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Trump discusses Venezuela strikes

Experts: Unusual move aims to ratchet up pressure on Maduro

Cybele Mayes-Osterman
USA TODAY

President Donald Trump bragged in recent days about the United States' first reported land strike on Venezuela, letting slip a CIA-led operation in which retired intelligence experts branded an unusual move.

The United States has made cover operations into Latin America before, but it's rare for a U.S. official, let alone the president, to acknowledge it publicly, former CIA and military intelligence officials told USA TODAY. The CIA has historically carried out cover operations to avoid the public knowing about them.

Mentioning the strike, as Trump did twice this week, sends a “serious message to (President Nicolás) Maduro that “the U.S. can reach down and touch him when it chooses to,” according to Rick de la Torre, a former CIA Latin America station chief.

Trump first mentioned the strike in a Dec. 26 interview on WABC radio when he said that the United States had “knocked out” a “big facility where the ships come from” two days prior without mentioning where the strike took place. Pressed about it by reporters at a Dec. 29 event at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Trump said the United States had struck a “dock area where they load the boats up with drugs.”

"We hit all the boats, and now we hit the implementation area," he said.

First CNN, and then The New York Times, reported later that day that the CIA carried out a drone strike in December on a dock in Venezuela that the United States suspected was being used by the gang Tren de Aragua to load drugs onto boats. The Trump administration has designated Tren de Aragua a foreign terrorist organization.

Government agencies have not confirmed whether the operation took place. The CIA declined to comment and the Pentagon referred questions to

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An opening reception was held Dec. 22 inside the Oak Ridge Conference Center's Edwena L. Crowe Grand Ballroom. Oak Ridge City Council named the ballroom in memory of Crowe, who died Jan. 13, 2025. With many family members and friends present, officials spoke about Crowe before a plaque touting her contribution to the community was unveiled. The ballroom features state-of-the-art audio-visual technology, elegant architectural design, and flexible space for meetings, banquets, and large-scale events, according to city information.



Sicknesses lead to visitor restrictions at area hospitals

Donna Smith
The Oak Ridger
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Both Covenant Health, parent company of Methodist Medical Center of Oak Ridge, and the University of Tennessee Medical Center have added visitor restrictions because of an increase in flu and respiratory illness cases in the area.

“Out of an abundance of caution, and due to the increase in respiratory illnesses and flu cases in our community, we have implemented temporary visitor restrictions effective Dec. 30, 2025, to protect our patients and staff,” reads the statement posted to the Covenant Health website and its Facebook page.

- Visitors under the age of 12 are not permitted to visit patients at this time.
- Anyone experiencing respiratory

symptoms (fever, cough, runny nose, or sore throat) may not visit patients.

Crystal Jordan, Methodist Medical Center spokesperson, said in an email that visitors are not required to wear masks.

People with any questions can call 865-374-0411. Representatives are available 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Other Covenant Health hospitals in-

clude Parkwest and Fort Sanders in Knoxville.

The UT hospital post on Facebook stated the same temporary restrictions are in place and added: “Clean hands make a big difference! Frequent hand-washing helps protect our patients, visitors, and team members.”

The Oak Ridger's News Editor Donna Smith covers Oak Ridge area news. Email her at dsmith@oakridger.com.

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