

Maduro vows to declare a 'republic in arms' if US forces attack



Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro speaks during a press conference in Caracas, Venezuela, yesterday.

AP PHOTO

CARACAS, VENEZUELA — Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro yesterday said he “would constitutionally declare a republic in arms” if the South American country were attacked by forces that the United States government has deployed to the Caribbean.

His comments during a news conference come as the US government this week is set to boost its maritime force in the waters off Venezuela to combat threats from Latin American drug cartels. The US has not signalled any planned land incursion by the thousands of personnel being deployed.

Still, Maduro’s government has responded by deploying troops along its coast and border with neighbouring Colombia, as well as by urging Venezuelans to enlist in a civilian militia.

“In the face of this maximum military pressure, we have declared maximum preparedness for the defence of Venezuela,” Maduro said of the deployment, which he characterised as “an extravagant, unjustifiable, immoral and absolutely criminal and bloody threat.”

The US Navy now has two Aegis guided-missile destroyers—the USS Gravelly and the USS Jason Dunham—in the Caribbean, as well as the destroyer USS Sampson and the cruiser USS Lake Erie in the waters off Latin America.

That military presence is set to expand.

Three amphibious assault ships—a force that encompasses more than 4,000 sailors and Marines—would be entering the region this week, a defence official told The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to describe ongoing operations.

The deployment comes as US President Donald Trump has pushed for using the military to thwart cartels he blames for the flow of fentanyl and other illicit drugs into US communities and for perpetuating violence in some US cities.

Yesterday, Venezuelan Foreign Minister Yván Gil, citing a United Nations report, told his counterparts in various Latin American countries that the deployment of US maritime forces is built on a “false narrative” as 87 per cent of cocaine produced in Colombia departs through the Pacific and traffickers attempt to move only five per cent of their product through Venezuela. Landlocked Bolivia and Colombia, with access to the Pacific and Caribbean, are the world’s top cocaine producers.

Gil added that the narrative “threatens the entire region” and an attack on Venezuela “would really mean a complete destabilisation of the region.”

“Let us immediately demand an end to this deployment, which has no other reason than to threaten a sovereign people,” he added during a virtual meeting of members of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States regional group.

Maduro also used his news conference to insist that he was the legitimate winner of last year’s presidential election. But ample and credible evidence has shown the contrary, prompting several countries, including the US, to not recognise Maduro as Venezuela’s president.

Maduro, sworn in to a third six-year term in January, added that his government maintains two lines of communication with the Trump administration, one with the State Department and another with Trump’s envoy for special missions, Richard Grenell.

He called Secretary of State Marco Rubio a “warlord” pushing for action in the Caribbean to topple Venezuela’s government.

Since the July 2024 presidential election, Venezuela’s political opposition has been urging the US and other countries to pressure Maduro into leaving office. Its leader, María Corina Machado, last

month thanked Trump and Rubio for the deployment of the vessels, describing the move as “the right approach” towards Venezuela’s government, which she described as a “criminal enterprise.”

Maduro yesterday, however, warned that US military action against Venezuela would “stain” Trump’s “hands with blood.”

“President Donald Trump, the pursuit of regime change is exhausted; it has failed as a policy worldwide,” Maduro said. “You cannot pretend to impose a situation in Venezuela.” (AP)