezuelan forces conducted the extrajudicial execution of an alleged gang leader in Bolívar state. Now the Pentagon controls Venezuela's main international airport and has docked a warship at its principal port.

Even as it claims purely humanitarian intent, Washington has maintained the sanctions that freeze Venezuelan government assets in US jurisdiction—including 31 tonnes of gold deposited at the Bank of England—while a special license permits only a narrow band of relief-related transactions.

The arrival of an Israeli military delegation further exposed the true character of the operation. Brig. Gen. Elad Edri, chief of staff of the IDF Home Front Command, arrived with 'expert teams' for reconstruction, according to the Israeli government. Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yvan Gil welcomed Israel's 'support for the Venezuelan people'—the same Gil who, as recently as Christmas, wrote on social media condemning the 'extermination' of the Palestinian people by what he called a 'genocidal actor.'

Those responsible are now welcomed with open arms.

The presence of the White Helmets, presented as 'Syria's first overseas humanitarian search-and-rescue deployment in modern history,' is further proof of relief efforts being used to further regime change operations. This group was created by British intelligence with US and European funding in 2013 as a propaganda tool to promote the forces seeking to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported in March that former Chevron executive Ali Moshiri pushed the CIA to "leave Rodríguez and her security-service backers in place" since the US-backed opposition "wasn't capable of keeping the oil flowing, let alone running the country."

The planning stages for the military coup in January evolved as a dialogue between US corporations, the CIA, the White House and a faction of the targeted country's state apparatus, following the same script as the series of coups Latin America witnessed in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. All were followed by fascist-military dictatorships working closely with the CIA to secure US corporate interests.

The Trump administration's approach envisions the Western Hemisphere as the United States' primary sphere of influence and the first line of defense for national security. The earthquake has accelerated rather than complicated these plans.

As shock and despair turn into anger, workers in Venezuela and across the Americas are beginning to see clearly what Trump's Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine means in practice. That anger requires an independent political perspective, grounded in revolutionary socialist internationalism to abolish and replace the entire capitalist system responsible for this catastrophe.



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