

NBC's *Today*

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16 minutes and 17 seconds

CRAIG MELVIN: A lot happening on this Monday morning, so let's get right to that top story. The growing fallout from that daring U.S. military strike on Venezuela over the weekend. Overnight, President Trump reaffirming the U.S. is taking charge of Venezuela, while issuing new threats against its interim leader and neighboring countries.

SHEINELLE JONES: We can also tell you that deposed Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro and his wife are expected to make their first court appearance here in New York today. Meantime, thousands of post-holiday travelers remain stranded after the FAA temporarily closed air space in the Caribbean to commercial flights.

MELVIN: We've got every angle of this still-developing story covered for you this morning. We're going to start at the White House with Peter Alexander. Peter, good morning.

PETER ALEXANDER: That stunning surprise raid may prove to be the easy part. Now, President Trump faces a massive new challenge, transforming Venezuela, which he says is a broken country, into a stable functioning one. Overnight, repeating his assertion that the United States is in charge, while noting among his immediate priorities, sending in American oil companies to take over Venezuela's oil supply and repair the infrastructure there. Overnight, President Trump returning to the White House, detailing his plans for the future of Venezuela aboard Air Force One.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: We're going to run everything.

ALEXANDER: Venezuela's ousted leader, Nicolas Maduro, who will appear in federal court today, seen arriving in the U.S. and accompanied by agents in New York. His wife Ceila Flores, one of Maduro's key advisers, is also in custody. Now questions about how involved America will be as the country moves forward. The President initially saying this on Saturday.

TRUMP: We're going to run the country.

ALEXANDER: Secretary of State Marco Rubio responding on *Meet the Press* Sunday.

KRISTEN WELKER [TO RUBIO] [on NBC's *Meet the Press*, 01/04/26]: Who are those people who will be running the country specifically?

SECRETARY OF STATE MARCO RUBIO [on NBC's *Meet the Press*, 01/04/26]: Well, it's not running — it's running policy.

ALEXANDER: But Sunday night, the President doubled down.

TRUMP: We're going to run it, fix it, we'll have elections at the right time.

ALEXANDER: And asked who's in charge:

TRUMP: Don't ask me who's in charge because I'll give you an answer and it'll be very controversial.

NEWSNATION's LIBBEY DEAN: What does that mean?

TRUMP: It means we're in charge.

ALEXANDER: And whether American troops will be on the ground in Venezuela —

TRUMP: Depends on what happens.

ALEXANDER: The President also delivering a warning to Venezuela's interim president, Delcy Rodriguez, a Maduro loyalist, if she does not meet demands for what he calls total access.

TRUMP: I will just say she will face a situation probably worse than Maduro. Because, you know, Maduro gave up immediately.

ALEXANDER: Rodriguez, who initially denounced Maduro's capture as an illegal kidnapping, striking a more diplomatic tone Sunday night, saying "our people and our region deserve peace and dialogue, not war." It comes as we learn new details about the highly coordinated mission in Venezuela to capture Maduro, including strikes and 150 American aircraft launched from 20 bases. A secret CIA team operated in the country since August using drones and a person inside Maduro's inner circle, according to a source with knowledge of the matter, to develop a picture of his daily routine. The military used that intelligence to build a replica of Maduro's safe house for training. These new images reveal the damage inflicted by the U.S. military strikes that the Pentagon says were necessary to clear the way for its forces. A senior White House official tells NBC News that Maduro's "overt arrogance," including his rejections of multiple offers to surrender and regular public dancing helped persuade some within the President's team that Maduro was defiant and would not leave on his own. That senior official responding to the President's remarks about the U.S. running Venezuela overnight, telling me the U.S. will exert its power in the country by control of Venezuela's oil, saying that the U.S. will keep its restrictions on the oil there in place for "maximum leverage," Sheinelle and Craig?

MELVIN: Our chief White House correspondent, Peter Alexander. Peter, thank you.

JONES: As Peter mentioned, Maduro and his wife are set to appear in federal court in New York here in just a matter of hours. NBC's Sam Brock is there. Good morning to you, Sam.

SAM BROCK: Sheinelle, good morning. Craig, good morning. There is a massive police presence here, barricades up everywhere, ahead of the arrival of deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Ceila Flores. They have been indicted by a federal grand jury here

in New York, as well as his son and three of their top lieutenants. In terms of the specific charges against Maduro, guys, he's facing narco-terrorism conspiracy, cocaine importation conspiracy, as well as weapons-related charges, all to line Maduro's own pockets and those of his associates. This according to the indictment. Now, after Maduro's capture, he was flown to upstate New York, and then transported with his wife by helicopter to a processing center in New York City, where fingerprints were taken, mug shots were taken, then Maduro and his wife were taken to the Metropolitan Detention Center — or MDC — in Brooklyn that have had fairly high-profile inmates in recent years, including Luigi Mangione, who is still there right now awaiting trial, as well as Sean "P. Diddy" Combs. As far as what's happening today, this is the initial appearance for Maduro. It's expected to be his arraignment. The big questions right now: how is he going to plea and what will Maduro's representation look like, because, you have to remember, he's been under U.S. sanctions, his assets have been frozen. It is not clear whether or not Maduro can even hire an American law firm to represent him. But either way, whoever is representing Maduro, you can be assured, will be filing a motion at some point challenging the legality of his capture. This, of course, just the first step of what is likely to be a very lengthy legal process. Sheinelle and Craig, back to you.

JONES: Alright, Sam, thank you.

MELVIN: So, as all of this plays out, reaction continues to pour in from Americans to world leaders to the people of Venezuela. NBC's Gabe Gutierrez has made his way to Colombia. He's near the Venezuelan border. He picks up that part of the story. Gabe, good morning.

GABE GUTIERREZ: Craig, good morning. Several Latin American countries, including Colombia and Mexico, have issued a joint statement condemning the U.S. actions in Venezuela. Meanwhile, President Trump is ramping up his rhetoric against Colombia's president overnight, as the military here, which you can see is set up behind me, braces for what's next. This morning, there is profound uncertainty in the Caribbean, following those stunning U.S. air strikes on Venezuela over the weekend. At first, the streets of Venezuela's capital, Caracas, were eerily empty. Now, armed, pro-government civilians are patrolling outside supermarkets. Neighboring Colombia is bracing for an influx of refugees and ramping up security, fearing a new wave of cartel violence. At Venezuela's border, Patricia Lopez crossing with her two young sons, hoping to ride out the uncertainty, at least for now, with relatives here in Colombia. [SPEAKING SPANISH] [TO LOPEZ] How do you feel right now? "The truth is, I'm in shock," she says. "I don't believe what's happening right now." As reaction poured in, last night, President Trump also turning his gaze to another South American country, fielding questions about the U.S.'s future throughout the region, as he condemned Colombia's president.

TRUMP: Run by a sick man, who likes making cocaine and selling it to the United States. And he's not going to be doing it very long.

GUTIERREZ: Asked if there will be a U.S. operation in Colombia —

TRUMP: It sounds good to me.

GUTIERREZ: Colombia's government, which has strongly denied being involved in drug trafficking, responding overnight, calling Trump's statement "contrary to the norms of international law." Trump discussing other countries in the region, including Mexico, condemning its alleged role in the drug trade.

TRUMP: Mexico has to get their act together. [SCREEN WIPE] We're going to have to do something.

GUTIERREZ: And saying this of Cuba:

TRUMP: Cuba looks like it's ready to fall.

GUTIERREZ: While the U.S.'s actions are facing fierce opposition in Havana, Cuba's president saying the U.S. had no moral or legal authority to forcibly remove Venezuela's leader, as state TV announced two days of mourning for the 32 Cubans killed while attempting to protect Maduro. Asked about another territory that he's considered a national security priority, Greenland, President Trump reiterated his desire to take it over for national security, but said he would worry about it in a few months. The Danish prime minister calling that idea a fantasy, Craig.

MELVIN: Gabe Gutierrez for us in Colombia. NBC's chief foreign correspondent Richard Engel has also made his way to the region overnight. Richard joins us from Bogota, Colombia. Richard, good morning to you. You've covered similar foreign interventions like this one across the globe over the years. What are the challenges you see going forward for both the United States and also Venezuela, Richard?

RICHARD ENGEL: Well, Craig, welcome to the new year. And it looks like we're going to be talking about Latin America a lot this year. Last several years, it's been the Middle East. Now, it looks like it's going to be South America. President Trump talking about Cuba ready to fall, making threats against Colombia. There are enormous challenges when you talk out regime change, when you carry out regime change. And that's what we've just seen. It was carried out under the guise of narco trafficking, but already, President Trump is talking about oil. He's talking about how this has to expand. There are really three options right now for Venezuela. Let's start talking about Venezuela itself. It seems like President Trump's preferred option is to keep the regime in place, but he wants at regime to be compliant. You just heard it a few minutes ago. President Trump says, unless the vice president, who's the acting leader, who is a Maduro ally, complies, she could face an even worse fate than Maduro. It seems like you would want that regime to maintain order, not have American troops there, but to do what the U.S. wants. Not clear if that's going to happen. He also thinks if that happens, others will follow, namely Cuba. For the United States, this is President Trump asserting his policy that he is defining, I think we can call it the Trump doctrine now, in which he wants the United States and him personally to assert dominance all over the region, for — if not just to be America first, but the Americas first, with him in charge, and it is a new policy. It is a risky policy. And a slippery slope.

JONES: Richard, this is a region on edge. Is there a sense among neighboring countries of how

all of this will impact them?

ENGEL: Neighboring countries are very nervous. I'm here in Colombia. I interviewed the president when I was here last time. He was very worried that you get a kind of mission creep, that the U.S. is focused on Venezuela at the moment, perhaps Cuba next, could be Colombia after that. But it is not just in the region. The world is watching. There — China is certainly watching. And as President Trump projects this new policy in which political power is tied with economic power, again, remember, this was launched to stop drugs, but mostly, he's talking about oil, security, how the U.S. has to protect itself, potentially take control of Greenland. It's really about national security and American dominance in the region. That sounds very good to China and would certainly make the leadership in Taiwan very nervous, because they could apply that same logic to their neighborhood.

JONES: The world is watching, for sure. Richard Engel, thank you.

MELVIN: Well, here at home, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are voicing concerns about the U.S. military action in Venezuela and what comes next. NBC's Ryan Nobles is in Washington with more on that part the story. Ryan, good morning.

RYAN NOBLES: Hey, Craig, good morning. And there's no doubt that congressional leaders have a lot of questions about the legality of the Trump administration's actions in South America and they also want to know what their plans are for the future. The answers may come later today, as top administration officials, including secretary of state Marco Rubio, will be on Capitol Hill for a high-level briefing. And as Congress returns to Washington this week, they're going to push to be involved in what happens next. Congress returns to session this week facing a surprising new challenge, after the Trump administration attacked Venezuela without alerting congressional leaders, a move that did not bother most Republicans.

CONGRESSMAN CARLOS GIMENEZ (R-FL): Thank you, President Trump, for taking the action to protect American lives, to protect American interests.

NOBLES: Many Democrats feel much differently, calling it illegal and dangerous.

SENATOR CHRIS MURPHY (D-CT) [on CNN's *State of the Union*, 01/04/26]: Clearly, this is wildly illegal. This is a president who has been operating illegally since he was sworn into office.

NOBLES: Democrats believe the administration should have come to Congress to ask for authorization to launch the attack, but Secretary of State Marco Rubio disagrees.

RUBIO [on NBC's *Meet the Press*, 01/04/26]: That couldn't require congressional approval, because this was not an invasion.

NOBLES: There's little appetite on Capitol Hill for the U.S. taking the lead on rebuilding a nation.

CONGRESSWOMAN MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE (R-GA) [on NBC's *Meet the Press*, 01/04/26]: My understanding of American first is strictly for the American people. [SCREEN WIPE] Not foreign countries that demand their priorities put first over Americans.

NOBLES: Across the country, the reaction has been divided.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE #1: When I wake up in the morning, when I see the news, Maduro is captured, oh, my god, thank you, god.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN #1 [WEARING A KIFFAH]: We do not stand with these illegal attacks.

NOBLES: Some celebrating from a rally in South Florida to Venezuelan Americans the west coast.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN #2: We have been screaming freedom for a decades.

NOBLES: But in other places, protests against the administration's military action and new worries of a prolonged conflict.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE #2: This is just another America imperialist invasion. They're trying to seize Venezuela's oil.

NOBLES: Now, in addition to the briefings that congressional leaders are expecting to get this week on the strike in Venezuela, the Senate will also hold a vote on a bipartisan resolution that is designed to avoid war in Venezuela without clear congressional authorization. It was a resolution drafted before this weekend's attack. Craig?

MELVIN: Ryan Nobles from Washington. Ryan, thank you. Let's focus now on what all of this could mean for your bottom line. NBC's senior business correspondent, Christine Romans, here looking at the potential impact on things like oil and gas. Christine, good morning.

CHRISTINE ROMANS: Good morning.

MELVIN: We should preface, it's very early.

ROMANS: Yeah.

MELVIN: This just happened a few days ago, but the President says he wants U.S. oil companies to basically run the oil operation in Venezuela. In the short-term, what — what could that mean for consumers, if anything?

ROMANS: Well, look, in the short-term, you've got this uncertainty, which could actually push up oil prices a little bit. You're seeing them up a little bit overnight, but there are so many questions, you guys. We don't know what the plan is. We don't know what happens next. We

don't know when and if those American oil companies are going to go in there. Chevron already is operating inside the country. But as you know, Venezuela sits on the largest proven oil reserve in the world, but right now is only pushing out like one percent of the oil we use because of so many problems, for so many decades in that country, so whatever happens next is going to take years. Analysts this weekend were telling me, if everything goes perfectly, like, starting tomorrow, you had these investments in the country, it could take five to seven years be getting meaningful amounts of oil out of Venezuela. Five to seven years. In the near-term, the is all of this uncertainty maybe drives up oil prices a little bit. And one analyst this week says, you could see oil prices rise maybe \$3 a barrel. That would be less than 10 cents a gallon for gas over — we're coming off a very good time for gas prices. Look at last year, it was a very stable and declining year for gas prices, so the backdrop here is good for American drivers and consumers.

JONES: Well, some Americans are certainly worried about inflation. On that note, how does all of this impact what we pay for other items?

ROMANS: Yeah, the longer term would be maybe gas prices, very long-term would start to drift lower, if you've got Venezuela pumping a lot of oil. But there are questions over the weekend about how this fits in to the President's strategy to lower prices, if you're raising all of this uncertainty in the region, and a lot of parallels being drawn to Iraq and Libya, where the United States said it was going to get in there, fix a big problem, and going to be able to exploit that oil, and that didn't really turn out that way.

JONES: We'll see what happens there.

ROMANS: Exactly.

JONES: All right, thank you, Christine.

MELVIN: Thank you, Christine. We'll see you back next hour.

(...)

7:31:16 a.m.

3 minutes and 15 seconds

JONES: Alright, well, we have a busy half hour for you straight ahead, starting with more fallout from the military's capture of Venezuela's leader. Following that operation, the FAA closed air space in the Caribbean to U.S. commercial flights and while those restrictions have now been lifted, thousands of passengers remain stranded.

MELVIN: NBC's Tom Costello covers aviation for us and joins us now with the very latest. Tom, good morning.

TOM COSTELLO: Good morning. What a headache for those trying to get home after the holidays, a weekend that is typically already one of the busiest of the year to begin with, made

even more difficult after thousands of Americans actually hundreds of thousands found their flights canceled and the options to rebook limited. More than 48 hours after the U.S.-Maduro operation, thousands of Americans remain stranded abroad this morning, with airlines scrambling to catch up following temporary air space restrictions over parts of the Caribbean and Venezuela.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL RADIO: San Juan Center air space is closed for the next 24 hours for military operations.

COSTELLO: Those restrictions triggered by military operations lifted Sunday, impacting more than a dozen airports and forcing more than a thousand flight cancellations. The disruptions piling up and causing chaos.

UNIDENTIFIED PASSENGER #1: It's been a mess. We've been delayed, more than six hours.

COSTELLO: At Miami International Airport, a hump for Latin American and Caribbean flights, many passengers left, frustrated and confused.

MONIQUE AMADOR [on Facebook]: These people are all waiting to figure out where their bag is at.

COSTELLO: After more than a hundred flights in Miami were canceled on Saturday, which resulted in baggage delivery delays and rebooking congestion in the immediate aftermath of Operation Absolute Resolve, America's attack in Venezuela. Radar shows flights steering clear of the restricted areas.

TIKTOK USER "ABRISSETTEMD": I don't know if anyone anticipated waking up to something like this, but I would really like to get home.

COSTELLO: The temporary restrictions after one of the but weekends of the year after the long holiday stretch.

TIKTOK USER "DEIJHA": I'm specifically in St. Vincent and they said we cannot leave until either Thursday or Friday. The price gouging is crazy, because we've been seeing flights for like \$3,000.

COSTELLO: Nearly 600 miles away from Caracas, Venezuela, the Schwartz family was stuck in St. Bartz, trying to get back home.

RACHEL SCHWARTZ: There are no flights from here. The boats are booked. [SCREEN WIPE] It's total chaos here.

MELVIN: Sounds like it, Tom. I mean, Tom, at this point, do we know how soon we can expect to get things back on track?

COSTELLO: You know, it's kind of just like the snowstorms in the wintertime, right? There's a snowball effect that can take a while to back up and running. Most airlines have started to resume flights to impacted airports to get people that are stranded on to their destinations. Delta, United, JetBlue, American, Southwest, all say they're adding seats and flights to their schedules, but the FAA, by the way, still has an air space advisory in effect for the next 30 days. It's not closed, but an advisory for much of the region, as they watch the military operations, guys.

MELVIN: All right, Tom Costello for us. Tom, keep us posted. Thank you.

CARSON DALY: Although if you're going to be stuck, St. Barts.

JONES: I was going say, the Caribbean —

MELVIN: That's true.

DALY: Just saying.

MELVIN: Could — could be — could be worse.

DALY: Could be worse, right.