

With imaginary decree, Trump attempts to ‘close’ Venezuela’s airspace

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Maiquetía “Simón Bolívar” International Airport near Caracas faces disrupted

operations after President Donald Trump's Nov. 29 threat to close Venezuelan airspace.

CARACAS, Venezuela (OrinocoTribune.com)—In a bizarre social media post on Saturday, November 29, U.S. President Donald Trump issued a warning amid escalating military action and pressure on Venezuela and President Nicolás Maduro: "To all airlines, pilots, drug dealers and human traffickers, please consider the airspace above and surrounding Venezuela to be closed in its entirety."

This unprecedented attempt at an air blockade is another step in the escalating aggression that Washington is carrying out against Venezuela. However, experts in international law emphasize that Trump does not have the authority to close the airspace of another sovereign country, as that power belongs solely to the state that exercises sovereignty over its territory or to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The threat comes a week after the U.S. government itself urged airlines to exercise extreme caution due to "military activity" in the region, thus disrupting international air operations in Venezuela. A few days later, the New York Times revealed that Trump held a telephone conversation with President Maduro, in which the possibility of a face-to-face meeting was discussed.

According to analysts, Trump's delirious social media post is evidence of the failure of the U.S. strategy toward Venezuela, which relied on a military uprising leading to a coup d'etat or a far-right uprising aimed at ousting Maduro. Neither option has materialized; instead, President Maduro's position becomes stronger by the day, especially after U.S. warnings affecting Venezuelan airspace and disrupting the freedom of the Venezuelan people to transit local and international routes.

Venezuelan experts also consider that Trump's announcement means the de facto cancellation of migrant repatriation flights that have been operating regularly since

February. Despite U.S. military threats, these flights have brought home more than 17,000 Venezuelan migrants who had been victims of racist and xenophobic U.S. immigration policies.

Recent history of no-fly zones

Although Trump's announcement falls short of a formal no-fly zone, its intent seems to be exacerbating a psychological operation or preparing the ground for direct U.S. military strikes against Venezuela.

A low-intensity electronic warfare operation has been ongoing in the country since October, visibly affecting global positioning systems and impacting fields that rely on them, including air transport. Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez denounced this fact on social media on Saturday.

In Libya, the implementation of a no-fly zone in 2011 was a complex and controversial military and diplomatic operation authorized by the UNSC, allegedly to protect civilians from "government bombardments." It quickly evolved from a neutral airspace denial mission into a broader air campaign in support of forces opposing President Muammar Gaddafi.

Critics, including the abstaining states on the UNSC, argued that NATO overstepped its mandate. They contended that the no-fly zone morphed into a de facto air war in support of U.S. imperial interests, with the ultimate goal of regime change. This led to Gaddafi's overthrow and assassination, and ultimately to the destruction of the Libyan state, now dismembered and with different chunks controlled by sectarian forces.

In Iraq, no-fly zones were created in 1991 without a UNSC mandate following the Gulf War. This was a larger, longer and more controversial operation than the one in Libya. It served as a key element in the U.S.-led military aggression and occupation

campaign, paving the way for the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq under the excuse of “weapons of mass destruction” that did not exist.

U.S. imperialism justified the creation of the “no-fly zone” under UNSC Resolution 688, which condemned the repression of Saddam Hussein and demanded Iraq end it. However, Resolution 688 did not explicitly authorize the use of force or no-fly zones, making their legal basis a subject of continuous controversy. Without explicit UN Chapter VII authorization, the U.S. and UK relied on the argument that the resolution provided a legal “basis” for action. Russia, China, France, as well as many international law experts have consistently demonstrated the no-fly zones over Iraq were illegal under international law.

Both cases ended with hundreds of thousands of deaths, the dismemberment of the affected states, and migration crises. Experts argue that these would pale in comparison to what might happen in Latin America and the Caribbean if the U.S. launches a full-scale military operation against Venezuela.

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