



U.S. Capture of Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro: Considerations for Congress

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On January 3, 2026, President Trump [announced](#) that the U.S. military had launched strikes across Venezuela that culminated in the capture and arrest of President Nicolás Maduro (2013-2026) and his wife Cilia Flores in an [operation](#) that resulted in few U.S. casualties. Maduro and Flores were transferred to New York to face narco-terrorism, drug trafficking, and weapons [charges](#). Maduro's ouster came after months of U.S. [lethal strikes](#) on vessels allegedly transporting drugs for U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) tied to Maduro, [seizures](#) of vessels transporting sanctioned Venezuelan oil, and a drone strike that [destroyed](#) a port facility. President Trump [said](#) that the United States will "run" Venezuela until a transition takes place and that U.S. companies will pay to rebuild the country's oil infrastructure. He [asserted](#) that Maduro's vice president and oil minister Delcy Rodríguez, who is under U.S. [sanctions](#) for corruption, appears willing "to do what we think is necessary" as acting president. If not, he [warned](#), she could "pay a very big price."

Congressional responses to the U.S. capture of Maduro have varied. Some Members have [supported](#) the "decisive and justified" operation to bring Maduro to justice. Others [criticized](#) the lack of prior authorization or notification to Congress and [warned](#) of the risk of entangling U.S. forces in Venezuela. Both chambers have considered but not approved resolutions pursuant to the [War Powers Resolution](#) that would direct the President to terminate the use of the U.S. military for hostilities against certain FTOs (S.J.Res. 83 and H.Con.Res. 61) or with Venezuela (S.J.Res. 90 and H.Con.Res. 64) without congressional authorization. The Senate may consider S.J.Res. 98, which would direct the President to remove U.S. forces from hostilities in Venezuela not authorized by Congress. Congress may consider other legislative and oversight actions.

U.S. Policy

Successive U.S. Administrations have employed various strategies to address authoritarian rule in Venezuela. Neither the first Trump Administration's sanctions strategy nor the Biden Administration's negotiated approach [precipitated](#) a change in government. In January 2025, Maduro began a third term, holding onto power despite [election results](#) suggesting he lost the 2024 election to Edmundo González. González became the opposition candidate after Maduro-aligned officials blocked the candidacy of opposition leader María Corina Machado; González has been in exile in Spain since September 2024.

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Machado, who escaped Venezuela in December 2025 to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, has [supported](#) U.S. military actions to oust Maduro.

Secretary of State Rubio has [said](#) that while restoring democracy remains a long-term goal, coercing the current government to address U.S. [security, migration, and energy concerns](#) is the immediate aim. President Trump [has asserted](#) that María Corina Machado “doesn’t have the support” to lead Venezuela.

- **Security.** The Trump Administration has stated that drug trafficking and terrorist groups led by or associated with Maduro threaten U.S. national security. In October, the Administration reportedly [informed](#) Congress that U.S. forces are in a “non-international armed conflict” with drug cartels in Venezuela and beyond.
- **Migration.** Political repression accompanied by an economic and humanitarian crisis fueled emigration of nearly [8 million](#) Venezuelans during Maduro’s presidency. This migration facilitated the spread of Tren de Aragua (TdA), a Venezuelan gang and U.S.-designated FTO. President Trump has [accused](#) Maduro of sending TdA members to conduct “irregular warfare” in the United States.
- **Energy.** Venezuela has the world’s largest proven oil reserves, but production has plummeted due to corruption, U.S. sanctions, and mismanagement. President Trump has repeatedly [asserted](#) that Venezuela stole oil and other resources from the United States. Secretary Rubio [said](#) that a U.S. “oil quarantine” of sanctioned shipments will continue as the United States leads efforts to rebuild the sector.

Some experts have disputed the Administration’s claims about Venezuela, including those regarding the existence of a [non-international armed conflict](#), Maduro’s [direction of TDA](#), and [stolen oil](#).

The situation in Venezuela remains unstable and U.S. policy uncertain. While newly sworn-in Acting President Rodríguez and other Maduro allies, including some indicted in the United States in [2020](#) and in [2025](#), apparently remain united and have [offered](#) to cooperate with the United States, they reportedly do not [exert](#) full control over the country, particularly in regions where criminal groups and Colombian FTOs are active. A Biden Administration official who led Venezuela policy [predicted](#) that while “criminalized continuity” or a “managed transition” to democracy could occur, power struggles and/or clashes within Venezuela may result in “chaos” requiring U.S. intervention. Colombian guerrillas have reportedly [vowed](#) to challenge U.S. imperialism.

International Reactions

The U.S. military operation to capture Maduro has prompted international debate. The [UN Secretary-General](#) said that U.S. actions set a “dangerous precedent,” while [European Union](#) officials urged restraint and respect for international law. The Organization of American States Secretary General [called](#) for a “peaceful way forward.” China, Russia, Cuba, and Iran have condemned the action.

Latin American governments have expressed [differing perspectives](#) on the U.S. capture. Some, including those of the three most populous countries (Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia), have [criticized](#) the action. Others, such as the governments of Argentina, Ecuador, and Peru, have supported the move. The president of [Panama](#), among other leaders, has called for Edmundo González to take power.

Congressional Considerations

Congress has supported past U.S. efforts to compel Maduro to cede power in order to hasten a return to democracy in Venezuela. Members have disagreed, however, on the second Trump Administration’s

policy goals and the legality of U.S. military strikes on drug vessels at sea, seizures of vessels transporting Venezuelan oil, and the military ouster of Maduro.

Members may continue to request or seek to compel information from the Trump Administration and to engage in consultations on its policy approach. Congress also may consider legislation to authorize or prohibit future military action or related funds for military operations in Venezuela. Congress could consider legislation to authorize aspects of U.S. policy or broad legislation to facilitate a democratic transition similar to the VERDAD Act (P.L. 116-94, Division J, Title I). Congress also could appropriate funds to support democracy or economic recovery that could be tied to congressional conditions. Congress may hold hearings, direct inspectors general to report on U.S. actions, and liaise with exiled opposition leaders.

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