

**Venezuela****Donald Trump says Venezuelan airspace is closed**

Announcement comes after military build-up by US forces in region



A US Navy F/A-18F Super Hornet aircraft is launched from the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R Ford while operating in the Caribbean Sea this month © via Reuters

**Steff Chávez** in Mexico City

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Donald Trump on Saturday said that Venezuela's airspace should be considered closed, as the US weighs launching strikes inside the country.

"To all Airlines, Pilots, Drug Dealers, and Human Traffickers, please consider THE AIRSPACE ABOVE AND SURROUNDING VENEZUELA TO BE CLOSED IN ITS ENTIRETY," Trump wrote in a post on his Truth Social platform.

On Thursday, Trump suggested that Washington would soon start hitting alleged drug traffickers on Venezuelan soil.

“We will be starting to stop them by land also,” he told US troops from his Mar-a-Lago resort during the Thanksgiving holiday. “The land is easier but that’s going to start very soon.”

He was addressing troops aboard the USS Iwo Jima, an amphibious assault ship in the Caribbean Sea as part of the largest US naval build-up in those waters since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

The US Federal Aviation Administration last week warned airlines to “exercise caution” when flying in Venezuelan airspace “due to the worsening security situation and heightened military activity in and around Venezuela”. There was a risk to planes at all altitudes, including take-offs and landings, the FAA said.

Earlier this week Venezuela [revoked](#) operating rights for six big airlines, including Iberia and Turkish Airlines, after they heeded western warnings and suspended routes following a military build-up by US forces in the region.

Venezuela’s civil aviation authority also revoked the rights for Latam, TAP, Avianca and Gol, accusing the carriers of taking part in “acts of state terrorism promoted by the US”.

The US has deployed a dozen warships — including its largest and most advanced aircraft carrier — more than 14,000 troops, fighter jets, a nuclear-powered fast-attack submarine and a special operations vessel, among other military assets, to the region since late August.

The build-up is widely seen as an effort to force Venezuelan leader [Nicolás Maduro](#), who the US has designated a terrorist, from power.

“Declarations like this constitute a hostile, unilateral and arbitrary act,” Venezuela’s foreign ministry said in a statement responding to Trump’s comments. “Venezuela will not take orders, threats, or meddling from any foreign power.”

The foreign ministry also said that Washington had “unilaterally suspended” migrant deportation flights from the US to Venezuela, which have repatriated 13,956 Venezuelans.

Since September, Washington has carried out at least 21 strikes as part of a military campaign against alleged drug trafficking boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, killing 83 people.

Trump and US defence secretary Pete Hegseth have vowed that those strikes would continue.

Hegseth, who made a surprise Thanksgiving visit to troops on two of the warships in the region, defended the strikes. The attacks have sparked concerns from Republican and Democratic lawmakers, human rights experts and critics that the military actions were illegal under domestic and international law.

“The declared intent is to stop lethal drugs, destroy narco-boats, and kill the narco-terrorists”, Hegseth said on Friday. “Our current operations in the Caribbean are lawful under both US and international law.”

The US on Monday designated the [Cartel de los Soles](#), a drug cartel it alleges is led by Maduro and high-level officials in his regime, as a foreign terrorist organisation. The designation could widen the Trump administration’s legal justification for escalating its military actions in the region.

Trump on Tuesday said he “might talk” to Maduro and that “we can do things the easy way, that’s fine. And if we have to do it the hard way that’s fine too . . . I’m not going to tell you what the goal is.”

The New York Times reported on Friday that a call took place between the two leaders late last week.

Chuck Schumer, the Democratic leader in the Senate, noted that only Congress had the power to authorise war, and that it had not done so.

“President Trump’s reckless actions towards Venezuela are pushing America closer and closer to another costly foreign war,” he said.

*additional reporting by Joe Daniels in Bogotá*

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