



1.8. Aftermath of US intervention

At the onset of his second presidency, President Trump revived a 'maximum pressure' strategy towards Venezuela.³⁵² He accused the Venezuelan government of large-scale cocaine trafficking, charged Maduro with leading the Cartel of the Suns (Cartel de los Soles), designated that group and Tren de Aragua as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs), issued a secret directive in August 2025 authorising Pentagon action against select Latin American cartels, doubled the US bounty on Maduro to 50 million USD, and deployed a naval task force toward Venezuelan waters.³⁵³ For information on these groups, see section [2.1 Armed groups](#).

In August 2025, the US began building up a large naval presence in the Caribbean, stating that its objective was to combat drug-trafficking networks allegedly linked to Venezuela and President Maduro,³⁵⁴ including Tren de Aragua and the Cartel of the Suns.³⁵⁵ By the end of March 2026, US forces had carried out 43 strikes in both the Caribbean and the eastern Pacific against boats allegedly transporting narcotics, resulting in 160 deaths.³⁵⁶

On 3 January 2026, the US carried out a military operation in Caracas aimed at capturing President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores.³⁵⁷ Following the operation, US President Trump stated that his administration would govern Venezuela until a "'safe, proper and judicious transition'" could occur and that the US would assume control over the sale of Venezuelan oil.³⁵⁸ The number of fatalities remains unclear, though sources indicated that at least 47 members of Venezuelan security forces and 32 Cuban military personnel were killed.³⁵⁹ On 7 January 2026, US Secretary of State announced that a three-phase plan for Venezuela, focused on stabilisation, recovery, and transition, would be implemented, accompanied by significant sanctions relief and a restructuring of trade relations.³⁶⁰

Both Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores were transported to New York, where they were indicted on four charges originally filed in 2020: 'Narco-Terrorism Conspiracy', 'Cocaine Importation Conspiracy', 'Possession of Machineguns and Destructive Devices', and 'Conspiracy to Possess Machineguns and Destructive Devices'.³⁶¹ As of 4 June 2026, no trial date had been set.³⁶²

On 5 March 2026, Vice-President Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in by the National Assembly as 'interim President', replacing Nicolás Maduro.³⁶³ Although the structure of Maduro's authoritarian government remained in place,³⁶⁴ sources indicated that since Maduro's capture, interim President Rodríguez has distanced herself from his style of governance and has cooperated closely with the US.³⁶⁵ On the same day, 5 March 2026, the US and Venezuela re-established diplomatic relations after seven years.³⁶⁶ On 8 March 2026, President Trump recognised Delcy Rodríguez as 'President'.³⁶⁷

Sources indicated that since becoming interim President, Delcy Rodríguez has undertaken a series of changes within the executive branch, the military, and the economic apparatus.³⁶⁸ On 19 March 2026, Rodríguez removed Defence Minister Vladimir López Padrino and appointed General Gustavo González López as his replacement.³⁶⁹ The following day, 20 March 2026, Rodríguez replaced several senior military commanders.³⁷⁰ General González López, who remains on the US sanctions list, previously served as director of the Bolivarian National Intelligence Service (SEBIN, Servicio Bolivariano de Inteligencia Nacional), an agency implicated in state repression.³⁷¹ For additional information on SEBIN, see section [1.6 State security forces](#). Interim President Rodríguez also replaced the ministers of Electric Energy, Housing, Transportation, Employment, Culture, and University Education, and introduced changes within the General Directorate of Military Counterintelligence (DGCIM, Dirección General de Contrainteligencia Militar) and the Presidential Guard.³⁷² On 29 April 2026, Cabello rejected calls for new presidential and parliamentary elections, stating that they would be held 'when the time is right'.³⁷³

The AtlasIntel and Bloomberg survey found that 52.2 % of respondents believed civil liberties had expanded in the country following the US intervention, while 30.4 % felt they had diminished.³⁷⁴ Regarding democratic conditions, 38.9 % of respondents said Venezuela was becoming 'a little more democratic' and 19.1 % 'much more democratic', compared with 22 % who stated that the country was 'not democratic at all'.³⁷⁵ Sources noted that, after the detention of Maduro, there is greater freedom in civic space and, to some extent, voice dissent.³⁷⁶ Amaya noted that political parties and civil society organisations have retaken public activities, resuming field work, and publishing reports, and that participation in protests has also increased, but emphasised that the risk has not disappeared, as the repressive apparatus remains intact.³⁷⁷ For additional information, see section [3.1. Political opponents and activists, and human rights defenders](#).

- [352](#)

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- [377](#)

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