

T&T faces fallout

Regional analysts warn PM that support for US in Venezuela impasse could open country up to aggression



International relations expert Dr Anthony Gonzales



St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves



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International relations experts say Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar's decision to back any impending United States action against Venezuela could have dire consequences for this country, including making T&T a target in any conflict.

"We could be a target here," warned retired director at the Institute of International Relations, Dr Anthony Gonzales, who said while he welcomes the US effort to intercept drug cartels in the Caribbean, he was concerned about the Prime Minister's offer to give access to American forces, if necessary, to defend Guyanese territory in the event of an attack by the Nicolas Maduro regime.

"I have no difficulty supporting Guyana in any conflict with Venezuela, but do we have to get involved and offer a base? When you're offering a military base, it means that you are a military ally of the country, which means that in case, you know, if America gets involved in any war, we could be a target here."

According to Gonzales, the Government should avoid antagonising Venezuela, as he rejected foreign intervention in a sovereign territory.

Meanwhile, Jamaican Professor Christopher Charles, a political and social psychologist at the University of the West Indies' Mona campus, warned Persad-Bissessar against isolating T&T from its Caribbean neighbours.

"I think the Trinidadian Prime Minister and the Government, in general, is really playing up to Trump to ensure that whatever he does, Trinidad and Tobago comes out on the side that is much better than others," he said.

He cautioned that global powers act primarily in pursuit of their own national interests, further advising that the arrival of three US warships could pave the way for US intervention in Venezuela.

"What I've noticed in the last, say, 15 years with the UNC in Trinidad and Tobago and the JLP (Jamaica Labour Party) in Jamaica, the leaders, what they have done is to move away from working with a collective voice. And this is not good for the region because major powers have no permanent friends," Charles said.

"All they have is permanent national interest. And so, when we work with them to facilitate their interest in our region and to antagonise and possibly destabilise or overthrow any government in the region or in South America or Central America, we are opening ourselves to further aggression. There are gangs in all Caribbean territories and they have transnational linkages with cartels in Mexico and Colombia and all over the place. So why the Venezuelan cartels?"

Also contacted, St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Dr Ralph Gonsalves told Guardian Media that a collective Caribbean response to the matter was essential, emphasising the importance of regional consultation on security matters.

"I want to deal with it (impending arrival of ships) in a Caricom perspective. I don't really want us to go one side against the other. I don't want to say anything as St Vincent. This a matter we should deal with in the context of Caricom," he stated. However, Gonsalves declined to comment on Persad-Bissessar's statement.

Another international relations expert, Prof Andy Knight, also expressed concern with the military action, accusing the Trump administration of possibly using the deployment as a diversionary tactic amid domestic controversies, including the ongoing Epstein scandal.

Knight advised that while it was framed as a counter-narcotics operation, the military presence could escalate tensions with Caracas.

"What we will witness is an escalation of tensions between Venezuela and the US and it could also risk driving wedges between Caribbean countries, which is my main concern. Regional unity is critical at this point in our history, when we as Caribbean people are trying to address shared challenges and promote our own economic development," Knight said.

"I am particularly concerned about Caricom unity in the face of Trump 2.0 provocations. There are elections coming up in Guyana and Jamaica. We have seen Trinidad and Tobago elect a pro-Trump political party to office for the next five years. What happens if both Guyana and Jamaica elect political parties that succumb to Trumpism? This could have the effect of dividing the Caribbean countries and splitting Caricom at a time when we cannot afford to be divided as a Caribbean people."

Knight said Venezuela's response, including President Nicolás Maduro's mobilisation of 4.5 million militia members, adds another layer of complexity.

"This could be seen as both genuine defence and political theatre. It signals a domestic show of strength to deter foreign intervention, but it also serves internal propaganda, consolidating Maduro's support base. What is worse is that Maduro might call on his allies, Russia, China, Iran, to counter what the US military is trying to do, particularly if the US Navy enters into Venezuelan territorial waters."

In an interview during the Santa Rosa Harvest in Arima yesterday, former foreign and Caricom

affairs minister Dr Amery Browne expressed shock at the Government's response, calling it "unprecedented circumstances" where a Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs Minister and Ambassador to Caricom shared different views on the same subject.

He noted that while Foreign Affairs Minister Sean Sobers told Guardian Media T&T would not be involved with the US operation, the Prime Minister contradicted him by giving full support to the US, while Caricom Ambassador Ralph Maraj mentioned regime change in Caracas "They need to get on the same page," he stated.

Yesterday, the People's National Movement said it would address this development at a news conference today.

Meanwhile, Movement for Social Justice leader David Abdulah the PM's remarks, calling it a "day of shame and sadness."

In a statement, Abdulah accused Persad-Bissessar of echoing a false US narrative about "terrorist drug cartels," which he said is a cover for military aggression. He also denounced her "shameful disrespect" for Caricom.

He reminded the public that one of the objectives of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, under which Caricom functions, is collaboration on foreign policy and international issues.

"Today, the Government is putting us on the wrong side of history," he said.