“This is the Donroe Doctrine,” Hegseth tours Venezuela and Colombia between national strikes

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19 November 2026

US War Secretary Pete Hegseth arrived in Caracas Wednesday in a previously unannounced visit and signed a military cooperation agreement with the government of acting President Delcy Rodríguez, effectively placing Venezuela's armed forces under the tutelage of the Pentagon. It was the most senior US visit since American special forces seized President Nicolás Maduro in a raid on January 3. Hegseth flew on to Bogotá the same day.

The agreement, signed with Venezuelan Defense Minister Gustavo González López, covers joint training, intelligence sharing, equipment and access to “new technologies,” restoring ties Hugo Chávez broke off in 2005.

“That is the Donroe Doctrine,” Hegseth said, reworking the 1823 Monroe Doctrine declaring US hegemony across the Western Hemisphere with Trump's name. “Venezuela has gone from our most aggressive regional threat to a compliant security partner on its way to rebuilding its military alongside the United States.”

Hegseth said more than he intended. Venezuela was never a “threat” because of drug trafficking. It was a threat while it defied US dictates and shipped its oil to China. It became a “compliant security partner” once it handed its oilfields to US capital and its army to the Pentagon, with its crude exports to China falling to zero.

The Shield of the Americas, the alliance of right-wing governments Trump launched in March in the name of fighting “narcoterrorism,” exists to defend US business interests against China, other geopolitical rivals, and above all against the working class. The region is being transformed into an active front in the emerging Third World War.

Hegseth's visit fell between national strikes in both countries. On Monday, teachers, health workers and university staff across Venezuela held a 12-hour national strike demanding a living wage and year-end bonuses far above the $150 the government offered. On Thursday, Colombian workers struck nationally against austerity, after mass protests in October.

The trip also came eight days after the US House of Representatives voted 211-204 to bury an impeachment resolution against Hegseth. Its eight articles included the abduction of Maduro without congressional authorization and the murder of hundreds of fishermen in drone missile strikes against boats off Venezuela’s shores. Hegseth's answer was to fly to Caracas and display what the abduction had bought for US imperialism: 17 oilfields, a Pentagon stake in the company working them and a Venezuelan army under US tutelage.

The Democrats, who insured that there were not enough no votes to impeach Hegseth, share these aims. The investigation of the oil deal they promise once they take control of Congress on January 3 concerns who profits—Trump’s buddies are today taking major stakes—and with whose sign-off, not the conversion of Venezuela into a US protectorate.

Two societies on the edge

The twin earthquakes that struck Venezuela on June 24 killed at least 6,509 people, roughly 20 times the 331 killed in Colombia's August 10 quake. The US Geological Survey puts the chance that Venezuela's real toll exceeds 10,000 at 81 percent.

Both countries are among the most unequal in the world, although recent figures are not available for Venezuela. At 376.9 percent, Venezuela's inflation is the highest on the planet, while the minimum wage has been frozen at 130 bolivars since 2022 and is now worth about 15 US cents. Some 8 million Venezuelans have left since the economic crisis began in 2014. More than 2 million Colombians emigrated since the COVID-19 pandemic struck, with 2025 setting a record. Both are among the top five nationalities deported from the US this year, and citizens of both countries have been sent on third-country flights to Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other nations.

Both governments are deepening the social crisis. De la Espriella's Economic Rescue Law would cut 45 trillion pesos a year, 2.2 percent of GDP, and extend the 19 percent sales tax to basic foods, while his government reopens oil exploration

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“including fracking.” Rodríguez has handed the oilfields to US capital, and most of the $12.26 billion in oil revenue released from a US-controlled account went to selling dollars to the banks, while wage increases are postponed to 2027.

The trigger for Monday's strike in Venezuela was the bonus offer, which university union leader Eduardo Sánchez called “a slap in the face.” Workers demand $960, citing the bonuses won through struggle by workers at the state-owned CVG and MINERVEN, and unions have called a 24-hour strike and a march on Miraflores for next week.

In Colombia, the October 14 protests brought tens of thousands into the streets of more than 10 cities, but the union leadership billed them as a “preparatory day” and channeled them behind lawsuits and the congressional maneuvers of former President Gustavo Petro's Pacto Histórico. Thursday's strike, called by the CUT labor federation and the teachers' union Fecode, targets the Rescue Law directly. It follows a decree loosening restrictions on police force against protesters, whose actions De la Espriella has branded “urban terrorism.”

These struggles refute the claim that the population has shifted to the right. De la Espriella faced nationwide protests even before he took office. It is the ruling elite that is moving to the right, escalating austerity, militarization and repression, and placing itself even further under the wing of Washington, whose Shield of the Americas exists to protect both the interests of US imperialism, and the Latin American ruling oligarchies from their own populations.

The same process is unfolding internationally, with mass protests in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Mexico and national strikes in France, Italy and Spain. In Argentina, medical residents struck on November 18 and the university union CONADU Histórica has called a 24-hour national strike for November 25. Workers in Caracas, Bogotá, Buenos Aires and Paris are objectively waging a common struggle. The task is to make this unity conscious.

“A compliant security partner”

In Caracas, Hegseth spoke of “the incredible resource capabilities that your country has that we look forward to unlocking together with you.” To alleged traffickers, he said: “We will hunt you down. We will find you. And we will kill you.”

Rodríguez has purged the Chavista high command, retiring 110 senior officers in July. US and Venezuelan forces killed Tren de Aragua leader Héctor Guerrero Flores in a joint operation in June, and the US helped the Venezuelan military carry out a deadly drone strike on an armed group, according to the *New York Times*.

Washington is negotiating a status of forces agreement, which would set the rules for US military personnel in the country.

The pact is the armed complement to the August oil deal, which Hegseth signed with Secretary of State Marco Rubio. It hands 17 fields holding about a fifth of Venezuela's reserves to North American Blue Energy Partners (NABEP). The US government holds 35 percent of its parent company, a guaranteed share of output and first refusal on the rest. Hegseth boasted that the deal “makes the Strait of Hormuz a non-factor for the Western Hemisphere.”

The cutoff left Beijing's $10 billion to $15 billion in oil-backed loans to Venezuela effectively unserviced. At the same time, De la Espriella promised before taking office to pull Colombia out of China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Washington is also prepared to play its protectorates off against each other. Reuters reported Thursday that State Department policy chief Jeremy Lewin floated to Guyanese officials in September the possibility of Venezuela taking partial control of the Essequibo, the western two-thirds of the territory claimed by Guyana, rich in gold and bauxite and adjacent to ExxonMobil's offshore oil finds. Lewin, who says he acted on White House orders, had discussed with Rodríguez the prospect of US companies operating there.

In Colombia, the hinge between the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Panama Canal, Hegseth delivered a C-130 Hercules transport plane but left without the deal he came for. According to the *Times*, De la Espriella told Washington he lacked the votes in Congress for a Title 10 agreement allowing US forces to carry out joint airstrikes and ground operations on Colombian soil. De la Espriella called the report “false,” but Foreign Minister Omar Bula urged Congress to approve expanded cooperation “as quickly as possible.”

Title 10 would go beyond what Colombia has already granted. Days after De la Espriella's August 7 inauguration, his government signed an agreement authorizing joint operations. Three MQ-9A Reaper drones lent by the Pentagon arrived at the Tolemaida base on October 30. The obstacle to US combat troops is not De la Espriella, but the expectation of feeding mass popular opposition.

The boat strikes Hegseth oversees have killed at least 240 people since September 2025. His next stops are Ecuador and Honduras, both of which are discussing expanded joint operations and basing agreements with US forces.

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