



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 3, 2026

Trump Says U.S. Will “Run” Venezuela. Maduro, Wife Captured This Morning in Delta Force Raid

With the arrest of Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, the United States will now “run” Venezuela, President Trump said at a news conference this morning. And American oil companies, whose properties Venezuelan dictator Hugo Chávez expropriated in 2007, will rebuild and take over the industry there.

Though Trump said the operation freed the Venezuelan people and ended Maduro’s criminal reign over a drug and terror gang empire, he focused on Venezuela’s oil, and said the United States will sell the nation’s oil to other countries, including China.



AP Images

Given that federal prosecutors in the southern district of New York had indicted Maduro for running a narco-terrorism conspiracy, Secretary of State Marco Rubio said, the mission was a law-enforcement operation backed by the U.S. military.

pic.twitter.com/072d2ceeK8

— Rapid Response 47 (@RapidResponse47) [January 3, 2026](#)

The Operation

Trump spoke at a news conference in Palm Beach, Florida, flanked by Rubio, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and General Daniel Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Caine said the mission involved all U.S. military services, including the Space Force.

The military rehearsed the operation, called Absolute Resolve, for months, Caine said. It not only involved low-flying helicopters but also fighter aircraft and bombers. More than 150 aircraft that flew from 20 bases participated, Caine said.

The U.S. Army’s elite Delta Force special operations team captured the Maduros, [officials told](#) CBS news.

Caine said Trump ordered the operation at 10:46 p.m. The strike force attacked Maduro’s compound at 2:01 a.m. Caracas time. The helicopters were fired upon, Caine said. One was hit, but not disabled.

By 3:29 a.m. Eastern Standard Time, Maduro and his wife were on the USS *Iwo Jima* and headed for the United States.

[.@thejointstaff](#) Chairman Gen. Dan Caine: "At 10:46 P.M. Eastern time last night, [@POTUS](#) ordered the United States military to move forward with this mission.... He said to us... 'Good luck, and Godspeed' — and those words were transmitted to the entire joint force."



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pic.twitter.com/yQyRPfIJoQ

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In early December, [Trump warned](#) that U.S. forces would strike Venezuela “soon.”

[In October](#), Trump strongly hinted that land strikes were ahead.

And in invoking the Alien Enemies Act to deport Venezuelan illegal-alien members of the Tren de Aragua terror gang, he signaled what was in store for TdA, Maduro, and Venezuela.

“TdA is closely aligned with, and indeed has infiltrated, the Maduro regime, including its military and law enforcement apparatus,” [Trump wrote](#) in the executive order:

TdA grew significantly while Tareck El Aissami served as governor of Aragua between 2012 and 2017. In 2017, El Aissami was appointed as Vice President of Venezuela. Soon thereafter, the United States Department of the Treasury designated El Aissami as a Specially Designated Narcotics Trafficker under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act....

Maduro leads the regime-sponsored enterprise Cártel de los Soles, which coordinates with and relies on TdA and other organizations to carry out its objective of using illegal narcotics as a weapon to “flood” the United States. In 2020, Maduro and other regime members were charged with narcoterrorism and other crimes in connection with this plot against America.

Venezuela is a “hybrid criminal state” that had organized “an invasion of and predatory incursion into the United States,” the order said.

Citing INTERPOL, the order said TdA was a “significant threat to the United States as it infiltrates migration flows from Venezuela.”

[Multiple reports said](#) Maduro [sent TdA](#) into the United States.

United States to “Run” Venezuela

Trump said U.S. oil companies will pay to “rebuild the oil infrastructure, which will cost billions of dollars.”

“We’re going to get the oil flowing the way it should be,” Trump said. As well, he continued, “we’re designating various people” to oversee the country.

“It’s largely going to be — for a period of time — the people who are standing right behind me,” Trump said. “We’re going to be running it, we’re going to be bringing it back.”

[.@POTUS](#): “We’re going to make sure it’s run properly. We’re going to rebuild the oil infrastructure... We’re going to make sure the people that were forced out of Venezuela by this thug are also taken care of.” pic.twitter.com/NB6J9UJdhr

— Rapid Response 47 (@RapidResponse47) [January 3, 2026](#)



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[@SecRubio](#): "We called members of Congress immediately after... at its core, this was an arrest of two indicted fugitives of American justice... it's just not the kind of mission that you can pre-notify because it endangers the mission." pic.twitter.com/OD7lImhrsB

— Rapid Response 47 (@RapidResponse47) [January 3, 2026](#)

Rubio said the administration notified Congress after Maduro was in custody because it was a "trigger-based mission."

"At its core, this was an arrest of two indicted fugitives of American justice.... It's just not the kind of mission that you can pre-notify because it endangers the mission," he said.

"Congress will leak," Trump said.

Maduro "had multiple opportunities to avoid this, he was provided multiple very, very, very generous offers, and chose instead to act like a wild man, chose instead to play around," Rubio said. "He wanted to play big boy."

pic.twitter.com/OFGYnq96uk

— Rapid Response 47 (@RapidResponse47) [January 3, 2026](#)

Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, have been indicted in the Southern District of New York. Nicolas Maduro has been charged with Narco-Terrorism Conspiracy, Cocaine Importation Conspiracy, Possession of Machineguns and Destructive Devices, and Conspiracy to Possess...

— Attorney General Pamela Bondi (@AGPamBondi) [January 3, 2026](#)

On X, U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi noted that Maduro and his wife [face charges](#) of "Narco-Terrorism Conspiracy, Cocaine Importation Conspiracy, Possession of Machineguns and Destructive Devices, and Conspiracy to Possess Machineguns and Destructive Devices against the United States."

Reaction

As expected, GOP leaders backed the operation and Democrats opposed it. "Today's military action in Venezuela was a decisive and justified operation that will protect American lives," House Speaker Mike Johnson said:

Nicolas Maduro is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Americans after years of trafficking illegal drugs and violent cartel members into our country — crimes for which he's been properly indicted in U.S. courts and an arrest warrant duly issued — and today he learned what accountability looks like.

I have spoken in the last several hours with [@SecRubio](#) and [@SecWar](#) Hegseth, and the nation will hear from [@POTUS](#) in his address at 11am ET.

Today's military action in Venezuela was a decisive and justified operation that will protect American lives.



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Nicolas Maduro is...

— Speaker Mike Johnson (@SpeakerJohnson) [January 3, 2026](#)

For years, Nicolas Maduro, the cartel he leads, and other cartels in Latin America have trafficked drugs into the United States, which have killed hundreds of thousands of Americans. President Trump's decisive action to disrupt the unacceptable status quo and apprehend Maduro,...

— Leader John Thune (@LeaderJohnThune) [January 3, 2026](#)

Said Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota:

For years, Nicolas Maduro, the cartel he leads, and other cartels in Latin America have trafficked drugs into the United States, which have killed hundreds of thousands of Americans. President Trump's decisive action to disrupt the unacceptable status quo and apprehend Maduro, through the execution of a valid Department of Justice warrant, is an important first step to bring him to justice for the drug crimes for which he has been indicted in the United States.

"The idea that Trump plans to now run Venezuela should strike fear in the hearts of all Americans. The American people have seen this before and paid the devastating price," top Senate Democrat Chuck Schumer of New York said on X.

The idea that Trump plans to now run Venezuela should strike fear in the hearts of all Americans. The American people have seen this before and paid the devastating price.

— Chuck Schumer (@SenSchumer) [January 3, 2026](#)

President Trump's unilateral military action to attack another country and seize Maduro — no matter how terrible a dictator he is — is unconstitutional and threatens to drag the U.S. into further conflicts in the region. What does it mean that the U.S. will 'run' Venezuela, and...

— Elizabeth Warren (@SenWarren) [January 3, 2026](#)

Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts is unhappy as well. "Trump's unilateral military action to attack another country and seize Maduro — no matter how terrible a dictator he is — is unconstitutional and threatens to drag the U.S. into further conflicts in the region," she wrote on X:

What does it mean that the U.S. will 'run' Venezuela, and what will Trump do next around the world? The American people voted for lower costs, not for Trump's dangerous military adventurism overseas that won't make the American people safer.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi of California was more measured. "The Administration has not made the case that an urgent threat to America's national security existed to justify the use of U.S. military force," she wrote.



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“If the President grounds his actions on the basis of drug trafficking charges, it is entirely hypocritical in light of his recent pardon of former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández who was responsible for bringing more than 400 tons of cocaine in the United States in order to ‘shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos,’” she continued:

The Administration says Maduro will be tried for drug trafficking in a U.S. court — but Hernández was convicted of the same crime by an American jury and Trump pardoned him.

Venezuela is ruled by an illegitimate regime, but the Administration has not made the case that an urgent threat to America’s national security existed to justify the use of U.S. military force.

President Trump has made no secret of his intentions to effectively abolish the...

— Nancy Pelosi (@SpeakerPelosi) [January 3, 2026](#)



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