

# VENEZUELA AFTER MADURO

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## Did you know?...

- [Multiple Latin American countries condemned](#) the US operation in Venezuela, while others expressed that the removal of Maduro was necessary. Following the operation, President Trump also mulled [pursuing similar military action against Colombia](#).
- The US military action in Venezuela diminished the geopolitical reach of multiple adversarial nations. With the removal of Maduro from power, [China, Russia, and Iran have lost an important partner](#) in the Western Hemisphere.
- Operation Absolute Resolve is similar in nature to the [1989 US invasion of Panama](#), with both actions being conducted under Article II of the US Constitution, allowing for the removal of a foreign leader with existing US indictments from power so they may face criminal justice in US courts.



### Post-Maduro Venezuela Seeks a New Path with Washington

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Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, who was [appointed interim president of Venezuela](#) following Maduro's capture, called for a "balanced and respectful" relationship with the US, [inviting the US government to work together](#) "on an agenda for cooperation that is aimed toward shared development."

# Venezuela After Maduro

## ***Executive Summary***

On January 3, 2026, President Donald Trump authorized the US military to execute Operation Absolute Resolve inside the nation of Venezuela. This lightning raid on Caracas involved the US Army's elite Combat Applications Group (Delta Force) along with combat aircraft, and concluded with the capture and extradition of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

While the removal of Maduro from power marks the end of a 25-year-long authoritarian dictatorship which first began under Hugo Chavez, it presents an uneasy path ahead for Venezuela with global implications.

Key Takeaways:

- **An Uncertain Transition:** While Venezuelan opposition leaders are celebrating the removal of Maduro, their suitability as the next leaders of Venezuela have so far been [seemingly dismissed by President Trump](#) and other US officials. The remains of the Maduro government are [consolidating around Vice President Delcy Rodriguez](#), who appears to have the [support of US President Donald Trump](#), and are [ramping up efforts to crack down on dissenters](#).
- **Regional Shock:** [Multiple Latin American countries condemned](#) the US operation in Venezuela, while others expressed that the removal of Maduro was necessary. Following the operation, President Trump also mulled [pursuing similar military action against Colombia](#). The ouster of Maduro has [especially impacted the communist regime in Cuba](#), who relied primarily on Venezuela for oil and maintained strong military ties with Caracas.
- **A Strategic Defeat For US Adversaries:** The US military action in Venezuela diminished the geopolitical reach of multiple adversarial nations. With the removal of Maduro from power, [China, Russia, and Iran have lost an important partner](#) in the Western Hemisphere.
- **Clear Precedent:** Operation Absolute Resolve is similar in nature to the [1989 US invasion of Panama](#), with both actions being conducted under Article II of the US Constitution, allowing for the removal of a foreign leader with existing US indictments from power so they may face criminal justice in US courts.

## **Venezuela's Decline Under Socialist Rule**

Venezuela has the [world's largest proven oil reserves](#) along with potentially significant [deposits of valuable minerals](#). Yet under the [rule of chavismo](#), the populist left-wing political movement originally conceived by Hugo Chavez, unprecedented nationalization along with inflation caused by overprinting currency turned Venezuela from one of the richest countries in South America into one of its poorest.

- The [rampant nationalization of crucial sectors](#) such as agriculture, oil, electricity, water, supermarkets, and financial institutions led to frequent interruptions in services, widespread bankruptcy, and destroyed production levels. For instance, [Venezuela's food production fell 75%](#) over the course of two decades.
- In 2003, Chavez implemented a [foreign currency control scheme](#) as a way to reduce inflation by setting an overvalued exchange rate between the Venezuelan currency and the US dollar. But with more demand for US dollars than supply, the regime was [forced to ration available US dollars](#) to importers, leading to a [black market for foreign currency](#) where corrupt regime members and lucky individuals assigned cheap US dollars obtained huge profits. Ultimately, [the scheme increased inflation](#) as it reduced oil revenues in Venezuelan currency and forced the regime to print more money to cover the deficit.
- The socialist regime [implemented price ceilings](#) on various basic products and necessities. But while more people were willing to buy at capped prices, the few private factories that escaped nationalization [could not turn a profit and reduced or halted their production entirely](#), leading to mass shortages in supermarkets.
- Venezuela's socialist regime created a [massive welfare state](#) through social "missions" aimed at tackling poverty, illiteracy, healthcare, and more. Expansive welfare programs and massive public works projects not only provided opportunities for corruption but [resulted in a growing deficit](#) financed by printing more currency. Continuously printing money to pay for endless state programs ultimately led to [high rates of inflation for Venezuela](#).

### **What Happens Next For Venezuela**

While the immediate objectives of Operation Absolute Resolve were achieved, the political outcome for Venezuela remains uncertain. Former US Ambassador to Panama John Feely described the operation as "precision, power, and professionalism," but [emphasized](#) that it stood in "high, high contrast" to the "imprecision, sort of chaos and uncertainty" of Venezuela's geopolitical future being laid out by the Trump administration.

- Speaking to a press conference hours after the raid, [President Trump suggested](#) that the US would "run" Venezuela "until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," and even hinted at the [possibility of American troops being stationed in-country](#).
- [Venezuelan opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia](#) welcomed the ouster of Maduro as "an important step," but said the country could only return to normal when "all Venezuelans who have been deprived of their freedom for political reasons are released" and when the 2024 election results are respected.
- Vice President Delcy Rodriguez, who was [appointed interim president of Venezuela](#) following Maduro's capture, called for a "balanced and respectful" relationship with the

US, [inviting the US government to work together](#) “on an agenda for cooperation that is aimed toward shared development.”

- Former US Special Envoy to Venezuela Elliot Abrams warned that the hardline duo of Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino and Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, who control most of Venezuela’s military power, [could move against Rodriguez and put Venezuela back into conflict with the US](#).
- Interior Minister Cabello has begun rallying loyalists within the Venezuelan Armed Forces and [mobilizing colectivos](#) (pro-government paramilitary groups), [vowing revenge](#) against those involved in the US operation. The US has offered a [\\$25 million reward](#) for information leading to Cabello’s capture.
- Venezuelan authorities have also expanded the scope of the country’s State of Foreign Commotion, a state of emergency restricting certain civilian rights, by [authorizing the search and arrest of individuals](#) accused of promoting or supporting the US incursion.
- It is possible that Venezuelans take to the streets and [invite the military and security forces to join a popular uprising to topple chavismo](#), but so far there have been no indications of protests.
- Venezuelan opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Maria Corina Machado [called for Edmundo Gonzalez to assume power](#). She vowed to [return to Venezuela](#), but did not specify when.
- Speaking on the need to develop Venezuela’s oil, [President Trump appeared to endorse interim president Delcy Rodriguez](#) as a partner and seemingly dismissed the possibility of Machado taking over. As of January 7, 2026, President Trump also made [no mentions](#) about fresh elections or the release of political prisoners.
- President Trump, however, [threatened](#) that Rodriguez could face tougher consequences than Maduro “if she doesn’t do what’s right.”
- [US Secretary of State Marco Rubio emphasized](#) that while he had “admiration” for Machado and Gonzalez and wanted to see Venezuela have a transition of power, “we don’t have the expectation that’s going to happen in the next 15 hours.”

### **How The Operation Has Impacted Cuba And Other Latin American Countries**

Cuba and Venezuela share a long history of economic and military cooperation. [Venezuela has been Cuba’s primary supplier of crude oil](#), which has since dropped from around 27,400 barrels per day during the first 10 months of 2025 to almost zero. [The Cuban military has also maintained an extensive presence inside Venezuela](#), with experts and former Venezuelan officials estimating between 5,000 and 15,000 Cuban personnel dedicated to intelligence, counterintelligence, and security tasks. The Cuban security presence supporting Maduro’s dictatorship is said to be a [reimbursement for the delivery of Venezuelan oil](#). In addition to cutting Cuba off from its primary oil source and longstanding

military partner, Operation Absolute Resolve has put other Latin American countries on notice, notably Colombia.

- Havana reported that [32 Cuban military and police officers were killed during Operation Absolute Resolve](#), stating that they were on a mission in Venezuela at the request of Caracas. While the Cubans' mission objectives were not clear, Secretary Rubio stated that [Maduro had Cuban bodyguards](#) ahead of his capture.
- Speaking to reporters, Trump said that [US military action against Cuba was unlikely](#) as the country appeared "ready to fall" without intervention, emphasizing that Havana would struggle to hold out without heavily subsidized oil from Venezuela.
- In the buildup to Operation Absolute Resolve, the CIA [struck a port facility near the Venezuelan city of Maracaibo](#), which according to Colombian President Gustavo Petro was a cocaine factory controlled by the Colombian guerrilla group ELN.
- [Colombian President Gustavo Petro condemned the US operation](#) as an "assault on the sovereignty" of Latin America. President Trump also suggested that the US could be [considering an attack on Colombia](#), referring to Petro as "a sick man, who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States" and adding that "he's not going to be doing it very long."
- The leaders of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay joined Spain in [issuing a joint statement rejecting the US operation to oust Maduro](#), saying that "the situation in Venezuela must be resolved exclusively through dialogue and in accordance with the will of the Venezuelan people, without interference and adhering to international law." The statement also [warned against exploiting Venezuela's natural and strategic resources](#), saying it would be incompatible with international law and sovereignty and "pose a threat to the economic, political and social stability of the region."
- Following Operation Absolute Resolve, President Trump also renewed calls for [potential military action against drug cartels in Mexico](#). Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum [rebuffed Trump's remarks](#), stressing her desire to work with the US without threats of intervention.
- Other Latin American countries such as [Argentina](#), [Bolivia](#), [Ecuador](#), [Paraguay](#), and [Peru](#) celebrated the US intervention in Venezuela as a necessary action.

### **How The Operation Has Affected American Adversaries**

[China](#), [Russia](#), and [Iran](#) all unequivocally condemned the US strikes against Venezuela. Caracas has long maintained friendly relations with this trio of US adversaries, and the ouster of Maduro marks the [removal of a critical geopolitical node](#) for their axis in the Western Hemisphere.

- Before his capture, Maduro was meeting with a [Chinese delegation](#) consisting of Special Envoy Qiu Xiaoqi; Chinese Ambassador to Venezuela Lan Hu; Director of the

Latin American and Caribbean Department of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Liu Bo and Deputy Director Wang Hao; and Regional Attaché Liu Xen.

- With Maduro out, Beijing stands to lose preferential access to heavily discounted heavy crude oil. Last year, China purchased around [568,000 barrels per day](#) from Venezuela.
- Maduro welcomed Russian weapons and support to prop up his regime, and Vladimir Putin has been keen to [keep Maduro as a proxy](#) in the Western Hemisphere. With Maduro's capture, Moscow loses an important source of geopolitical influence in close proximity to the US.
- Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) relied on [sanctions-evasion schemes](#) which were in place under Chavez and Maduro. Through barter, opaque contracts, and shadow shipping networks, [Iran and Venezuela covertly exchanged services and commodities](#) such as refinery repairs and components, gasoline, crude oil, and gold. Leaked documents from late 2025 suggest that [Iran-linked projects in Venezuela totaled roughly \\$4.7 billion](#).
- The IRGC also maintains an [extensive fleet of sanctions-evading "ghost tankers"](#) sailing under various flags moving crude oil products to and from Tehran. With Maduro removed from power, the ghost tankers [which served Iran out of Venezuela](#) are put in jeopardy.

### **Venezuela 2026 Compared To Panama 1989**

Operation Absolute Resolve bears resemblance to Operation Just Cause, the 1989 US invasion of Panama which concluded with the [capture and extradition of Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega](#). There are differences between the two operations, but the core template remains the same.

- **Scale And Duration:** Operation Absolute Resolve against Venezuela was of [a much more limited scale and duration](#), an hours-long raid involving a small special forces strike team and around 150 aircraft, while [Operation Just Cause involved nearly 26,000 combat troops](#) engaged in multi-week combat.
- **Legal Framing:** Operation Absolute Resolve is framed as a law enforcement operation (apprehending "narco-terrorists") carried out under [Article II powers](#) and [existing US indictments against Maduro](#) and without prior congressional authorization. Operation Just Cause was also conducted under [existing indictments against Noriega](#) and without prior congressional approval, but with [immediate War Powers reporting](#) and [broad Executive justification](#).
- **International Reaction:** Operation Absolute Resolve against Venezuela has been [widely condemned](#) by world governments and the UN Human Rights Office for violating the UN Charter. While the UN General Assembly "strongly deplored" the 1989 US invasion of Panama, a [UN Security Council Resolution condemnation failed](#) after vetoes from the US, UK, and France.

- **Outcome:** Both Noriega and Maduro were captured during the two respective operations and ultimately sent to face justice within the US. In the wake of Operation Just Cause, the democratically elected government of Guillermo Endara was [restored](#) in Panama. Following Operation Absolute Resolve, Maduro's Vice President Delcy Rodriguez was sworn in to lead a temporary government with [no clear timeline for elections](#) and [growing uncertainty](#) over whether Venezuela can truly reconcile with the US and cooperate towards an eventual democratic transition.
- **The Bottom Line:** Regarding Operation Absolute Resolve, Trump can claim precedent based on [prior practice](#) of removing an indicted foreign leader in the hemisphere; the existing indictments against Maduro for narco-terrorism and related crimes allowing for the action to be framed as [enforcing US criminal law](#) instead of waging a new war; and the prior practice of [presidents initiating military action under Article II powers](#) without official declaration of war, with Trump and Republicans arguing that Operation Absolute Resolve fits this bill due to its [short timeframe and no occupation](#).

### **American Voter Sentiment On Operation Absolute Resolve**

- **Voters Split On Use Of Force To Remove Maduro:** [46% of voters approve](#) of Trump's effort to remove Maduro from power through use of force, but [nearly as many \(43%\) disapprove](#). Still, [55% of voters believe](#) that Venezuelans are better off without Maduro.
- **Voters Believe America Is Safer With Maduro Removed:** [36% of voters say that America is now safer](#) with Maduro removed from power, while [29% say it's less safe](#). In addition, [47% of voters](#) believe Maduro's removal is likely to decrease the amount of drugs coming into the US while [39% disagree](#) and think such a decrease is unlikely.
- **Voters Split On Whether Trump Should Have Briefed Congress:** [42% of voters say Trump should have briefed Congress](#) before the operation in Venezuela, while [43% disagree](#) and say secrecy was the correct move. Regardless of what they think Trump should have done, [only 31% believe Congress would have kept quiet](#) about the attack.