

**Letter****Letter: Trump has painted himself into a corner on Venezuela**

From Ambassador (r) Jorge Heine, Non-Resident Fellow, The Quincy Institute (Washington, DC), Santiago, Chile



© Cristian Hernandez/AP

Published DEC 11 2025

---

Amid much misleading commentary on the critical situation in US-Venezuelan relations, Francisco Rodríguez provides a breath of fresh air in his guest column “Trump needs an off-ramp in Venezuela” ([Opinion](#), FT Weekend, December 6).

Much of the opinion being voiced has been in the opposite direction — that it is the Venezuelan president, Nicolás Maduro, who needs an off-ramp.

In fact, it is the other way around. In Venezuela, the Trump administration has painted itself into a corner. By deploying a significant naval presence in the Caribbean, including America's largest aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R Ford, and a large number of additional US navy ships; by illegally sinking multiple alleged drug boats off the Venezuelan coast and killing their crew; by arbitrarily (and again illegally) in effect closing Venezuela's air space; and by threatening to attack Venezuelan territory, the Trump administration has narrowed its own options to the very limit.

The assumption was that all of this pressure would somehow lead to Maduro's resignation, a wrong-headed assumption from the word go. Authoritarian regimes are made up, not just of a leader, but of a vast apparatus of support that is fully aware of what awaits its members once the leader is gone. This apparatus is not ready to throw in the towel.

At this point, the Trump administration is left with two choices: some sort of surgical strikes on a few Venezuelan military bases and on other localities it identifies as drug trafficking centres, and then call it a day; or a full-scale land invasion à la Iraq. Both are problematic. The first would entail leaving in place a strengthened Maduro regime. The second would mean exactly the sort of "endless war" Trump campaigned against in 2024, with a Libya-like scenario, a country that 14 years after the Nato-led invasion still finds itself mired in civil war. Rodríguez is right. The best option for the US now is a compromise solution that considers some of Washington's demands but falls short of regime change.

**Ambassador (r) Jorge Heine**

*Non-Resident Fellow, The Quincy Institute (Washington, DC), Santiago, Chile*

---

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2025. All rights reserved.

---