U.S. Military Action in Venezuela: Rapid Regime Disruption and Rising Regional Uncertainty

On January 3, 2026, the United States launched a large-scale military operation against Venezuela, combining coordinated air and ground strikes on key military and government targets. The operation focused on strategic locations in Caracas and multiple sites nationwide. U.S. President Donald Trump announced the action early Saturday, stating it was successfully executed, with President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores taken into custody. Washington framed the operation as part of a counter-narcotics and anti-corruption campaign aimed at removing Maduro and facilitating a political transition.

The initial phase involved multiple explosions across Caracas, particularly near military installations and critical infrastructure. The targeting pattern suggested a deliberate focus on command-and-control nodes, air-defense systems, and government facilities, indicating a strategically planned assault. The scale of the operation pointed to extensive prior preparation, involving multiple aircraft and elite ground units. The speed and coordination of the strikes appeared designed to rapidly seize control and limit the Venezuelan military's ability to mount an organized response.

Military action extended beyond the capital, with reported strikes in Miranda, Aragua, and La Guaira states. These attacks triggered nationwide power outages, disrupting communications, transportation networks, and essential services. The blackout heightened uncertainty and constrained emergency response capabilities. Early reports indicated casualties among security personnel and civilians, with fatalities confirmed in several areas.

In the aftermath, Venezuela's leadership situation remains highly unsettled. Maduro and Flores are reportedly in U.S. custody, effectively removing him from direct authority. In Caracas, the Supreme Court named Vice President Delcy Rodríguez as interim president to ensure administrative continuity. The government has declared a national emergency and continues to denounce the U.S. operation. Competing claims to authority and uncertainty over international recognition have left the transition pathway unclear.

International reaction was swift and largely critical. China and Russia called for restraint, Cuba condemned the action, and several Latin American governments warned of regional destabilization. Public sentiment within Venezuela remains divided between expectations of political change and fears of prolonged instability.

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