



## Jets carrying dozens of Russian troops land in Venezuela: report

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Several reports say roughly 100 Russian troops arrived in Venezuela over the weekend, as socialist dictator Nicolas Maduro fights off calls for him to step down. The move raised alarm bells over escalating tensions in the region, but the two allied countries insist they are simply carrying out routine military exercises.

What are the details?

According to the [BBC](#), two Russian military jets landed at Simon Bolivar International Airport outside Caracas on Saturday, carrying military equipment and dozens of troops. Independent Venezuelan journalist [Javier Mayorca](#) reported that 99 soldiers filed out of one aircraft under the command of Russian General Vasily Tonkoshkurov.

American economist Steve Hanke tweeted a picture purportedly showing Russian troops on the ground at the airport next to an Ilyushin IL-62M, which is used for transporting military personnel.

Steve Hanke: “More Russian soldiers unload in #Venezuela to help prop up Pres. #Maduro. The Ilyushin IL-62M is used to carry military personnel and frequently flies troops from #Russia to Syria -- indeed it stopped in #Syria on its way from Russia to #Caracas.”

A Venezuelan official speaking on the condition of anonymity confirmed the arrival of Russian military officials, telling [Reuters](#) the visit was for training, strategy, and discussing equipment maintenance. Russian media outlet [Sputnik](#) cited an unnamed diplomatic source on the ground in Caracas, who said there was "nothing mysterious" about the two nations fulfilling ongoing military contracts.

In December, the Kremlin sent two nuclear-capable bombers to Venezuela in a highly publicized show of support for Maduro's regime. The next month, Russia sent 400 mercenaries to Venezuela, a source [told Reuters](#).

Why the tension?

Control in Venezuela is in limbo, after Maduro's crippling socialist policies have left the country in economic ruin, causing citizens and opposition politicians to revolt. The dictator's disputed reelection led to the nation's Congress declaring Maduro a usurper, and opposition leader [Juan Guaido](#) declared himself interim president shortly thereafter.

The U.S. and dozens of other countries recognize Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate president, but Maduro has refused to step down and still holds control of the military. Russia, China, and

Cuba have maintained their steadfast support of Maduro, and the Kremlin has a vested interest — Moscow has invested billions in an effort to keep the dictator's regime afloat.

Sputnik noted that "both Caracas and Moscow have been expressing concerns that Washington may resort to military means to oust Maduro from power."

Meanwhile, the Trump administration has not ruled out intervening using military action in the South American country, with national security adviser John Bolton hinting at plans to send thousands of U.S. troops to neighboring Colombia.