



By: TA | AP Brief

# Maduro open to US talks on drug trafficking



Venezuela is open to negotiating an agreement with the United States to **combat drug trafficking**, the South American country's President Nicolás Maduro said in a pretaped interview aired Thursday on state television, but he declined to comment on a CIA-led strike last week at a Venezuelan docking area that the Trump administration believed was used by cartels.

Maduro, in an interview with Spanish journalist Ignacio Ramonet, reiterated that the U.S. wants to force a government change in Venezuela and gain access to its vast oil reserves through the monthslong pressure campaign that began with a massive **military deployment** to the Caribbean Sea in August.

"What are they seeking? It is clear that they seek to impose themselves through threats, intimidation and force," Maduro said, later adding that it is time for both nations to **"start talking seriously**, with data in hand."

"The U.S. government knows, because we've told many of their spokespeople, that if they want to seriously discuss an agreement to combat drug trafficking, we're ready," he said. "If they want oil, Venezuela is ready for U.S. investment, like with Chevron, whenever they want it, wherever they want it and however they want it."

Chevron Corp. is the only major oil company exporting Venezuelan crude to the U.S. Venezuela has the world's largest proven oil reserves.

## A drone strike

The interview was taped on New Year's Eve, the same day the U.S. military announced strikes against five alleged drug-smuggling boats.

The latest attacks bring the total number of known boat strikes to 35 and the number of people killed to at least 115, according to numbers announced by the Trump administration. Venezuelans are among the victims.

President **Donald Trump** has justified the attacks as a necessary escalation to stem the flow of drugs into the United States and asserted that the U.S. is engaged in an "armed conflict" with drug cartels.

The strikes began off Venezuela's Caribbean coast and later expanded to the eastern Pacific Ocean.

**Asked about the operation on Venezuelan soil, Maduro said he could "talk about it in a few days"**

Meanwhile, the CIA was behind a **drone strike** last week at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels, according to two people familiar with details of the operation who requested anonymity to discuss the classified matter.

It was the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the boat strikes began, a significant escalation in the administration's pressure campaign on Maduro, who has been charged with narco-terrorism in the U.S.

Asked about the operation on Venezuelan soil, Maduro said he could "talk about it in a few days."