



LATIN AMERICA

KATIA LEIVA

US-VENEZUELA TENSIONS RISE

SECRETARY OF STATE MIKE POMPEO'S TRANSITION PROPOSAL

The Trump administration has proposed a "Democratic Transition Framework" for Venezuela's government. The proposal hopes to promote political reconciliation by setting up a power-sharing transition government, which could lead to the removal of tough sanctions on Venezuela's industries, notably the oil sector.

The plan is unlikely to be accepted by President Nicolás Maduro, who has been able to withstand previous attacks. Maduro, despite being dismissed by much of the international community, continues to hold power and military support. Maduro's political opponent and self-declared interim president, Juan Guaidó, has struggled to legitimise himself and gain enough internal support.

U.S. officials believe that evolving situations and mounting pressures, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the plunging price of oil, will cause Maduro's supporters to be more open to negotiation.

While Maduro has yet to comment on the proposal, he has previously accused the U.S. government of aiding the opposition on multiple "coup" attempts, so it is unlikely that the proposal will move forward. Previous attempts at moving towards a transition government have failed, including one sponsored by Norway in September 2019.

US RAMPS UP EFFORTS TO END VENEZUELAN "NARCO-TERRORISM"

In an effort to stop illegal drug imports, the US administration has deployed warships to the Caribbean. This comes one week after the Trump administration charged top Venezuelan officials with "narco-terrorism", drug trafficking, corruption, and money laundering. US Attorney-General William Barr accuses Maduro of conspiring with Colombian rebel group Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC) to traffic cocaine into the United States. According to President Trump, the military deployment will include increased surveillance, disruption, and seizures of drug shipments.

Venezuelan officials are calling the accusations racist and a "diversion" from the pandemic. The U.S. is offering \$15 million for information that could lead to Venezuelan President Maduro's arrest. The deployment of the U.S. warships is expected to further escalate tensions.

"In cooperation with the 22 partner nations, U.S. Southern Command will increase surveillance, disruption, and seizures of drug shipments and provide additional support for eradication efforts which are going on right now at a record pace. We're deploying additional Navy destroyers, combat ships, aircraft, and helicopters; Coast Guard cutters; and Air Force surveillance aircraft, doubling our capabilities in the region."

- U.S. President Donald Trump, April 1 Press Briefing