



24 November 2025

Minister of Foreign Affairs

For action by 28 November 2025

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

BRIEFING Overview Submission

PURPOSE To provide an update on US military pressure on Venezuela, and to propose New Zealand positioning.

Contact details

NAME	ROLE	DIVISION	WORK PHONE s9(2)(a)
James Waite	Divisional Manager	Americas Division	
Tui Dewes	Unit Manager Latin America	Americas Division	

Recommended referrals

Prime Minister	For information by	3 December 2025
Minister of Defence	For information by	3 December 2025

Minister's Office to complete

Approved

Noted

Referred

Needs amendment

Declined

Withdrawn

Overtaken by events

See Minister's notes

Comments

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

Key points

- On Friday 14 November, the US formally announced Operation Southern Spear, which aims to dismantle "narco-terrorist" networks in the Western Hemisphere and secure its borders against the flow of illicit narcotics, especially fentanyl. The operation was announced within the context of the ongoing US strikes against alleged drug-trafficking vessels in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean. Since September 2025, the US has conducted 21 lethal strikes, resulting in at least 83 fatalities.
- ^{s6(2)(h)}
- The strikes and the US military deployment off the coast of Venezuela, which includes the recent arrival of the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, appear aimed at increasing pressure on Venezuela, including for political change. ^{s6(a)}
- ^{s6(a)} the Maduro-led regime, which was returned to power following a fraudulent election in July 2024. ^{s6(a)}
- Last week, President Trump confirmed publicly that he is considering talks with Maduro but that military action against Venezuela remains a possibility. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}
- ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)} we assess that further US military action is likely over the coming weeks to increase pressure on Maduro. This may include airstrikes on Venezuela, ^{s6(a)} Ground action at this stage is unlikely ^{s6(a)} but it cannot be completely ruled out.
- We propose that New Zealand's approach to the situation be guided by the following principles: international law must be respected; transnational criminal groups are a genuine security threat in the Americas and cannot act with impunity - these groups are also a national security threat to New Zealand; the Venezuelan people's democratic and human rights must be upheld; and diplomacy and political dialogue are the preferred pathways to restoring democracy in Venezuela and resetting the country's economy.
- Subject to developments, we propose initial responsive public messaging that notes we are monitoring developments, ^{s6(a)} and reiterates our support for a peaceful return to democracy in Venezuela.



Grahame Morton
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- 1 **Note** the United States' intensifying military presence, and its strikes **Yes / No** against alleged drug-traffickers, in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean as part of its newly announced Operation Southern Spear;
- 2 **Note** that the recent arrival of the USS Gerald R Ford, the world's largest **Yes / No** aircraft carrier, brings with it an increased possibility of air strikes against Venezuela^{56(a)}
- 3 **Agree** that New Zealand's position should be guided by the following **Yes / No** principles:
 - 3.1 We expect all parties to comply with international law.
 - 3.2 Transnational criminal groups are a genuine security threat in the Americas and cannot act with impunity; these groups are a national security threat to New Zealand.
 - 3.3 Venezuelans' democratic and human rights must be upheld.
 - 3.4 Diplomacy and political dialogue are the preferred pathways to restoring democracy in Venezuela and resetting the country's economy.
- 4 **Endorse** the proposed reactive media lines outlined in this submission;
- 5 **Refer** a copy of this submission to the Prime Minister and Minister of **Yes / No** Defence.

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Date: / /

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

Report

US military action in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean

1. Since September 2025, the US has been conducting strikes against alleged drug-trafficking vessels in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean, as part of its Operation Southern Spear, which seeks to remove "narco-terrorists" from the Western Hemisphere. The US has conducted 21 lethal strikes on 22 vessels it has alleged to be trafficking drugs, resulting in at least 83 fatalities.
2. The US military presence in the region is considerable, representing its largest deployment in the region in decades. It includes a significant array of naval assets, including the recent arrival of the world's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, alongside six other warships, and at least one nuclear-powered attack submarine, air force deployments, and some 15,000 personnel in the region.
3. ~~s6(a)~~

4. ~~s6(a)~~

Recent US estimates suggest that 10 - 13% of global cocaine production is moved through Venezuela.
~~s6(a)~~

The United States and Venezuela

5. ~~s6(a)~~

The US has long accused Maduro of being an illegitimate leader who seized and has retained power through fraudulent election processes¹. In August this year, the US doubled its reward under its Narcotics Rewards Program to USD \$50 million for information leading to Maduro's arrest and/or conviction for violation of US narcotics laws. This is the largest such reward ever offered by the US.

6. In a recent interview with 60 Minutes, President Trump was asked directly about the prospect of regime change or military escalation against Venezuela. He stated that war with Venezuela is "unlikely", but that "Maduro's days as president are numbered." He cited the ongoing military operations off the coast of Venezuela, describing them as counter-narcotics efforts, but also acknowledged a broader intent to increase pressure on the Maduro regime.

¹ Opposition candidate Edmundo González Urrutia is said to have garnered around 70% of the vote, yet the Venezuelan National Electoral Council claimed he won 44% to Maduro's 51%.

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

President Trump did not rule out the possibility of further escalatory steps but declined to discuss details of potential ground strikes.

7. Last week, President Trump confirmed publicly that he is considering talks with Maduro but that military action on Venezuela remains a possibility. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

- 8.

Proactively Released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

9.

s9(2)(h)

10. s9(2)(h)

11.

12.

13.

Reactions from others

14. s6(a)

Foreign Minister Anand commented that Canada had assisted the US with counternarcotics efforts but had "no involvement" in its actions in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean. She demurred over whether the strikes violated

s6(a)

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

international law, saying it was "within the purview of the US authorities to make that determination".^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

15. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

16. Caribbean and Latin American states have expressed a range of concerns. The CARICOM Heads of Government, bar Trinidad and Tobago, have "reaffirmed the principle of maintaining the Caribbean Region as a Zone of Peace and the importance of dialogue and engagement towards the peaceful resolution of disputes and conflict." CARICOM also "underscored that efforts to overcome these challenges should be through ongoing cooperation within international law".

17. The 9 November joint declaration of the CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) - EU Summit, held in Colombia, stated "CELAC has declared itself as a Zone of Peace, committed to the settlement of disputes through dialogue and cooperation in accordance with international law.... We discussed the importance of maritime security and regional stability in the Caribbean. We agreed on the importance of international cooperation, mutual respect, and full compliance with international law, including in combatting transnational organised crime and drug trafficking. Several CELAC member States emphasised their national positions regarding the situation in the Caribbean and the Pacific. We reiterate our commitment to strengthening mechanisms for dialogue, coordination, and technical assistance to jointly address these challenges."

18. Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has staunchly supported US actions, including strikes.^{s6(a)}

19. Mexican President Sheinbaum has made clear that Mexico does "not agree" with the strikes, commenting that "there are international laws on how to operate when dealing with the alleged illegal transport of drugs or guns on international waters". Colombia's President Petro has more forcefully denounced the strikes and has ordered the suspension of intelligence sharing with US security agencies^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

20. Venezuela's close partner Russia has said: "we firmly denounce the use of excessive military force in carrying out actions in anti-drug operations. Such actions are in violation of both United States domestic legislation...and the norms of international law". China has also condemned the strikes, stating that it "opposes the use or threat of force", and emphasised the importance of peace and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean.

New Zealand's proposed position

21. We propose that New Zealand's position be guided by the following principles, including:

- We expect all parties to comply with international law.

United States Military Pressure on Venezuela

- Recognising that transnational criminal groups are a genuine security threat in the Americas and cannot act with impunity; these groups are a national security threat to New Zealand.
- The Venezuelan people's democratic and human rights must be upheld.
- Diplomacy and political dialogue are the preferred pathways to restoring democracy in Venezuela and resetting the country's economy.

22. ^{s6(a), s6(b)(i)}

23. Subject to how developments unfold, it is proposed that New Zealand take a measured approach if asked to comment, drawing on the following messages:

- New Zealand is monitoring developments in the Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific Ocean.
- We remain committed to working with our Latin American and other partners to disrupt the supply of illicit drugs. As part of the Government's newly announced meth action plan, Police and Customs positions will be established in the region to support engagement to stop drugs flowing to New Zealand.
- New Zealand stands with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a fair, democratic and prosperous future. New Zealand supports efforts to achieve a negotiated return to democracy in Venezuela, as the only solution that ensures that the will of the Venezuelan people is respected.
- New Zealand expects all parties to comply with international law and supports diplomatic efforts to reach solutions to complex cross border issues.

24. In the event of future developments, such as a US attack on Venezuela, we will revert with additional messaging.

25. New Zealand may be asked to join statements or resolutions on the issue, as we did on the outcome of Venezuela's elections in July 2024. We will revert for advice if that is the case.

Resourcing

26. The issue will be able to be managed within MFAT's resources both in Wellington and our Americas network.

FORMAL MESSAGE: SITREP 1: US STRIKES ON VENEZUELA AND CAPTURE OF MADURO

Sun 4/01/2026 12:13 am

Action – Hohenga

BOG/WSH: Grateful reporting overnight on the US actions against Venezuela, and the regime's response.

Report – Pūrongo*Explosions across Venezuela and capture of Maduro*

According to various sources, multiple explosions have occurred throughout Venezuela (Caracas, Miranda, Aragua, and La Guara), beginning at around 1.50am (VT)/6.50pm (NZT), 3 January 2026. The cause and precise locations of the explosions are not immediately clear. However, strikes are reported to have occurred against a range of military sites and essential infrastructure, such as Venezuela's main port.

2 At approximately 1030pm (NZT), President Trump confirmed via Truth Social that the US was responsible for the attack. He stated that the explosions were part of "...a large-scale strike against Venezuela and its leader, President Nicolas Maduro, who has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the country. This operation was done in conjunction with US Law Enforcement." He has announced that there will be a news conference at Mar-a-Lago at 11am on 3 January (5am on 4 January, NZT), where further details will be provided.

3 Venezuela has condemned the US attack as a "flagrant violation" of the UN Charter and claims the objective is "none other than to seize Venezuela's strategic resources".

Consular

4 Only one New Zealander is registered on SafeTravel as being in Venezuela. They have been contacted by CON.

Media lines

4 Given the timing of the attack, there has been limited international reaction so far, but we expect that to change over the coming hours.

5 Both the PM and MFA will hold off issuing any comment until after President Trump's press conference. In the meantime, the following media lines have been provided to OMFA and PMO:

- New Zealand is monitoring developments in Venezuela.

- New Zealand stands with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a fair, democratic and prosperous future.
- New Zealand supports efforts to achieve a negotiated return to democracy in Venezuela, as the only solution that ensures that the will of the Venezuelan people is respected.
- New Zealand expects all parties to comply with international law and supports diplomatic efforts to reach solutions to complex cross border issues.
- New Zealanders currently in Venezuela are advised to follow the advice of local authorities and monitor the media for developments. We continue to advise that New Zealanders do not travel to Venezuela.
- There is one New Zealander registered with SafeTravel as currently being in Venezuela.
- New Zealanders requiring urgent consular assistance can contact the 24/7 consular emergency line on +64 99 20 20 20.

Ends - Mutu

FORMAL MESSAGE: SITREP 2: US STRIKES ON VENEZUELA AND CAPTURE OF MADURO

Sun 4/01/2026 8:58 am

Summary – Rāpopoto

Further to overnight reporting, for which thanks, we provide a summary of President Trump's comments from his press conference this morning; an outline of international reactions (as far as we are aware, Australia, Japan and Singapore have yet to comment); and proposed initial New Zealand messaging.

Action – Hohenga

All posts: grateful for ongoing reporting of international reactions.

Report – Pūrongo***President Trump's press conference***

2 Following yesterday's early morning strikes on Venezuela and capture of Maduro, President Trump gave a press conference at 11.40am (EST)/5.40am (NZT) addressing the situation. During the press conference, he stated that:

- "The US Armed Forces conducted an extraordinary military operation in the capital of Venezuela. Overwhelming American military power – air, land, and sea – was used to launch a spectacular assault".
- The US had transported Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores to the USS Iwo Jima. They were being transported to New York to face a range of narcotics and weapons charges.
- "It was a force against a heavily fortified military fortress in the heart of Caracas, to bring outlaw dictator Nicolas Maduro to justice. This was one of the most stunning, effective, and powerful displays of military might and competence in American history".
- "All Venezuelan military capacities were rendered powerless as the men and women of our military, working with US law enforcement, successfully captured Maduro in the dead of night...". "...He was captured along with his wife, Cilia Flores, both of whom now face US justice...for their campaign of deadly narcoterrorism against the US and its citizens".
- The US will run Venezuela "until such time we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition." "We want peace, liberty and justice for the great people of Venezuela, and this includes many people living in the US who want to go back to their country, their homeland".
- US companies would be responsible for rebuilding Venezuelan oil infrastructure. "We are going to have our large US oil companies go and spend billions of dollars and fix the oil infrastructure and start making money for the country".

- The US had the capability to undertake further strikes if needed, but at this time did not consider it would be necessary. "We are ready to stage a bigger and much larger attack if we need to do so".

International reactions

3 We anticipate that, like New Zealand, some international partners have been holding off commenting in detail until after President Trump's press conference and further details are known. Key reactions so far are as follow:

Traditional partners

- Australia: No official response.
- The UK: Prime Minister Keir Starmer has commented via X that: "the situation in Venezuela is fast moving, we will establish all the facts and speak to allies. Our embassy in Caracas is working to ensure all British nationals in Venezuela are supported".
- Canada: Minister of Foreign Affairs Anita Anand has released the following statement: "Since 2019, when Canada closed its embassy in Canada, we have refused to recognise the legitimacy of the Maduro regime and opposed its repression of the Venezuelan people, including the persecution of dissenters and particularly political leaders opposed to the regime. In keeping with our long-standing commitment to upholding the rule of law and democracy, Canada calls on all parties to respect international law, and we stand by the people of Venezuela and their desire to live in a peaceful and democratic society. Canada is engaging with its international partners and monitoring developments closely. Canada stands ready to assist Canadians in need through our consular officials and embassy in Bogotá, Colombia".
- France: French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot posted on X that: "the military operation that led to the capture of Nicolas Maduro violates the principle of not resorting to force, that underpins international law. France reiterates that no lasting political solution can be imposed from the outside and that only sovereign people themselves can decide their future".
- European Union: The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy posted on X that the EU is closely monitoring the situation in Venezuela. "I have spoken with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and our Ambassador in Caracas". "The EU has repeatedly stated that Mr Maduro lacks legitimacy and has defended a peaceful transition". "Under all circumstances, the principles of international law and the UN Charter must be respected. We call for restraint. The safety of EU citizens in the country is our top priority".
- United Nations: A UN spokesperson has stated that Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is "deeply concerned" by US action in Venezuela, and which sets "a dangerous precedent". "The Secretary-General continues to emphasise the

importance of full respect – by all – of international law, including the UN Charter. He is deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected".

Regional responses

- Cuba: Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez posted on X that his government denounces the strikes, calling them "state terrorism", adding "our zone of peace is being brutally assaulted" by the US.
- Trinidad and Tobago: Prime Minister Kamala Persad-Bissessar made clear that the country is not participating in U.S. military operations in Venezuela. "Trinidad and Tobago continues to maintain peaceful relations with the people of Venezuela," Persad-Bissessar said.
- Colombia: Colombian President Gustavo Petro said in a post on X that: "The Republic of Colombia reiterates its conviction that peace, respect for international law, and the protection of life and human dignity must prevail over any form of armed confrontation.
- Mexico: In a statement, Mexico's Foreign Ministry has said it "strongly condemns and rejects the military actions carried out unilaterally in recent hours by the armed forces of the United States of America against targets on the territory of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela." The ministry said the attack "seriously jeopardises regional stability".
- Brazil: Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has condemned the US strikes on Venezuela, calling them a "serious affront" to the country's sovereignty. "The bombings on Venezuelan territory and the capture of its president cross an unacceptable line. These acts represent a most serious affront to Venezuela's sovereignty and yet another extremely dangerous precedent for the entire international community".

Other reactions

- Russia: The Russian Foreign Ministry has described the US strikes on Venezuela a "matter of deep concern and condemnation". "The pretexts used to justify such actions are unfounded". "Ideological hostility has triumphed over businesslike pragmatism and a willingness to build relationships of trust and predictability." The ministry has also stated that "it is crucial, above all, to prevent further escalation and to focus on finding a way out through dialogue". "Latin America must remain a zone of peace, as it declared itself in 2014". "And Venezuela must be guaranteed the right to determine its own destiny without any destructive, let alone military, external intervention."
- China: The PRC said on Saturday it firmly opposes US military strikes on Venezuela and the capture of the country's leader Nicolas Maduro, calling it a violation of international law. "China is deeply shocked and strongly condemns the

US's blatant use of force against a sovereign state and its action against its president," Beijing's foreign ministry said in a statement. "Such hegemonic behaviour by the US seriously violates international law, infringes upon Venezuela's sovereignty, and threatens peace and security in Latin America and the Caribbean. China firmly opposes it," it added.

New Zealand media messaging

4 In line with earlier agreed New Zealand positioning (our FM of 4 December 2025 refers), and the approach of close partners, it is proposed that MFA issue an initial comment along the following lines:

"New Zealand is concerned by and actively monitoring developments in Venezuela and expects all parties to act in accordance with international law. New Zealand stands with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a fair, democratic and prosperous future.

We continue to advise that New Zealanders do not travel to Venezuela. New Zealanders requiring urgent consular assistance can contact the 24/7 consular emergency line on +64 99 20 20 20."

5 Our holding media lines have been amended/reordered/expanded as follows:

Key media messages

- New Zealand is actively monitoring developments in Venezuela.
- New Zealand expects all parties to comply with international law and supports diplomatic efforts to reach solutions to complex cross border issues.
- New Zealand stands with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a fair, democratic and prosperous future.
- New Zealand supports efforts to achieve a negotiated return to democracy in Venezuela, as the only solution that ensures that the will of the Venezuelan people is respected.

Consular messages:

- New Zealanders currently in Venezuela are advised to follow the advice of local authorities and monitor the media for developments. We continue to advise that New Zealanders do not travel to Venezuela.
- There is one New Zealander registered with SafeTravel as currently being in Venezuela.
- New Zealanders requiring urgent consular assistance can contact the 24/7 consular emergency line on +64 99 20 20 20.

[If asked] Was New Zealand involved at all in the strikes?

- New Zealand was not involved in US action in Venezuela.

s9(2)(g)(i)

s6(a)

Consular

6 As noted in our last sitrep, only one New Zealander is registered on SafeTravel as being in Venezuela, and they have been contacted by CON. We have had no further reports of New Zealand citizens in Venezuela. Our current SafeTravel advice is do not travel. We will review and update the content of the advice as appropriate in coordination with other close partners in the region.

Ends - Mutu

FORMAL MESSAGE: SITREP 3: US STRIKES ON VENEZUELA AND CAPTURE OF MADURO

Sun 4/01/2026 7:11 pm

Summary – Rāpopoto

We provide a third update following US strikes on Venezuela and its capture of Maduro on 3 January 2026. It includes a summary of developments, New Zealand's messaging, and international reactions. The next sitrep will be issued at 0800 Monday 5 January (NZT).

Action – Hohenga

s6(a)

Report – Pūrongo***Summary of developments***

As reported previously, on 3 January 2026, the US carried out early hour military strikes across at least five locations in Venezuela and captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. The pair were transported to New York, where they arrived this afternoon and have been indicted on narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, and weapons offences. The first court appearance is tentatively scheduled for as early as tomorrow.

2 "Operation Absolute Resolve" involved more than 150 US aircraft - including bombers, fighter jets, UAVs, and reconnaissance planes. There were no US fatalities during the operation, and no equipment was lost.

3 President Trump confirmed that the US will "run the country" until "a safe, proper and judicious transition" can take place. Details on future governance remain limited at this time, though discussions appear to be underway, with individuals from the opposition and possibly also from affiliates of the Maduro government.

4 President Trump has not ruled out "a much larger attack if needed",
US forces remain on station on vessels off Venezuela. It is not currently clear whether any US forces remain in Caracas.

5 The Venezuelan government has denounced the US attacks and "kidnapping" of Maduro and maintains that he is still the legitimate Venezuelan President. In his

absence, Venezuela's Supreme Court ruled today that Delcy Rodríguez, who has been serving as vice president to Maduro, should assume the role of interim president. Opposition leader María Corina Machado has called for an opposition candidate to assume power. President Trump has expressed doubt that Machado could take office herself, commenting in his press conference that Machado lacks the requisite support.

New Zealand's position and media messaging

6 In line with earlier agreed New Zealand positioning (our FM of 4 December 2025 refers), MFA issued the following X post this morning:

"New Zealand is concerned by and actively monitoring developments in Venezuela and expects all parties to act in accordance with international law. New Zealand stands with the Venezuelan people in their pursuit of a fair, democratic and prosperous future.

We continue to advise that New Zealanders do not travel to Venezuela. New Zealanders requiring urgent consular assistance can contact the 24/7 consular emergency line on +64 99 20 20 20."

7 Our holding media lines can be found [HERE](#), attached and below for ease of reference.

8 For posts' broader awareness, New Zealand has a long-standing policy of not making public statements of recognition of governments. This should not be misconstrued as support for the Maduro regime. As reiterated in the 24 November 2025 submission to Ministers on US military pressure on Venezuela,^{s6(a)}

Minister Peters called for free and fair elections in Venezuela in 2018, and this has been the consistent position of successive New Zealand governments. In 2024, New Zealand joined a Chile-led joint statement on Venezuela, made a full statement on Venezuela in the Human Rights Council, and Minister Peters addressed New Zealand's concerns with the Maduro regime and reiterated the importance of free and fair elections in a major foreign policy speech in Chile.

International reactions

9 International responses are being closely monitored and have been captured in the chart [HERE](#) and are also attached.

10 The international reaction is delineated between those who support the US intervention, those who condemn it, and those who have taken more measured positions. Those taking measured positions have, to varying degrees, sought to balance reassessments of Maduro's illegitimacy with calls for adherence to international law and a peaceful, negotiated, and Venezuelan-led transition to democracy.

11 Our traditional partners have now confirmed or further elaborated their positions, which generally align with our own:

- Australia: Prime Minister Anthony Albanese issued the following statement earlier today on X: "The Australian Government is monitoring developments in Venezuela. We urge all parties to support dialogue and diplomacy in order to secure regional stability and prevent escalation. Australia has long held concerns about the situation in Venezuela, including the need to respect democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We continue to support international law and a peaceful, democratic transition in Venezuela that reflects the will of the Venezuelan people. Australians in Venezuela who need assistance can contact the 24/7 emergency consular assistance team at +61 2 6261 3305 from anywhere in the world or 1300 555 135 from within Australia."
- The UK: Prime Minister Keir Starmer commented further today via X that: "The UK has long supported a transition of power in Venezuela. We regarded Maduro as an illegitimate President, and we shed no tears about the end of his regime. I reiterated my support for international law this morning. The UK government will discuss the evolving situation with US counterparts in the days ahead as we seek a safe and peaceful transition to a legitimate government that reflects the will of the Venezuelan people."
- Canada: Following Foreign Minister Anita Anand's earlier statement, Prime Minister Mark Carney commented today via X that: "Canada has not recognised the illegitimate regime of Maduro since it stole the 2018 election" and "the Canadian government therefore welcomes the opportunity for freedom, democracy, peace, and prosperity for the Venezuelan people." The statement called "on all parties to respect international law."

Consular

12 As noted in our earlier sitreps, only one New Zealander is registered on SafeTravel as being in Venezuela, and they have been contacted by CON. We have had no further reports of New Zealand citizens in Venezuela. Our current SafeTravel advice is do not travel.

Ends - Mutu

FORMAL MESSAGE: SITREP 4: US STRIKES ON VENEZUELA AND CAPTURE OF MADURO

Mon 5/01/2026 7:51 am

Summary – Rāpopoto

We provide a fourth update following US strikes on Venezuela and its capture of Maduro on 3 January 2026. It includes a summary of developments, New Zealand's messaging, and international reactions. Absent any major developments, the next sitrep will be at 0800 on 6 January.

Action – Hohenga

For information and reporting as requested in our previous messages.

Report – Pūrongo***Summary of developments***

As reported previously, on 3 January 2026, the US carried out early hour military strikes across at least five locations in Venezuela and captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. The pair were transported yesterday to New York, where they remain in custody at the Metropolitan Detention Centre in Brooklyn. They await trial on narco-terrorism and other indictments (see Maduro's indictment attached). Maduro is expected to make an initial appearance in Manhattan federal court today.

2 "Operation Absolute Resolve", which involved more than 150 US aircraft, including bombers, fighter jets, UAVs, and reconnaissance planes, now appears to have been a 'raid' rather than an 'occupation'. Secretary of State Marco Rubio commented to media today that was this was "not a war against Venezuela". The New York Times has reported that at least 40 people were killed in Saturday's operation – including Venezuelan military personnel and civilians. There were no US fatalities.

3 While President Trump has not ruled out "a much larger attack if needed", the Pentagon has now confirmed that no US military personnel remain in-country. There are still 15,000 troops stationed in the Caribbean though, and the US maintains its blockade on sanctioned oil tankers entering and exiting Venezuela.

4 Despite President Trump's assertion that the US will "run" Venezuela, details on future governance remain limited at this time. However, the US Administration has confirmed that it is in discussion with Delcy Rodríguez (who was Vice President and Oil Minister under Maduro and confirmed by the Venezuelan Supreme Court as interim-President yesterday). Rodríguez has received the Venezuelan military's support for her interim-Presidency, suggesting that Maduro's allies maintain a strong hold on the country's leadership for the time being. ^{s6(a)}

5 On the ground in Venezuela, aside from some protests organised in support of Maduro, most Venezuelans appear at this stage to be focused on more prosaic concerns - whether they have enough food and medicine and what this attack means for the internal security situation. According to media reports, apart from those protesting, or queueing for food and medicine, the streets of Caracas remain relatively quiet.

6 s6(a)

New Zealand's position and media messaging

7 Media lines can be found [HERE](#), attached and below for ease of reference.

International reactions

8 International responses are being closely monitored and have been captured in the chart [HERE](#) and are also attached.

9 The international reaction remains delineated between those who support the US intervention, those who condemn it, and those who have taken more measured positions. Those taking measured positions have, to varying degrees, sought to balance reassessments of Maduro's illegitimacy with calls for adherence to international law and a peaceful, negotiated, and Venezuelan-led transition to democracy.

10 Key new reactions released since the last sitrep include:

- **Japan:** at 6.32 pm Sunday 4 January (NZT) Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a [press statement](#). The statement notes efforts to gather information and ensure the safety of Japanese nationals and details Japan's position: "The Government of Japan has consistently emphasized the importance of restoring democracy in Venezuela as soon as possible. Japan has consistently respected fundamental values such as freedom and democracy. Japan has also consistently emphasized respect for the principles of international law within the international community. Moving forward, based on this consistent stance, Japan will advance diplomatic efforts aimed at restoring democracy and stabilizing the situation in Venezuela, while continuously working closely with relevant countries, including G7 members and regional nations, to take all necessary precautions for the safety of Japanese nationals."
- **Singapore:** at 7.30 pm Sunday 4 January (NZT) Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a [press statement](#): "Singapore is gravely concerned by the US intervention on 3 January 2026 in Venezuela. Singapore is deeply committed to

international law and the principles of the UN Charter that safeguard the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states, especially small states. Singapore has consistently opposed actions contrary to international law by any parties, including foreign military intervention in any country. Singapore urges all parties to exercise restraint and hopes for a peaceful resolution to the situation in Venezuela in accordance with international law and the principles of the UN Charter. There are no Singaporeans e-registered with MFA in Venezuela. Singaporeans are advised to defer all travel to Venezuela."

Consular

11 As noted in our earlier sitreps, CON has been in contact with the one New Zealander registered on SafeTravel as being in Venezuela. We have had no further reports of New Zealand citizens in Venezuela. Our current SafeTravel advice is do not travel. In line with Australia, Canada, and the UK, we will update the content of our advice to note the attacks and advise any citizens to shelter in place. We will also review our content for Colombia, noting the increased risk of civil unrest following developments in Venezuela.

12 Absent any major developments, the next sitrep will be at 0800 on 6 January.

Ends - Mutu

FORMAL MESSAGE: SITREP 5: US STRIKES ON VENEZUELA AND CAPTURE OF MADURO

Tue 6/01/2026 8:02 am

Summary – Rāpopoto

We provide a fifth update following US strikes on Venezuela and its capture of Maduro on 3 January 2026. It includes a summary of developments, New Zealand's position and messaging, and international reactions. Further sitreps/reporting will be provided in response to major developments rather than every 24 hours.

Action – Hohenga

For information and reporting as requested in our previous messages.

Report – Pūrongo***Summary of developments***

As reported earlier, on 3 January 2026, the US carried out early hour military strikes across at least five locations in Venezuela and captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. Following their transportation to New York, Maduro and Cilia are currently on trial for narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy and possession and conspiracy to possess machine guns and other devices (Maduro's indictment is reattached). **Maduro and Cilia's trial began at 0600 NZT Tuesday 6 January in the US District Court in Manhattan.**

2 "Operation Absolute Resolve", which involved more than 150 US aircraft, including bombers, fighter jets, UAVs, and reconnaissance planes, now appears to have been a "raid" rather than an "occupation". Though there were no US fatalities, **the death toll has reportedly risen to at least 80 people, including Venezuelan military personnel and civilians.** The Cuban Government has said that at least 32 of its nationals died during the operation.

3 While President Trump has not ruled out "a much larger attack if needed", the Pentagon has confirmed that no US military personnel remain in-country. There are still 15,000 troops stationed in the Caribbean though, and the US maintains its blockade on sanctioned oil tankers entering and exiting Venezuela.

5 The US Administration has confirmed that it is in discussion with Delcy Rodríguez, who has now taken office as interim-President. According to President Trump, Rodríguez told Rubio in a call that she would do "whatever the US asks". In her initial public comments, though, she emphasised that Venezuela will "not be a colony of an empire".
s6(a)

President Trump told the Atlantic in an interview that, if Rodríguez "doesn't do what's right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro". Rodríguez subsequently moderated her tone, inviting the US to collaborate in an "agenda of cooperation" (full statement in the attached international reaction document).

6 s6(a)

Yesterday, González made the first opposition statement since President Trump's comments about Machado. In the video, referring to himself as the "President of Venezuela", González called on Venezuela's armed forces to enforce the 2024 election result. **He emphasised his "popular mandate and the clear support of millions of Venezuelans".**

7 On the ground in Venezuela, aside from some protests organised in support of Maduro, most Venezuelans appear at this stage to be focused on more prosaic concerns - whether they have enough food and medicine and what this attack means for the internal security situation. According to media reports, apart from those protesting, or queueing for food and medicine, the streets of Caracas remain relatively quiet.

8 s6(a)

Today, Secretary of State Rubio, Secretary of War Hegseth, Attorney General Pam Bondi, CIA Director Ratcliffe, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Caine will brief the relevant Intelligence, Armed Services, and Foreign Affairs Committees in Congress.

9 Since the raid in Venezuela, President Trump and members of his Administration have issued warnings to several other countries. Yesterday, President Trump commented, "we are in the business of having countries around us that are viable and successful and where the oil is allowed to freely come out", adding "American dominance in the Western Hemisphere will never be questioned again".
s6(a)

New Zealand's position and media messaging

10 New Zealand's approach to the situation in Venezuela, is guided by four key principles agreed by MFA late last year (our FM of 4 December 2025 refers), which include that:

- We expect all parties to comply with international law.
- Venezuelans' democratic and human rights must be upheld.
- Diplomacy and political dialogue are the preferred pathways to restoring democracy in Venezuela and resetting the country's economy.
- Transnational criminal groups are a genuine security threat in the Americas and cannot act with impunity; these groups are a national security threat to New Zealand.

11 Media lines can be found HERE, attached and below for ease of reference.

International reactions

12 International responses are being closely monitored and have been captured in the chart HERE and are also attached.

13 The international reaction remains delineated between those who support the US intervention, those who condemn it, and those who have taken more measured positions. Those taking measured positions have, to varying degrees, sought to balance reassessments of Maduro's illegitimacy with calls for adherence to international law and a peaceful, negotiated, and Venezuelan-led transition to democracy.

14 Key new reactions released since the last sitrep include:

- **Joint statement by Brazil/Chile/Colombia/Spain/Mexico/Uruguay:** At 5.30 am Monday 5 January (NZT), the six countries, which include three of the most populous in Latin America, released a statement reaffirming their adherence to "the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations". The statement expressed "profound concern" and firmly rejected "the military actions undertaken unilaterally in Venezuelan territory".
- **Statement on behalf of 26 EU Members:** At 9.00 am Monday 5 January (NZT) High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas released a statement on behalf of EU members, bar Hungary, reaffirming the principles of international law and the responsibility of Security Council members to uphold them. The statement emphasised the importance of a democratic transition in Venezuela, led by the Venezuelan people.
- **United Nations Security Council:** At the time of writing (7.00 am NZT) the Security Council is holding a briefing on recent United States action in Venezuela.

At 5.00 am NZT Secretary General António Guterres released his full remarks to the Security Council which underscore the importance of sticking to principles "in situations as confused and complex as the one we now face including". Those principles include "respect for the UN Charter", "respect for the principles of sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of states", and "the prohibition of the threat or use of force".

- **Pope Leo XIV:** At 2.00 am Monday 5 January (NZT) Pope Leo released a statement on X expressing "deep concern" and noting that "the good of the beloved Venezuelan people must prevail over every other consideration".
- **Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum:** On the morning of 5 January (local time), at her daily press conference, President Sheinbaum responded to President Trump's comments, reiterating Mexico's opposition to the US intervention in Venezuela and to any kind of intervention in Mexico. "It is necessary to reaffirm that in Mexico the people rule, and that we are a free and sovereign country — cooperation, yes; subordination and intervention, no," she said in explaining that Mexico cooperated with the US on drug trafficking and security.
- **Colombian President Gustavo Petro:** At 7.30 pm Monday 5 January (NZT) in a lengthy post on X President Petro responded to President Trump's threats that the US military could be used against Colombia saying that "for the Homeland I will take up arms again - though I do not want to."

Consular

15 As noted in our earlier sitreps, CON has been in contact with the one New Zealander registered on SafeTravel as being in Venezuela. We have had no further reports of New Zealand citizens in Venezuela. Our current SafeTravel advice is do not travel. **In line with Australia, Canada, and the UK, we updated the content of our advice yesterday to reference the attacks and advise any citizens to shelter in place.**

16 Further sitreps/reporting will be provided in response to major developments rather than every 24 hours.

Ends - Mutu