

# As humanitarian crisis reaches “critical” stage, NYT reports “Marco Rubio is Running Venezuela”

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The humanitarian catastrophe triggered by the twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24—magnitude 7.2 and 7.5—has entered what the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) now calls a “critical” phase. As the death toll mounts, an exposé in the *New York Times* has confirmed from internal sources that Venezuela has been turned into a semi-colonial protectorate administered directly from Washington.

The Venezuelan government announced Wednesday that 4,829 people are confirmed dead and 16,740 injured. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator has called estimates of up to 50,000 missing “terrifyingly plausible.” More than 20,000 people remain in temporary shelters, while authorities estimate 25,000 housing units will need to be built for those left homeless. NASA calculates that 58,870 buildings were damaged or destroyed.

PAHO director Jarbas Barbosa warned that “in the coming weeks, the greatest health risks may come not only from injuries caused by the earthquakes, but also from interruptions to health services, overcrowding, inadequate water and sanitation, and reduced access to vaccination and routine care.”

PAHO’s assessment found three hospitals so severely damaged they require full evacuation, 24 more with damage affecting operations and 20 with minor damage, as well as 20 damaged outpatient facilities, and over 100 primary-care units affected, 20 of them severely. In La Guaira, half the health workforce has been lost—dead, missing, injured, or displaced.

The UN and foreign aid agencies, while helping secure emergency medical and sanitation supplies, have again proven utterly incapable of mobilizing resources commensurate with the scale of the disaster. UN humanitarian coordinator Gianluca Rampolla told *El País* that “a country whose GDP today is a quarter of what it was in 2012 needs to rebuild financial muscle to invest in basic services: health, education, water, sanitation. A country

without those services is not sustainable.”

Yet appeals by the UN and Venezuelan authorities for Washington to release the billions in frozen Venezuelan state assets and export revenue held by the US Treasury have been ignored.

Instead, even as the earthquake toll rises, Vice President for the Economy and Banco de Venezuela president Calixto Ortega has confirmed that the government is proceeding with an IMF-backed restructuring of Venezuela’s foreign debt, channeling still more resources toward an estimated \$240 billion owed to creditors—resources that could instead rebuild hospitals and homes.

Washington’s response to the disaster has not been to loosen its economic stranglehold but to deepen its military occupation under humanitarian cover. As SOUTHCOM commander Gen. Francis L. Donovan declared on July 12: “We create a military with but one purpose, to fight and win. But when that same military can respond to a crisis like this, we see the best in the American people... We’ll remain on the task and on the mission until the job is done.”

Workers should have no illusions about when that “job” will be finished—not before US imperialism has secured its strategic objectives.

Those objectives were laid bare in the *New York Times* report “How Marco Rubio Is Running Venezuela From Afar.” Citing more than a dozen officials in Washington and Caracas, the *Times* found that in the six months since US military forces seized sitting President Nicolás Maduro from his residence, Rubio has become the country’s de facto “viceroy,” exercising a degree of personal control over a nation not seen since L. Paul Bremer ran occupied Iraq in 2003.

Rubio effectively controls Venezuela’s finances, the distribution of its natural resources, and its government, communicating directly and informally—in Spanish, over WhatsApp—with Delcy Rodríguez, Maduro’s former vice president who now nominally leads the country with

Washington's blessing.

The mechanism of financial control is damning: the US Treasury collects the revenue from most of Venezuela's oil exports and doles it out gradually through the country's private banks, with Rubio's team dictating what the money can be spent on and by whom—an arrangement the *Times* compares to parents handing out allowances to children.

According to Trump, Rodríguez told Rubio after Maduro's ouster that she was "willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again." Trump has said the US will "run the country" until a "safe, proper and judicious transition," adding in a separate interview that he expects Washington to run Venezuela "for years."

Venezuelan crude now flows through trading arrangements with firms Trafigura and Vitol set up by the Trump administration, while Rubio has sidelined Energy Secretary Chris Wright to personally direct the opening of Venezuela's oil sector to American capital, prioritizing US firms over the European companies previously operating there.

Rubio has also warned Rodríguez's government against dealings with US adversaries, and Venezuela's state oil company has quietly taken over operations it co-owned with Russia's Rosneft.

*Times* journalist Anatoly Kurmanaev, while noting US aid has some value, pointed out: "Venezuela, for example, no longer has military helicopters because they were mostly destroyed by the Americans in the Jan. 3 attack"—aircraft that could otherwise be searching for earthquake survivors.

The establishment of this viceroyalty is being underpinned by a military occupation. US forces control Caracas's Simón Bolívar International Airport and the Port of La Guaira, the country's most important, reinforced by the recent arrival of the USS San Antonio. In a joint US-Venezuelan operation, alleged drug trafficker Niño Guerrero was extrajudicially executed—a preview of the "security" regime being constructed under occupation.

As the ICFI has warned for over a decade, documented in the volume *Sounding the Alarm: Socialism against War*, US imperialism—wracked by economic decline, staggering debt, and the erosion of the dollar's global position—is turning to military force to sustain its hegemony. The war in Ukraine, the US war on Iran, preparations for war with China, and the Gaza genocide are not separate crises but components of a single eruption of imperialist violence, of which the occupation of Venezuela is now an integral part.

Trump already speaks of Venezuelan oil as an extension of US reserves. But even total command of Venezuela's government is insufficient for Washington's aims.

CSIS senior fellow Robert Evan Ellis, in a recent column, identifies the real strategic priority: countering Chinese

influence and suppressing class struggle and anti-imperialist sentiment across Latin America. Ellis cites an AMLAT Radar poll showing 49 percent of Latin Americans consider China the best trade partner against just 26 percent for the US, and warns that rising fuel costs could topple Washington's allied governments in Ecuador and Bolivia.

The underlying economic data explains his alarm. An Inter-American Development Bank report found China was the fastest-growing buyer of Latin American exports in early 2026, up 25 percent year-on-year, compared to 14 percent growth in US-bound exports. Venezuela's total exports fell 8.7 percent even as its exports to the US ticked up following Maduro's capture.

CSIS economist Philip Luck notes China's loans to Venezuela are repaid through oil flows it controls directly, giving Beijing priority over bondholders in any IMF restructuring—but US intervention has now cut off that channel: Venezuelan crude exports to the US reached 17.1 million barrels in May and to India 13.5 million, while shipments to China remained at zero for a fifth consecutive month.

Domestically, the machinery of dispossession has proceeded unabated through the disaster. On July 8, Rodríguez signed a decree further loosening oil regulation beyond January's privatizing Hydrocarbon Law, lowering taxes and royalties for foreign capital, declaring it establishes "a favorable environment for cooperation between the state and national and foreign capital."

Moreover, under US oversight, the Rodríguez government and Washington-sponsored opposition figures will launch an "election dialogue" August 1 to lend democratic cover to the occupation. And in a telling personnel move, Rodríguez removed Yvan Gil—long associated with anti-imperialist rhetoric—from the foreign ministry, installing him instead at Science and Technology, while a new Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade was handed to Félix Plasencia, Venezuela's current representative in Washington.

Every element of this record—the frozen billions withheld from earthquake relief, the debt payments prioritized over housing, the oil wealth redirected to Wall Street and Washington—demonstrates that the "job" the US military is completing in Venezuela has nothing to do with making its population whole after the earthquakes. It is the installation of a semi-colonial police-state regime.



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