

# The American Venezuela operation marks end of era of US military hesitation

written by Ruth Pines-Feldman | 05.01.2026

The American move in Venezuela is not just a successful military operation.

From the perspective of the Trump administration, it is intended to convey a broad and unmistakable message to the United States' adversaries. As US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said at a press conference in Florida, when US President Donald Trump makes a threat, he also acts.

Venezuela became a concrete example that Trump's Washington is prepared to use military, intelligence, and economic power to enforce red lines, even at the cost of international criticism. For rivals of the United States, it served as a warning that statements from the White House can no longer be dismissed as mere rhetoric.

As expected, criticism within the US has been sharp and has come from both sides of the political spectrum, including a heated debate over the legality of the operation and whether it violated international law.

Figures from the "progressive camp," including New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani, were quick to declare the move illegal, a position that also resonated in mainstream media, including *The New York Times*.

At the same time, the publication of indictments against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, alongside the release of footage documenting his transfer to the United States, makes it clear that the White House is preparing for a high-profile legal battle.

Maduro is expected to stand trial in federal court in southern New York, widely regarded as the preferred venue for major federal cases, particularly those involving drug offenses, financial fraud, and cross-border criminal activity.

Even sharper criticism focuses on what may come next. Critics fear a repeat of past mistakes, foremost among them Iraq, the rapid toppling of a regime without a stable political plan for the day after.

Trump has stated that the US will control developments in Venezuela through local actors, but he has not explained how such a mechanism would operate, nor has he ruled out the possibility of an American ground presence if required.

The American memory of Iraq looms over public debate, and concerns about a power vacuum and institutional collapse are prominent. For now, Venezuela's Vice President, Delcy Rodríguez, has assumed the role of acting president.

The economic dimension has also been stated without ambiguity. Trump declared

that the Venezuelan oil industry is “returning to American control,” arguing that the Maduro regime had unlawfully nationalized these assets, a process from which China primarily benefited.

According to Trump, the US not only corrected a historical injustice, but will also rehabilitate energy infrastructure and restore American influence in the region. The central framing of the move is explicitly geopolitical, aimed at blocking the China-Russia-Iran axis in the US’s backyard. According to reports, Venezuela has in recent years served as a base for hostile activity, including cooperation with Iran, and has become an anchor point for an anti-Western axis in South America. Trump seeks to sever the chain, and not only in Venezuela.

## **Reinforcing US as ‘world’s strongest superpower’**

Public discourse is already shifting toward a question troubling many: Is this the end, or is it only the beginning?

The question of Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, and even Greenland is being raised, although at this stage, there is no mention of regime change in Iran.

At the same time, it remains to be seen whether there will be a Chinese response to the move, which reportedly caught Beijing completely by surprise, just hours after an official visit between the two countries in Venezuela, and whether any shift will emerge around Taiwan.

Statements emphasizing the operation’s success, no fatalities, no loss of equipment, and the use, apparently, of advanced cyber capabilities that, according to Trump, plunged the entire capital into darkness, are intended to reinforce the image of the US as the world’s strongest superpower, militarily as well.

In a broader view, some argue that Washington succeeded in Venezuela, where Putin failed in Kyiv at the outset of the Ukraine-Russia War.

It is also impossible to ignore the motive presented as central: the war on drugs. It remains to be seen whether Maduro’s removal will generate a domino effect among regional cartels and how this will affect the broader system.

Finally, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth defined the operation as an expression of “America First” and of the concept of “peace through strength.” The Trump administration is seeking to send a clear signal to countries around the world: the era of American hesitation, at least for now, is over. Published in The Jerusalem Post, January 2026.