



By: TA | AP Brief

Top US military adviser visits Caribbean



The nation's **top military officer** is visiting American troops in Puerto Rico and on a Navy warship in the region, where the U.S. has amassed an unusually **large fleet** of warships and has been attacking alleged **drug-smuggling boats**.

Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and President Donald Trump's primary military adviser, will be joined by David L. Isom, the senior enlisted adviser to Caine.

Caine's office said in a statement that the men will "engage with service members and thank them for their outstanding support to regional missions."

This will be Caine's second visit to the region since the U.S. military started building up its presence, which now includes the nation's **most advanced aircraft carrier**.

Caine and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth came to Puerto Rico in September after ships carrying hundreds of U.S. Marines arrived for what officials said was a training exercise.

Hegseth said then that the deployed Marines were "on the front lines of defending the American homeland."

Caine's visit this week comes as **Trump evaluates** whether to take military action against Venezuela, which he has not ruled out as part of his administration's escalating campaign to combat drug trafficking into the U.S.

A pressure tactic

The buildup of American warships and the strikes, which have killed more than 80 people on 21 alleged drug boats, are seen by many as a pressure tactic on Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro to resign.

The Trump administration also is ramping up pressure by designating the **Cartel de los Soles**, or Cartel of the Suns, as a foreign terrorist organization, although the entity that the U.S.

government alleges is led by Maduro is not a cartel per se.

Until this year, the label of foreign terrorist organization had been reserved for groups like the Islamic State or al-Qaida that use violence for political ends.

The designation of Cartel de los Soles will provide a whole bunch of new options to the United States for dealing with Maduro - Pete Hegseth

The Trump administration applied it in February to eight **Latin American criminal organizations** involved in drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and other activities.

The administration blames such designated groups for operating the boats it is striking but rarely identifies the organizations and has not provided any evidence.

Hegseth said last week that the designation of Cartel de los Soles will provide a "whole bunch of new options to the United States" for dealing with Maduro. In an interview with conservative news outlet OAN, Hegseth did not provide details on what those options are and declined to say whether the U.S. military planned to strike land targets inside Venezuela.

"So nothing is off the table, but nothing's automatically on the table," he said.