



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on October 9, 2025

Senate Rejects Bid to Curb Trump's Caribbean Strikes

On Wednesday, the U.S. Senate narrowly defeated a resolution that would have restrained President Donald Trump's authority to conduct military strikes on non-state actors in the Caribbean. The measure, titled "[A joint resolution to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities that have not been authorized by Congress](#)," was sponsored by Democratic Senators Tim Kaine (Va.) and Adam Schiff (Calif.). It failed by a count of 48 to 51.

Under the [final tally](#), two Republicans — Senators Rand Paul (Ky.) and Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) — bucked party lines to support the motion. On the Democratic side, Senator John Fetterman (Pa.) voted against it. Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) did not cast a vote.



AP Images

The legislation would have required a formal debate and vote in Congress before the president carries out further military strikes under the justification of combating drug trafficking. Kaine and Schiff asserted that Congress must reclaim its constitutional power over war.

Proponents of the resolution argued that U.S. air and naval strikes in recent weeks had occurred without adequate oversight. Opponents, largely Republicans, warned that the measure would undercut the president's flexibility to act swiftly against the drug threat and, potentially, in [the Middle East](#).

Background to U.S. Strikes

The Senate vote came amid growing controversy over a series of U.S. military strikes in the Caribbean targeting vessels alleged to be carrying illegal drugs. Since September 2, the Trump administration has acknowledged at least four such operations in international waters off Venezuela. Some reports suggest there might have been as [many as six](#).

The first strike, announced on September 2, destroyed a small vessel in the southern Caribbean, killing 11 people. President Trump [said](#) those aboard were members of Tren de Aragua, a Venezuelan gang designated by U.S. State Department as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO). Venezuela's government [disputed](#) that claim, saying the dead were fishermen, not gang members.

Roughly two weeks later, Trump [confirmed](#) a second strike that he said killed three more people who were "extraordinarily violent drug trafficking cartels and narcoterrorists." A [third attack](#) followed around September 19, also resulting in three reported deaths.

The most recent confirmed strike occurred on October 3, when U.S. forces targeted another small craft in international waters near Venezuela. War Secretary Pete Hegseth [said](#) four people were killed. He described the boat as "transporting substantial amounts of narcotics — headed to America to poison our people." A video released by the Pentagon showed a missile obliterating a fast-moving vessel. The



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footage offered no view of the alleged contraband.

Across these strikes, the administration claims a total of 21 deaths.

The Administration's Case

The Trump administration has offered a few central assertions in defense of its campaign. First, that the vessels were carrying narcotics bound for the United States. Second, that the traffickers operate as terrorist networks, justifying force under the law of armed conflict. Third, that swift military response is necessary to disrupt the drug pipeline.

In an October [notice](#) to Congress, the White House argued that the United States is engaged in a “non-international armed conflict,” and that groups such as Tren de Aragua are “non-state armed groups.” On that basis, Trump ordered Hegseth to conduct operations against them “pursuant to the law of armed conflict.” Previously, the administration [expressed](#) a belief that the cartels acted on behalf of the Maduro regime.

Yet such an approach effectively merges law enforcement with military power. Narcotics smugglers, once prosecuted in court, are now cast as enemy fighters. The move creates a legal gray zone in which criminality is redefined as warfare. For now, it is allowing the executive branch to bypass both judicial process and congressional approval.

At the same time, the administration has produced no concrete evidence that the bombed vessels carried drugs or were bound for the United States, relying instead on references to classified intelligence reports. [According](#) to *Politico*, congressmen received a classified briefing about the strikes last Wednesday. Yet, says the outlet,

Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said the meeting failed to satisfy lawmakers on “the legal rationale, the mission itself and the intel surrounding the strikes.”

Previously, in [typical maritime drug interdictions](#), the Coast Guard acted as the principal enforcement agency. It would board a suspect vessel, seize contraband, and preserve it in a strict chain of custody for prosecution. Bombing a target at sea forecloses those procedures and leaves little chance for independent forensic verification.

Reactions and International Ripples

Internationally, the strikes have drawn sharp criticism. Colombian President Gustavo Petro [claimed](#) the latest bombed vessel may have been a Colombian ship carrying Colombian citizens.

Venezuelan authorities [accused](#) the United States of using the “war on drugs” as cover for regime change in Venezuela.

Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva [called](#) the presence of U.S. warships in the Caribbean a “factor of tension” for Latin America. His comment reflected wider regional concern that Washington's counter-drug deployments are evolving into a military posture near Venezuela.

Domestically, the vote laid bare the tension within the Republican Party. On the House floor, Senator Paul [stressed](#) concerns over the loss of due process and suggested the killings were extrajudicial. He argued that Congress should not allow the executive branch to act as “judge, jury and executioner.”



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The Senator also quoted Jon Duffy, a retired Navy captain:

A republic that allows its leaders to kill without law, to wage war without strategy, to deploy troops without limit, is a republic in deep peril. Congress will not stop it. The courts will not stop it. That leaves those sworn not to a man, but to the Constitution to stop this.

Indeed, what is cast as a counter-narcotics mission has become a constitutional test of presidential power and the legal boundary between crime and war.

Escalation

Meanwhile, the administration has sharply raised tensions with Caracas. On Monday, President Trump [ordered](#) an end to diplomatic contacts with the Maduro regime amid [expanding](#) U.S. military and intelligence activity along the Caribbean coast.

Maduro, for his part, accused Washington of plotting a “false-flag operation.” He [claimed](#) on Tuesday Venezuelan security forces had foiled an attempt to plant explosives at the U.S. Embassy in Caracas — a scheme he said was designed to trigger a direct confrontation with his government.



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