



By: TA | AP Brief

US destroyers head toward waters off Venezuela as Trump aims to pressure drug cartels



The United States is deploying three Aegis guided-missile destroyers to the waters off Venezuela as part of President Donald Trump's effort to combat threats from Latin American drug cartels, according to a U.S. official briefed on the planning.

The USS Gravelly, the USS Jason Dunham and the USS Sampson are expected to arrive soon, said the official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke Tuesday on the condition of anonymity.

A Defense Department official confirmed that the military assets have been assigned to the region in support of counter narcotics efforts.

The official, who was not authorized to comment about military planning, said the vessels would be deployed “over the course of several months.”

The deployment of U.S. destroyers and personnel comes as Trump has pushed for using the U.S. military to thwart cartels he blames for the flow of fentanyl and other illicit drugs into American communities and for perpetuating violence in some U.S. cities.

Trump has also pressed Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum to cooperate more on security than her predecessor, specifically being more aggressive in pursuit of Mexico's **cartels**.

But she has drawn a clear line when it comes to Mexico's **sovereignty**, rejecting suggestions by Trump and others of intervention by the U.S. military.

Trump in February **designated** Venezuela's Tren de Aragua, MS-13 in El Salvador and six groups based in Mexico as foreign terrorist **organizations**.

His Republican administration has also stepped up immigration enforcement against alleged gang members.

The designation is normally reserved for groups like al-Qaida or the Islamic State group that use violence for political ends — not for

money-focused crime rings such as the Latin American cartels.

But the Trump administration argues the international connections and operations of the groups — including drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and violent pushes to extend their territory — warrant the designation.

Earlier this month, the Trump government **announced** it was doubling to \$50 million a reward for the arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, accusing him of being one of the world's largest narco-traffickers and working with cartels to flood the U.S. with fentanyl-laced cocaine.

Maduro said the U.S. had increased its threats against Venezuela

The press office of Venezuela's government did not respond to a request for comment from the AP on the deployment of the destroyers.

But without mentioning the ships, Foreign Minister Yvan Gil in a statement Tuesday characterized the U.S. government's drug-trafficking accusations against Venezuela.

“Washington's accusing Venezuela of drug trafficking reveals its lack of credibility and the failure of its policies in the region,” Gil said. “While Washington threatens, Venezuela steadily advances in peace and sovereignty, demonstrating that true effectiveness against crime is achieved by respecting the independence of its peoples. Every aggressive statement confirms the inability of imperialism to subdue a free and sovereign people.”

Maduro announced the planned deployment of more than 4.5 million militia members around the country

Maduro on Monday said the U.S. had increased its threats against Venezuela and announced the planned deployment of more than 4.5 million militia members around the country.

The militias were created by then-President Hugo Chávez to incorporate volunteers who could assist the armed forces in the defense of external and domestic attacks.

“The empire has gone mad and has renewed its threats to Venezuela’s peace and tranquility,” Maduro said at an event in Caracas, without mentioning any specific action.

Maduro was indicted in a New York federal court in 2020, during the first Trump presidency, along with several close allies on federal charges of narco-terrorism and conspiracy to import cocaine. Back then, the U.S. offered a \$15 million reward for his arrest.