

# U.S.-Venezuela Tensions: Legal, Geopolitical Implications of Military Deployment and Sanctions

By Holland & Knight

Tensions between the United States and Venezuela intensified in August 2025 as evidenced by the deployment of U.S. military forces in the region. The economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. remain in effect, and profound ideological differences persist between the two governments. In this context, approximately 4,000 U.S. Marines and sailors were mobilized to the waters of Latin America and the Caribbean, with eight military vessels carrying 1,200 missiles and a nuclear submarine facing Venezuela.

These actions are part of a reinforced initiative by the U.S. government to combat drug trafficking in Latin America, which included the confiscation of more than \$700 million in Venezuelan assets, according to statements by the U.S. attorney general. The U.S. government has made this fight a priority, undertaking measures such as those mentioned and even formalizing a directive to intensify the war against the cartels. Specifically, on Aug. 7, 2025, it was announced that the reward for information leading to the arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro would be increased to \$50 million, asserting that he represents a threat to U.S. national security.

For his part, the leader of the Venezuelan regime told international media that the U.S. military advance constitutes "the greatest military threat witnessed in South America in the last 100 years." In contrast, opposition leader María Corina Machado urged the Venezuelan Armed Forces and regional governments to adopt a clear stance against the Maduro dictatorship, noting that more than 90 percent of the population rejects the Chavista regime and that public discontent is increasingly evident. As an example, she cited the failure of the recent call to enlist public employees and citizens in the militia.

In the economic sphere, the global energy crisis continues to influence the bilateral agenda. Last month, speculation arose regarding the possibility that the U.S. might partially ease sanctions to allow certain oil transactions, contingent upon Venezuela's compliance with democratic commitments. Nevertheless, no substantial modifications to the sanctions were announced during this period.

Finally, on Sept. 2, 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reported a "lethal strike" had been carried out by the U.S. government against a vessel allegedly linked to drug trafficking in the southern Caribbean. This event confirms the escalation of tensions and military deployment in the region, consolidating a scenario of confrontation that presents significant legal challenges in the areas of international law, state sovereignty and the protection of human rights.

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