

Trump Unleashes the CIA on Venezuela

A war against drugs and migrants also includes regime change

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*It is particularly difficult to pick out the most idiotic comments made by **President Donald Trump** over the past week as there is so much to choose from.*

There were the memorable doodle-headed speeches before the Israeli Knesset and the so-called Peace gathering in Sharm el-Sheikh Egypt and the threats against Hamas over the failure to come up with the bodies of Israeli hostages that were killed by American government provided bombs dropped by Israel and are now buried beneath piles of rubble.

And then there is the Insurrection Act, cited nearly every day by Trump or one of his cabinet, which, if it is successfully called for and passes through judicial review, will truly turn the United States into a police state ruled by a leader that clearly is mentally incompetent as well as providing all the signs that he is a narcissistic psychopath whose goal in holding the presidency is to be surrounded by folks who tell him constantly how great he is! And let's not forget the bloviation regarding the "Triumphal" Arch being planned for the Arlington National Cemetery end of Memorial Bridge leading to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington.

What the often-garrulous if incoherent Trump never said in the context of conflict in the Middle East was that a "GENOCIDE conducted by Israel is taking place in Gaza" as that is a word that is strictly *verboten* in the circle that surrounds him even though nearly all of the rest of the world sees it otherwise. He nevertheless frequently expressed his pain at the thought of 20 Israeli "hostages" with little to spare for an estimated 20,000 dead Palestinian children. To mention Gazan suffering would presumably would cut off the \$100 million plus loose change that comes his way from donors like Israeli Las Vegas casino multi-billionaire Miriam Adelson, who flew with Trump on Air Force One and grinned when he announced publicly how she was worth \$60 billion and posited how she is more loyal to Israel than she is to the United States. It was what some might regard as a genuine national security issue that did not seem to bother the president in the least. The Knesset audience cheered however, particularly when Trump related how Israeli annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights had been secured through a bribe he had received from the Adelsons during his first term in office.

Beyond all that entertainment, however, as a former intelligence officer, my favorite Trump bit of chatter last week was his somewhat odd revelation that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is now operating in Venezuela. That is in addition to the deployment of eight warships, a nuclear-powered submarine, B-52 bombers and fighter jets to the region as part of what the Administration has described as an operation to combat drug smuggling and illegal migration into the United States. There are reportedly a total of about 10,000 US military personnel, as a possible sea-air-and ground invasion force, assembled in the Caribbean area either on ships or in US territory on Puerto Rico. The recent resignation of the SOUTHCOM commanding Navy Admiral Alvin Holsey, who may have had reservations about the legality of what was afoot, is not expected to slow the troop build- up.

On Tuesday, Trump said that the Navy had struck another small boat off the coast of Venezuela, killing six people. It was the fifth [such strike in the Caribbean](#), where the Trump administration has asserted its presumed authority to treat alleged drug traffickers as [unlawful combatants](#) who may be attacked with military force. At least 27 people have been killed in the five strikes, according to figures released by the administration, and a sixth strike [on Thursday](#) reportedly was the first to result in "survivors" who apparently have been picked up by a US warship. There are also reports about a "drug submarine" which was intercepted and destroyed by the US Navy.

Speaking to reporters in the Oval Office on Wednesday alongside FBI **Director Kash Patel** and **Attorney General Pam Bondi**, Trump was questioned about the reported [Justice Department opinion](#) which forms the basis of the administration's ramped up campaign against Latin American drug cartels. It includes expanded authorities for the CIA to conduct lethal targeting and carry out covert action in the region. President Donald Trump reportedly had updated CIA's authorities when he also signed a secret directive ordering the military to begin hitting Latin American drug cartels earlier in the summer.

Before that, in April, the CIA had begun reviewing its existing authorities to use lethal force against Latin American drug cartels, as the Trump administration made confronting the cartels a [major priority](#) for the intelligence agency. At that time, the CIA was [already flying surveillance drones](#) that are capable of being armed over Mexico to begin to take out the Mexican cartels if ordered to do so by the White House.

Interestingly, there already exists a presidential directive, known as a “finding,” for CIA covert action related to the counternarcotics mission that dated back to the 1980s. The Trump administration has been working to update that finding to provide further clarity to CIA on the specific actions the agency is allowed to take in the Latin American region. The basic problem is that Latin America is in America’s backyard. The expansion of CIA’s authorities has included lethal targeting against cartel actors, an authority that is fraught with risk as in Latin America, there are, comparatively, many US-born citizens and green card holders — people who might have the legal standing to sue the US government if they are somehow targeted or harmed.

President Donald Trump explained on Wednesday that he had indeed authorized the CIA to operate inside Venezuela to clamp down on illegal flows of migrants and drugs from the South American nation, but stopped short of saying it would have authority to remove current Venezuelan **President Nicolas Maduro** which clearly is also a major policy objective. Trump explained how “We have a lot of drugs coming in from Venezuela, and a lot of the Venezuelan drugs come in through the sea, so you get to see that, but we’re going to stop them by land also. I think Venezuela is feeling heat. But I think a lot of other countries are feeling heat too. We’re not going to let this country, our country, be ruined because other people want to drop, as you say, their worst,” he also said, referring to his [questionable claim](#) that countries emptied their prisons and mental institutions to dump such illegal and marginal people in the United States.

Trump’s statement was remarkable because presidents don’t normally acknowledge directives, the “findings,” that allow spies to accomplish a secret mission. The whole idea of having a CIA is to allow the United States to operate in the shadows and conduct “deniable” operations, which is the key feature of “covert action,” i.e. that it should remain covert. Trump, always capable of acting impulsively, might, on the contrary, have been sending a message to the Venezuelan government about his seriousness over the drug and migrant issues. Phony warnings about boats allegedly filled with “narcoterrorists” might be considered psychological warfare, with Trump hoping to scare Maduro into resigning office and going into exile. The fact is that Venezuela plays a relatively minor role in the region’s drug trade, with Colombia and Ecuador being the prime suppliers. The president would not respond to questions regarding whether the CIA’s goal was to topple Maduro, for whom the US has offered a \$50 million bounty. “Wouldn’t it be a ridiculous question for me to answer?” he said.

Another issue raised by Trump’s exposure of what should not have been exposed is the endangering of CIA officers operating in Venezuela. What

have they been doing there? Well, this is just speculation, but they might have been funding and advising anti-government politicians like the woman who just won the Nobel Peace Prize **Maria Corina Machado**. She is reportedly a great fan of Trump and MAGA and also of the Israeli government, both of which she [has called on](#) to bring about regime change in her own country!

Real vulnerability for running such operations comes because CIA officers generally have two types of “cover” when they operate overseas. One is official, which would be working out of a US Embassy or Military Assistance office, but, thanks to Trump’s [interference](#) in the Venezuelan election in 2019 which preceded the breaking off of diplomatic and other relations, “official” does not exist in Venezuela which means there is no official or diplomatic protection. That means that officers must operate under “non official cover” (NOCs) which is normally as a businessman or student, or even using a forged passport, as an unalarming national of a country friendly to Caracas. In none of those cases will the officer have any protection if he or she is caught and you can bet that due to Trump’s overt and one might say lethal pressure the Venezuelan counterintelligence and police services are now looking very hard for American spies. Which contributes to the raising of the obvious question of whether what is being proposed for Venezuela is in any way due to an actual threat or desirable relative to what might be gained. Based on the evidence provided by the White House up until now, the answer would have to be “No!”

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