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Venezuela rejects new ExxonMobil oil wells in Essequibo, ramped-up U.S. military aid

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The Venezuelan government has warned of a “proportionate response” to new threats from Guyana’s military partners.

Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez has strongly criticized the expansion of US corporation Exxon Mobil’s oil exploration in the territorial waters of the disputed Essequibo region.

“The energy multinational not only usurps the sovereignty of Guyana [...] but also seeks to protect its illicit operations in a sea that is pending demarcation,” Rodríguez wrote Tuesday on social media while taking aim at the “warmongering US influence.”

The Venezuelan VP [warned](#) that expanded oil activities in the Essequibo area would

violate international legality and the [Argyle Agreement](#) signed in December in Saint Vicent and the Grenadines between Venezuelan and Guyanese Presidents Nicolás Maduro and Irfaan Ali.

“Venezuela will not rest in its defense of the Essequibo and will assert its rights in all circumstances,” she concluded.

In the “Joint Declaration of Argyle for Peace Between Guyana and Venezuela,” Maduro and Ali committed to not use force against each other and to continue direct talks to resolve the [Essequibo controversy](#) under international law.

On January 25, a [second meeting](#) took place in Brazil between the foreign ministers Yván Gil and Hugh Hilton Todd as part of a joint commission. The two officials renewed the pledge to maintain peace and continue working toward a diplomatic solution.

Rodríguez’s reaction came after ExxonMobil’s president Alistair Routledge [announced](#) on Tuesday the company will drill two new exploratory wells in the Stabroek Block, which is located some 200 kilometers offshore the Essequibo region. It covers an area of 26,800 square kilometers and contains more than 11 billion barrels of crude and gas. Routledge said the company has no intention of ceasing operations in the Stabroek Block and has Guyana’s and US support.

Talking to the press, Routledge said that ExxonMobil would continue “pursuing business and delivering on commitments” with Guyana, claiming that present oil operations do not violate international law. He added that the company and partners Hess Corporation and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) have invested over US \$29 billion into oil developments in the Stabroek Block.

Exxon is currently producing approximately 645,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd) from the offshore reserves and aims to reach more than 1.2 million bpd by the end of

2027.

For his part, Guyana's foreign secretary Robert Persaud told the press that the government supported the expansion of oil projects in the Stabroek Block, claiming the area belongs to the country's land and maritime space.

The renewed tensions between the neighboring countries regarding the 160,000 square kilometer Essequibo region were exacerbated by Washington's announcement this week to provide Guyana with new aircraft, helicopters, military drones and radar technology. On Monday, Brazil also sent more troops to its border with Guyana. Both military collaborations were [welcomed](#) by ExxonMobil.

Venezuela's Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López [said](#) that any provocations from the US Southern Command (Southcom), which he described as ExxonMobil's "private security," would be met with a "proportional response."

In recent months, Caracas has repeatedly denounced US interference and military threats as the territorial dispute with Guyana escalated. In December, the US Southcom carried out [flight operations](#) with the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and a [British warship](#) arrived in Guyanese waters for open sea defense exercises. In response, Venezuela held large-scale military drills of its own.

The December 3 [Essequibo referendum](#) held in Venezuela likewise raised tensions between the countries as Guyana interpreted the move as an attempt to forcefully annex the region. Voters overwhelmingly supported the country's sovereignty claim over the Essequibo and President Maduro ordered the creation of a new Venezuelan state called Guayana Esequiba as well as civil and military institutions for the disputed area.

The two neighboring South American nations' dispute over the resource-rich Essequibo Strip dates back to the 19th century. For its part, Venezuela maintains

that an 1899 ruling that granted the territory to the United Kingdom, Guyana's former colonizer, was fraudulent due to the lack of Venezuelan representation and alleged collusion between the judges.

In February 1966, the United Kingdom and Venezuela reached the Geneva Agreement to work out a mutually satisfactory solution, with Guyana taking over the UK's role after gaining independence months later. However, the controversy remained dormant and the dispute flared up again in 2015 following the discovery of massive offshore oil deposits by ExxonMobil. Caracas has contested the oil exploration for violating the 1966 accord.

In 2018, Guyana requested that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague rule over the territorial dispute, but Venezuela does not recognize the court's jurisdiction and contends that the 1966 Agreement is the only binding instrument to solve the controversy. The case is still ongoing.

Source: [Resumen](#)

