

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 8, 2026

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable James Risch
Chairman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

The Honorable Charles Grassley
Chairman
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Tom Cotton
Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Mark Warner
Vice Chairman
Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

Dear Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Durbin, Chairman Cotton, and Vice Chairman Warner:

We write to urge you to convene immediate public oversight hearings covering President Donald Trump's January 3, 2026 military operation in Venezuela, which Congress did not authorize. The American people deserve clarity as to why the President put our servicemembers in harm's way and what his plan is in Venezuela moving forward.

Nicolás Maduro was an illegitimate, brutal leader who lost, and then stole, the country's 2024 elections. There is also no doubt as to the bravery and skill of the U.S. military, law enforcement, and intelligence community personnel who contributed to this operation. However, we have seen no evidence justifying the administration's initial decision to take military action to oust Maduro – particularly without Congressional authorization or even Congressional notification.

Equally important, with Maduro now in U.S. custody, the administration has provided Congress absolutely no coherent justification for keeping 15,000 U.S. forces and dozens of U.S. military assets in the region. Congress must decide whether we should permit this administration to maintain this military build-up, and assess the broader national security implications of the President's military intervention in Venezuela.

This is not just a procedural matter, nor an after-action report. The Trump administration has, thus far, failed to explain its plans for Venezuela's future, how this misadventure will end, and whether it plans to use the U.S. military to exploit Venezuela's oil for our own economic purposes. Public hearings would provide the answers the American people deserve, including on the following questions:

- 1. What are U.S. interests in Venezuela and how do they justify the military actions that President Trump ordered without Congressional authorization?** President Trump mentioned oil roughly 20 times in his January 3 press conference. Meanwhile, other senior administration officials justified U.S. actions as necessary to counter illicit narcotics, assert U.S. influence as a “great power” in the Western Hemisphere, access Venezuela’s vast natural resource wealth, and prevent illegal immigration.¹ The American people deserve to understand why the President put our military in harm’s way and may do so again.
- 2. Under what legal authority did the administration carry out the January 3 operation?** The scope of the operation, involving hundreds of U.S. military personnel and planes, is not consistent with a law enforcement operation.
- 3. How many people were killed in the January 3 operation, and what country or countries were they from?** Reports suggest that 32 Cubans may have been killed.²
- 4. With Maduro in U.S. custody, why have we not redeployed our military personnel to other priority missions from which they were distracted?** Every member of Congress should be asking why this administration still has thousands of U.S. personnel and dozens of U.S. assets deployed off the coast of Venezuela, and be wary of the open-ended nature of this mission.
- 5. Did the administration misrepresent intelligence to justify its military operation?** In July 2025, the Department of the Treasury designated Cartel de los Soles as a “terrorist organization” and in November 2025 the State Department followed suit, although the administration never provided Congress intelligence to justify this designation. Yet on January 3, 2026, the Department of Justice issued a revised indictment against Maduro, which no longer claims that Cartel de los Soles is an organized entity that threatens Americans. This reversal calls into question the legal and intelligence framework that the Trump administration repeatedly cited to justify Congressionally unauthorized military operations in the region since September 2025.³
- 6. What diplomacy did President Trump authorize prior to invading Venezuela?** U.S. officials and the Maduro regime reportedly held detailed negotiations, including at least one phone conversation between President Trump and Maduro.⁴ Congress needs to better understand the substance of those negotiations and why they did not produce a peaceful outcome.
- 7. When did President Trump authorize U.S. military action to capture Maduro?** In recent months, officials from some U.S. departments and agencies may have failed to fulfill their statutory obligations to keep Congress currently and fully informed of their agencies’ activities planning for regime change in Venezuela.

¹ <https://www.axios.com/2026/01/06/domroe-doctrine-the-war-for-minerals-oil-and-ai>; <https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-press-conference-venezuela-maduro-january-3-2026>

² <https://apnews.com/article/cuba-us-venezuela-maduro-e66899b41f0b84cf83f77a69d399b486>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/us/trump-venezuela-drug-cartel-de-los-soles.html>

⁴ <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/venezuela/article312516272.html>

8. **Why did the Trump administration consult privately with oil companies “before and after” the operation, as the President put it – but not with Congress?**⁵ There is no reason for the President to brief corporate interests ahead or instead of the American people’s elected representatives regarding a U.S. military operation in a foreign country. While President Trump and Secretary Rubio claimed that they could not brief Congress for fear of potential leaks, this justification rings hollow when President Trump himself and members of his cabinet have disclosed sensitive, apparently classified information to the public, to journalists in Signal chats, and even U.S. adversaries.⁶ Moreover, *the War Powers Resolution of 1973* requires the President to consult Congress “in every possible instance” before sending troops into war, unless the action is in response to an imminent threat facing American citizens or servicemembers – which was not true regarding Venezuela.
9. **What does President Trump mean when he says he is prepared to deploy “boots on the ground” in Venezuela?** Venezuela’s legitimate leadership did not invite the U.S. military to occupy its territory, and Congress has not authorized a military occupation.
10. **What is the Trump administration’s plan to “run” Venezuela, as the President put it, and does that plan include a timeline for transitioning to Venezuela’s democratically elected government?** President Trump stated on January 3: “We will run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition.” However, other administration officials have suggested there will not be a transition and that U.S. policy is to coerce what remains of the Maduro regime to undertake unspecified actions in line with U.S. interests.
11. **What factors led the Trump administration to abandon the bipartisan U.S. policy of recognizing Edmundo González Urrutia as the legitimate democratically elected leader of Venezuela?** President Trump suggested that the opposition lacks support, but González overwhelmingly won the 2024 elections.
12. **Did the Trump administration cut a deal with elements of interim President Delcy Rodríguez and her associates prior to the January 3 military operation, and what specific demands have we made of Rodríguez?** The administration must publicly disclose the terms of any arrangement, as well as what the administration intends to do should Rodríguez not comply with any U.S. demands.
13. **What intelligence led the Trump administration to conclude that Maduro’s security services will cooperate with any U.S. plan to “run” Venezuela and exploit its oil?** The Venezuelan security services have a clear financial interest in maintaining the status quo. Congress must determine if the Trump administration plans to bribe illegitimate, corrupt, and repressive elements of the Maduro regime as part of the White House’s quest to control Venezuela’s oil.⁷

⁵ <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5672735-trump-venezuela-oil-industry/>

⁶ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-revealed-highly-classified-information-to-russian-foreign-minister-and-ambassador/2017/05/15/530c172a-3960-11e7-9e48-c4f199710b69_story.html

⁷ <https://www.ft.com/content/4b87b114-1d16-46ea-ab75-cb511d441431>

14. What financial or other commitments has the Trump administration made to facilitate the expansion of U.S. oil companies' footprint in Venezuela? On January 5, President Trump said that the United States may subsidize oil companies so that they can rebuild Venezuela's oil infrastructure.⁸ Congress must determine if the President plans to make the American people foot the bill for private corporate interests in Venezuela.

15. Does the Trump administration plan to invade Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Greenland? President Trump has long asserted that Greenland, which is part of Denmark, should be a U.S. territory, implying willingness to take U.S. military action against a NATO ally. He similarly indicated a desire to pursue military action against Colombia and Mexico, longstanding U.S. counternarcotics and trade partners. Secretary Rubio also suggested that Cuba could be a future target of U.S. military action. Congress has not authorized any of these dangerous potential military operations.

The President's recent actions in Venezuela risk implicating the United States in a corrupt bargain to govern a sovereign country alongside elements of an authoritarian regime, seemingly for the purpose of exploiting Venezuela's oil. This is an unprecedented and dangerous break with decades of U.S. foreign policy. What the Trump administration does next in Venezuela – to say nothing of potential action against Colombia, Cuba, Greenland, and Mexico – will have serious implications for U.S. national security.

Congress must fulfill its constitutional duty to conduct oversight and reassert its role in future decisions regarding Venezuela. The American people expect that we will do our jobs on a bipartisan basis, and we encourage you to convene hearings on these questions and related issues without further delay.

Sincerely,



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator

⁸<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/us-may-subsidize-oil-companies-rebuild-venezuelas-energy-infrastructure-trump-2026-01-05/>



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Andy Kim
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Cory A. Booker
United States Senator