



Talking Points on Venezuela

On January 3, the United States launched a major military operation against Venezuela, including ground and air strikes in multiple locations. To date, there is no reliable information as to the number of Venezuelans hurt or killed by the operation. The U.S. captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife during the operation and flew them to the United States to face criminal charges based a superseding four-count indictment in the Southern District of New York.

President Trump announced that the U.S. would be “running” Venezuela for an undetermined amount of time and that American oil companies would take the lead in rebuilding infrastructure and managing Venezuela’s immense oil assets. When asked for specifics about the plan, the President gave no details, including with respect to how the country itself would be governed.

Events are unfolding rapidly, but the attack and capture raise serious questions about the lack of constitutionally required Congressional authorization, violations of international law and national sovereignty, and questionable justifications.

Below are talking points that we encourage State Leads to reference and share with your volunteers. We hope these will help you craft your own messages, be they on social media or in traditional media sources, so we can collectively raise awareness about the constitutional, legal, and ethical concerns raised by this action.

Bypassing Congressional Authorization

Although the Constitution gives Congress the authority to declare war, (the War Powers Art. 1, Section 8, Clause 11: The Congress shall have power...to declare war”) the President did not seek permission from Congress, nor did he inform them of this action prior to the attack.

The President dismissed Constitutional concerns raised by members of Congress, labelling them complainers who should just be praising the outcome of the operation instead of worrying about its legality. In an interview on Fox and Friends, he said: “[a]nd the democrats, maybe they’ll take a shot...All they do is complain... They should say great job. They shouldn’t say ‘Oh gee, maybe it’s not constitutional’ You know, the same old stuff that we’ve been hearing for years and years.” ([CNBC](#))



Administration officials have offered conflicting explanations for the failure to seek Congressional approval for the attack. The Department of Justice and the Department of State have described it as a law enforcement action, not an act of war. In his public address, however, the President suggested he did not advise Congress in advance because he was afraid of “leaks.”

Notably, these conflicting explanations do not alter the underlying fact that Congress was not consulted before the action was taken, nor the fact that this consultation is required by law. As Jeremy Paul, professor at Northeastern University and a Meeting the Moment volunteer in Massachusetts, stated: “You cannot say this was a law enforcement operation and then turn around and say now we need to run the country...It just doesn’t make any sense.” ([Reuters](#))

Undermining International Law and National Sovereignty

Forcibly removing a country’s leader, inducing regime change through military actions, and announcing plans to run another country’s government are all fundamentally at odds with established rules of international law. The U.S. actions have drawn widespread criticism for violating international law and the fundamental principles that underly our international world order. The United Nations Secretary General stated that the operation contravened the U.N. Charter’s prohibition (Article 2(4) which the U.S. ratified after WWII) against the use of force against “the territorial integrity or political independence of any state” and warned that the operation sets a “dangerous precedent.” ([Reuters](#))

Leaders from France, Brazil, Mexico, Spain and the European Union also condemned the action ([NYT](#)). Following the attack, in his public address, President Trump criticized leaders of Cuba and Colombia explicitly, with both the U.S. Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense reinforcing his criticisms and lightly veiled threats. On Fox and Friends, Trump made further comments about Mexico, suggesting that the U.S. might intervene if President Sheinbaum continued to refuse U.S. assistance in counter-trafficking efforts.

Drugs or Oil? Conflicting Justifications for Military Action

In public remarks justifying the military action, the President emphasized oil interests before mentioning drugs, even while using narcotrafficking as a pretense for the attack. Claims linking Venezuela directly to fentanyl trafficking are unsubstantiated and absent from the 25-page indictment, which does include references to cocaine. Trump openly stated that U.S. oil firms would invest in and manage Venezuelan oil infrastructure, suggesting that economic interests are central to the strategy.



Further undermining the administration's stated justification for the attack is President Trump's pardoning of former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, who was convicted in U.S. federal court of conspiring to traffic more than 400 tons of cocaine into the United States and sentenced to 45 years before being released following the pardon. The President's pardoning of a high-profile convicted trafficker at a time when the administration claims to be waging a drug war undermines the credibility of U.S. drug enforcement policy.

While the administration has described U.S. governance of Venezuela as temporary, it also signaled long-term involvement in the oil industry, raising questions about whether foreign companies will hold perpetual or open-ended rights. In his address, President Trump, claiming that past Venezuelan government "stole our oil" advised that the U.S. is "going to run the country right... take a tremendous amount of wealth out of the ground". ([NYT](#)) These statements suggest that the U.S. could be initiating a prolonged engagement outside this nation – all without any input or approval from Congress.

SUMMARY

The administration's actions in Venezuela raise profound constitutional, legal, and ethical concerns. The decision to bypass Congress and disregard international law further demonstrate the extreme risks facing rule of law and democracy in America and the world at large. The Administration's shifting and implausible justifications for the action – particularly those centered on U.S. economic interests – set a dangerous precedent.

This overview was written by the LDAD Meeting the Moment Leadership Team.