

# US deploys 2 more ships near Venezuela

Mission complains to UN about nuclear capability of one



FILE: The crew on board the USS Lake Erie in Hawaii in 2004.

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GAIL ALEXANDER SENIOR POLITICAL REPORTER

The United States' recent move to order additional ships—including a nuclear-powered attack submarine—to the southern Caribbean to address drug cartel threats has been condemned by Venezuela's mission to the United Nations, which says the entry of a nuclear submarine to the region violates treaties the US has signed.

Venezuela's mission, in its complaint to the UN, cited treaties that the Caribbean should remain a zone of peace—a call Caricom has made.

But T&T Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar has welcomed the additional US forces in the region.

This, as the issue of the US deployment of ships to the region continues engaging attention, even as Guyana and Jamaica are heavily involved in campaigns for their general elections next Monday and Wednesday.

Last week, the Trump administration ordered an amphibious squadron to the Southern Caribbean in a crackdown on hemispheric drug cartels.

The USS San Antonio, USS Iwo Jima and USS Fort Lauderdale were scheduled to arrive off Venezuela's coast by last Sunday carrying 4,500 service members, including 2,200 Marines. On their destination, US Defence officials told CNN then that the ships had not received orders to head to the edge of Venezuela's territorial sea, which has approximately 4,000 kilometres of coastline.

On Monday, Reuters cited information from US sources that two additional US ships—the USS Lake Erie, a guided missile cruiser, and the USS Newport News, a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine —will arrive in the region by early next week.

These are reportedly aimed at addressing threats to US national security from specially designated “narco-terrorist organisations” in the region.

The US designated Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel and Venezuelan criminal group Tren de Aragua (TDA) as global terrorist organisations.

T&T Defence Minister Wayne Sturge recently said the TDA is operating in T&T.

PM: Only cartels' minions upset at US presence

After Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar backed the US initiative, dismissed the need for T&T consultation with Caricom on the issue and put the bid to dismantle drug networks above Caricom's call for the region to remain a zone of peace, she said yesterday she had no problem with additional US ships in the area.

“No, not at all. The maritime area to be patrolled is very large, so any additional naval assets would only increase the effectiveness of the drug interdiction operation,” Persad-Bissessar told Guardian Media.

“The only persons who are tense are those engaged in drug trafficking and those enabling the cartels. These US ships are operating in international waters; they're not interfering with the sovereignty of any nation.”

She added, “For years, the region has complained about drugs and violent crime. We are finally getting some help and suddenly, persons are against the naval patrols.

Citizens must take a close look at the persons who are complaining about the aggressive US action against the drug cartels.

The cartels have infiltrated the top echelons of society throughout the Caribbean, so they now have their minions in our country agitating against the US presence.”

On whether T&T might be caught in the crosshairs of the situation, she said that is “engaging in hyperbole and hysteria.”

Venezuelan complaint about sub

But Venezuela's Permanent Mission to the United Nations yesterday called for the Permanent Missions of the Member States and the Permanent Observer Missions to the UN to follow up on its August 25 communication regarding a “series of hostile actions and continued threats” by the US against Venezuela.

The mission strongly denounced the additional US vessels as a serious threat to regional peace and security. Venezuela called for “preserving peace, security, and stability” in the region.

The mission communicated to the UN, the legal framework involved and which was allegedly violated by the US:

- The presence of an offensive nuclear submarine in Latin America and the Caribbean contradicts the historic commitment of nations to disarmament and peaceful settlement of disputes and represents a clear act of intimidation, contrary to the letter and spirit of the UN Charter, which, obliges all states to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity/political independence of any state.
- Latin America and the Caribbean were declared a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone by the Treaty of Tlatelolco (1967), Protocol II, of which was ratified by the US in 1971.
- Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace was adopted by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2014 and recognised by the UN.

The mission stated that the introduction of a nuclear submarine into the region, without transparency regarding its cargo or rules of employment, violated the object and purpose of legally binding instruments and erodes collective confidence in the validity of the regional denuclearisation regime.

The mission added, “Venezuela demands the immediate cessation of the US military deployment in the Caribbean. It demands clear and verifiable guarantees from Washington that it will not deploy or threaten to use nuclear weapons in the region.

“It urges the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean to convene urgent consultations to examine this series of hostile actions and attempts at intimidation.

“Venezuela urges respect for the Treaty of Tlatelolco, signed by the US and declaring Latin America and the Caribbean a nuclear-weapon-free zone.”

Antigua’s Browne urges zone of peace; Caricom silent

There was no response to Guardian Media’s queries on the US developments (and Persad-Bissessar’s pro-US statements) from Caricom chairman, Jamaica Prime Minister Andrew Holness, Caricom Secretary General Dr Carla Barnett, or the heads of Barbados, St Vincent, Grenada, Dominica or St Lucia yesterday.

However, Antigua/Barbuda Prime Minister Gaston Browne, contacted on the US fleet deployment and Persad-Bissessar’s remarks, said, “The region must remain a zone of peace. I’m a peace practitioner—I condemn all wars and conflicts. They bring no value to humanity—they are destructive.

That’s all I have to say.”

Guyana Foreign Affairs Minister Hugh Todd cited Guyana’s statement on the issue.

Guyana President Irfaan Ali, on the campaign trail, has recommitted Guyana’s support for the US initiative.