

Global implications of US military operation in Venezuela

ANALYSIS

The potential ripple effects of the United States' military operation in Venezuela on January 3, 2026, extend well beyond either country. Brookings scholars assess the global implications of the events that took place in Caracas.

Who controls Venezuela's overseas oil assets?



By Scott R. Anderson
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The Trump administration's plan to "run" Venezuela through interim President Delcy Rodriguez is in deep tension with a signature policy of the first Trump administration. As a result, it has the potential to cause confusion regarding who controls the oil industry that the Trump administration wishes to reform. In 2019, the first Trump administration — along with various allies — stopped recognizing the Maduro regime as Venezuela's government. Instead, it recognized the government of Juan

Guaidó, who claimed to be interim president under Venezuela's constitution by virtue of his role in the 2015 National Assembly and the allegedly fraudulent nature of the 2018 presidential election that Maduro claimed to have won. When Guaidó lost this role in 2023, the Biden administration (alongside many other countries) shifted US recognition to the 2015 National Assembly itself as "the only legitimate branch" of Venezuela's government. While the Maduro regime remained in effective control of Venezuela, such recognition allowed the 2015 National Assembly to control various extraterritorial Venezuelan assets and interests, including control of oil-related assets, interests, and institutions.

But the Trump administration's new strategy of working through Maduro's former deputy, Rodríguez — including to reform Venezuela's oil sector — casts this practice into doubt. Will the United States continue to recognize the 2015 National Assembly? Or will its new arrangement with the Rodríguez regime restore Caracas's control of Venezuela's overseas oil assets and interests? And if the latter, will other countries follow? The answers to these questions will shape how Venezuela's overseas oil resources are managed — and their absence underscores how little the Trump administration seems to have prepared for the aftermath of its actions.



Pro-government supporters attend a rally a day after the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro by US forces, in Caracas, Venezuela, on January 4, 2026.

CARLOS BECERRA/GETTY IMAGES

Don't count on Congress

But don't count it out either



By Sarah A. Binder
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The Trump administration's go-it-alone strike on Venezuela and capture of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro raises the inevitable question: Where's Congress? Legal scholar Edward Corwin wrote decades ago that the US Constitution is "an invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy". True, presidents from both parties have aggressively accrued the

lion's share of such authority — typically with lawmakers' acquiescence or outright consent. But even a weakened Congress can crystallize public dissent to counterbalance presidential power. First, public opinion has not rallied to the president. The first survey out of the gate shows uneven public support for Trump's moves in Venezuela. Only a third of Americans support the military's move to oust Maduro; another third opposes Trump's move, and the rest do not seem to care or know enough to give an opinion. While two-thirds of Re-

publicans have rallied to Trump's side, most of the rest of the GOP respondents did not proffer an opinion. Still, majorities of both parties and independents expressed concern that the United States would get too involved in Venezuela. Such public ambivalence is unusual historically. Voters often "rally around the flag": After dramatic, focused, international events, public opinion often favors the president. This time, Democratic leaders have sharply criticized Trump's lack of a "day after" plan, and even some Senate Republicans have offered tepid support. Such reactions undermine a public rally to the president — weakening

Trump's standing in Congress and strengthening Democrats' resolve to stay on the attack. The Trump administration's saber-rattling against Greenland could generate similar pushback: Some Republicans have already questioned White House threats against this NATO ally. Second, senators will likely vote soon on Senator Tim Kaine's (D-Va.) resolution to block further use of force within or against Venezuela absent congressional authorization. Skeptics of the 1973 War Powers Resolution (WPR) rightly question whether the WPR affords any leverage to lawmakers seeking to legally challenge the executive's deployment of military force. But such fights are

more political than legal. WPR rules can propel resolutions to the House or Senate floor — even over party leaders' objections. Such votes force a president's partisans to take a stand. A similar Senate vote this past November attracted two Republicans, albeit failing 49-51. An analogous House vote last month secured three GOP votes before losing, 211-213. Of course, if both chambers passed such a resolution, they would surely fail to override an inevitable Trump veto. But forcing opponents to take a position can often be more electorally valuable to lawmakers than passing a bill. Given today's slim GOP majorities, limited public support

for the administration's actions in Venezuela, and skepticism from a few GOP senators, the Trump administration will need to make a concerted effort to keep its partisans in line. Third, keep eyes on how Democrats exploit the Venezuela issue for the 2026 midterms. Debating the legality and constitutionality of the president's military incursions abroad will not turn out the swing voters necessary for Democrats to regain control of the House. Expect Democrats to reframe the politics to turn Americans' attention back home. The affordability crisis in the United States will matter far more in November than the lives of Venezuelans or inhabitants of Greenland.



Venezuela Ambassador to the United Nations Samuel Reinaldo Moncada Acosta speaks as he holds up a news article, during a UN Security Council meeting on US strikes and the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the US, on January 5, 2026.

FRANK FRANKLIN II/AP

Venezuela likely to embolden Russia



By Daniel S. Hamilton
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The Trump administration's Venezuela intervention is likely to embolden Russia, and further challenge Ukraine and

Europe, in several ways. Trump called Maduro's extraction an "extraordinary military operation," echoing Vladimir Putin's description of his invasion of Ukraine as a "special military operation," and thus suggesting that on occasion, big powers may be warranted in intervening militarily against smaller countries. Trump has openly flouted international

Unconstrained by norms or institutions

'Donroe Doctrine' in practice



By Vanda Felbab-Brown
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Immediately after capturing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, Trump announced that the operation was only the beginning. The Trump administration assumes it can control the remaining pillars of the Maduro regime through an offshore military presence and oil embargo alone. Trump and Secretary of State Marco Rubio also believe that cutting off Venezuela's oil lifeline to Cuba will topple the Castro-ite government in Havana. At the same time, Trump renewed his

law, much as Putin has, giving Moscow further openings to disregard any international legal constraints on its actions. Trump has announced he intends to "run" Venezuela, much as Putin wants to run Ukraine — another boost for Russia. And while Trump's actions have upended Russia's support for the Maduro regime, Ukraine is a much bigger prize for the Kremlin: during Trump's first term, allegedly, Russia had informally

offered to end its support for Venezuela in exchange for US acceptance of Russian dominance of Ukraine. Publicly, Moscow has protested US actions; privately, the Kremlin sees opportunity. While some European leaders have criticized the US action as a violation of international law, most have been cautious about crossing Trump at a time when they want to secure US security guarantees for Ukraine, and as they

have become acutely aware of their own dependence on the United States. Trump's subsequent statement that "We do need Greenland, absolutely," prompted Europe's largest allies and the Nordic countries to close ranks behind Denmark, which governs the autonomous region, and to suggest that Greenland's security is best handled through NATO. Nonetheless, Europe's options are limited.