

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 5, 2026

Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

The Trump administration's unilateral invasion of Venezuela and the capture of President Maduro and his wife were unlawful, unjustified, and unwise. Your statements that the United States will "run" the country and its oil industry raise grave concerns about the legality, intent, and lasting consequences of a military intervention carried out without congressional authorization.¹ The Administration's actions and rhetoric reveal that control over Venezuela's vast oil resources—not national security, democracy, or humanitarian principles—is driving U.S. policy.² The use of U.S. military force to invade another nation for the benefit of the petroleum industry breaches fundamental constitutional limits on presidential power and violates international law. You have no legal authority to overthrow a foreign government or to claim its natural resources. I urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to immediately cease all hostilities against Venezuela and seek the approval of the U.S. Congress before taking any further military action. Using the outdated and disgraced practice of "gunboat diplomacy" to do the bidding of oil conglomerates must end now.

These concerns are amplified by reports that Administration officials told Members of Congress that there were no plans for invasion, regime change, or significant military action in Venezuela.³ Those representations appear fundamentally inconsistent with actions underway and raise serious questions about whether the Administration deliberately misled Congress in order to avoid its obligations under the War Powers Resolution. It is especially troubling and unacceptable that, by your own account, domestic oil executives were informed of these plans before Members of Congress.⁴

The situation on the ground in Venezuela remains deeply volatile. The removal and detention of a sitting head of state, absent a Venezuelan-led and internationally supported transition process, risks creating a dangerous power vacuum with immediate consequences for safety, human rights, and regional stability. Any U.S. involvement in Venezuela must place respect for Venezuelan sovereignty and human rights at its core.

¹ Trump says U.S. will 'run' Venezuela and sell seized oil in remarks on the strikes, NPR (Jan. 3, 2026), <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/03/g-s1-104346/trump-venezuela-maduro-press-conference>.

² Rachel Frazin, Trump says the US will be 'very strongly involved' in Venezuelan oil, The Hill (Jan. 3, 2026), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5671113-trump-venezuela-oil/>.

³ Noah Robertson and Theodoric Meyer, Trump administration misled Congress before Maduro raid, Democrats say, The Washington Post (Jan. 3, 2026), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/01/03/maduro-rubio-congress/?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

⁴ Sarah Fortinsky, Trump says he tipped off oil companies on Venezuela attack, The Hill (Jan. 5, 2026), <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5672735-trump-venezuela-oil-industry/>.

Compounding these risks is the apparent absence of a credible “day-after” plan to stabilize Venezuela and protect civilians, particularly in light of the hard lessons of past U.S. interventions. History shows that military action undertaken without a viable post-conflict strategy leads to prolonged instability, human suffering, and open-ended U.S. involvement. Without a comprehensive plan for governance, civilian protection, or a transition, these actions risk deepening Venezuela’s humanitarian crisis and drawing the United States into a costly and indefinite military occupation.

It is particularly alarming that your Administration’s desire for Venezuelan oil is the driving factor behind this military action. You have gone so far as to say that Venezuela “took all of our oil” and “we want it back,” asserting that the country “took our oil rights.”⁵ You are abusing American military power, putting service members’ lives at risk, and jeopardizing our international standing. You are admittedly acting on behalf of private oil companies, to increase their profits, based on actions that the Venezuelan government took nearly 20 twenty years ago. This hostage-taking of Venezuela’s oil industry would strip Venezuelans of their sovereign rights over their own resources, undermine the rules-based international order, and represent a return to reckless resource-driven aggression, no different in principle from Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Your claim that “we’re going to get reimbursed for everything that we spend” as you pour taxpayer dollars into your desire to “run” Venezuela is a false promise that will remind many Americans of other lies told during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.⁶

History offers a clear warning against the belief that the United States should engineer regime change to seize oil assets or protect fossil fuel corporation interests. In 1953, the United States orchestrated the overthrow of Iran’s democratically elected government to reinstall a dictator who would protect Western oil interests. That intervention—driven by the desire for oil and fear of Iran’s nationalization of its oil resources—led to decades of instability, subjugation, of the Iranian people and enduring U.S. resentment, creating consequences still felt today.

Any U.S. policy toward Venezuela must prioritize genuine democratic self-determination, not the installation or backing of a puppet dictator who will safeguard private oil companies’ interests at the expense of the Venezuelan people. The United States cannot claim to act in the defense of democracy while facilitating the replacement of one authoritarian regime with another. Our history already includes too many dark chapters of American support for repressive regimes in the name of U.S. corporate interests, leaving behind a legacy of human suffering, oppression, and instability.

The United States is now in grave danger of repeating those tragic mistakes. In Iraq, the removal of a brutal dictator was treated as an endpoint rather than the beginning of a far more complex and costly intervention. The absence of a credible post-conflict strategy triggered years of instability, widespread suffering, and a prolonged U.S. military occupation that severely

⁵ ‘We want it back’: Trump demands Venezuela return ‘land, oil rights’ to U.S., PBS News (Dec. 17, 2025), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-we-want-it-back-trump-demands-venezuela-return-land-oil-rights-to-u-s>.

⁶ Anton Troianovski, *Trump Long Wanted to Take the Oil. He Says He’ll Do It in Venezuela*, The New York Times (Jan. 3, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/03/us/politics/trump-venezuela-oil.html>; Dilip Hiro, *How Bush’s Iraqi Oil Grab Went Awry*, The Nation (Sept. 26, 2007), <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/how-bushs-iraqi-oil-grab-went-awry/>.

damaged U.S. credibility. Iraq and Afghanistan alike demonstrate how invasions launched without clear objectives can spiral into geopolitical quagmires with enormous human and financial costs. These experiences should serve as stark warnings to the Administration against repeating the same mistakes in Venezuela.

The American people deserve clear answers about the Administration's objectives, legal rationale, and plans for Venezuela's future. We need congressional oversight to ensure that U.S. actions respect Venezuelan sovereignty, uphold human rights, and are lawful, limited in scope, and timebound. Without transparency and accountability, the United States risks repeating past failures, eroding public trust, destabilizing entire regions, and inflicting lasting harm, while drawing the country into yet another protracted intervention with no clear end in sight.

Given these concerns, please respond to the following questions in writing by January 20, 2026:

1. How does the Administration reconcile its actions in Venezuela with what was conveyed to Members of Congress? Did the Administration deliberately mislead Congress to circumvent the War Powers Resolution?
2. What is the Administration's plan for governance in Venezuela following the capture of Nicolás Maduro?
3. How is the Administration ensuring that U.S. involvement does not become a prolonged or indefinite intervention comparable to Iraq or Afghanistan?
4. What assurances can the Administration provide that Venezuelan resources, particularly oil, are not being treated as U.S. assets?
5. To what extent have considerations related to Venezuela's oil sector influenced U.S. decision-making?
6. What steps is the Administration taking to prevent broader regional destabilization, including violence affecting civilians in Venezuela and neighboring countries? How is the Administration coordinating with regional partners and international organizations to address humanitarian needs and uphold international human rights obligations?
7. Did any Administration official negotiate or discuss U.S. military intervention in Venezuela with any Venezuelan opposition figure, political faction, or intermediary in exchange for private companies' access to Venezuelan oil resources?
8. Before the invasion, did any Administration official discuss U.S. plans to take over Venezuelan oil with any U.S. oil company representative? If so, please name the people involved and when the conversations took place.

You are leading the United States toward the very kind of endless, oil-driven conflicts you vowed to end and that the American people have repeatedly rejected. I urge you to change course immediately.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator