



Trump Says 'Military Option' Possibility in Venezuela

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President Donald Trump raised the possibility of "military option" in Venezuela over that country's president's power grab that has roiled the South American nation.

"We have many options for Venezuela, and by the way, I'm not going to rule out a military option," Trump told reporters outside his club in Bedminster, New Jersey.

Trump called Venezuela "our neighbor" and said, "We have troops all over the world in places that are very, very far away — Venezuela is not very far away, and the people are suffering, and they're dying. We have many options for Venezuela, including a possible military option if necessary."

Maduro recently pushed for a vote to redraft the Venezuelan constitution via a National Constituent Assembly, an election that the Trump administration has characterized as a sham meant to turn Maduro into a dictator.

Venezuela has been rocked by street protests over the move. More than 120 people have been killed and thousands arrested in over four months of unrest. The U.S. Treasury Department last week imposed sanctions on Maduro.

Asked the military option would be a U.S.-led effort, Trump did not elaborate but said "We don't talk about it. But a military operation, a military option is certainly something that we could pursue."

The U.S. military says it has not received any orders for Venezuela. There are a small number of U.S. military personnel in Venezuela, primarily Marines guards at the Embassy.

Hours after Trump's remarks Friday, the White House said Maduro requested a phone call with Trump, and the White House indicated that will not happen until there are changes.

"President Trump will gladly speak with the leader of Venezuela as soon as democracy is restored in that country," the White House office of the press secretary said in a statement.

One expert called Trump's threat of military action "totally reckless" and a bluff.

"We know for a fact that the U.S. is not willing to invade Venezuela," Juan Carlos Hidalgo, Latin America policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity, said in a phone interview with NBC News.

Hidalgo also said Trump's comments play into Maduro's hands amid the unrest in the Venezuela, because the regime "desperately needs a scapegoat, desperately needs a foreign enemy."

"This is providing Maduro with ammunition to declare a state of emergency in Venezuela just as the Constituent Assembly has been very busy suppressing dissent," Hidalgo said.

A U.S. military spokesperson referred questions to the White House to characterize Trump's comments, saying: "The military conducts contingency planning for a variety of situations. If called upon, we are prepared to support whole-of-government efforts to protect our national interest and safeguard U.S. citizens."