

## Sen. Rick Scott wants the U.S. military to deliver aid in Venezuela

BY ALEX DAUGHERTY

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WASHINGTON

After Nicolás Maduro blocked humanitarian aid from entering Venezuela in February, the U.S. and others responded with sanctions. But nearly two months later, much of the aid continues to sit at the Venezuela-Colombia border.

Now, Florida Sen. Rick Scott is urging the U.S. military to get involved in getting aid across the border, after unarmed trucks manned by supporters of opposition leader Juan Guaidó were blocked by Maduro on Feb. 23.

“There is only one option left to get aid to the people of Venezuela. It is something that no one is willing to talk about,” Scott said at a Thursday morning speech at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. “It is becoming clear that we will have to consider the use of American military assets to deliver aid. Maduro and his thugs have left us no choice.”

Scott's remarks come two weeks after Russia sent two military planes and 100 troops to Venezuela, [prompting a rebuke](#) from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

“We must not appear weak in the face of Chinese, Russian, and Cuban determination to prop up Maduro,” Scott said. “Our adversaries question our will and our determination. Put simply, they don't think we're serious.”

Scott's remarks are among the strongest statements made by an elected official on Venezuela.

Sending U.S. troops into Venezuela without Maduro's approval, even in a humanitarian capacity, would significantly escalate the ongoing standoff between Guaidó and Maduro. Guaidó, the head of the national assembly who has claimed he is the legitimate leader of Venezuela, is backed by the United States and about 50 other countries around the world, though he does not have the backing of Venezuela's military. Russia, China, Cuba and Turkey continue to recognize Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate leader.

Scott did not offer specifics when asked Thursday afternoon how his comments differ from ordering a U.S. invasion in Venezuela.

"First off, we got to listen to what president Juan Guaidó wants, number two we have to rally our allies, number three we have to figure out how we can provide humanitarian aid with our military...," Scott said.

He did not specify whether the use of American military assets means using air support to drop aid into the country or using ground troops to cross the border and protect the distribution of aid.

"I think we got to rely on the military, you tell them what the mission is and they figure out what they need to do," Scott said.

Scott and other Miami lawmakers like Sen. Marco Rubio and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart have said in recent weeks that Maduro's ongoing control of the government is a threat to U.S. national security, a step up from classifying the country as a socialist basket case.

"Ideal outcome in [Venezuela](#) is peaceful restoration of democracy & constitutional order," Rubio tweeted. "But the U.S. can't ignore the growing presence of [Russia](#) military, the daily flights from [Iran](#) & the violent 'colectivo' gangs the [Venezuelan military] refuses to confront."

Scott went one step further, arguing that the current strategy of announcing new sanctions every few days hasn't done enough to curb the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

"If sanctions can cripple the Maduro regime, we must continue on that path. But so far, sanctions alone aren't stopping the Maduro regime and the United States needs to start considering the use of military assets to bring aid to the millions of starving and sick Venezuelans," Scott said. "And I call on all of our allies and those supporting Guaidós to help us in this effort."

He also said the U.S. should be wary of efforts by the Russians to increase their military presence in Venezuela, comparing the situation to the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Syrian civil war.

“Russia has also sent nuclear-capable bombers to Venezuela, to intimidate the United States and other countries in the region,” Scott said. “Not since the Cuban Missile Crisis has Russia taken such aggressive steps to expand their influence in the region.”

Scott acknowledged OAS ambassador and former Florida legislator Carlos Trujillo in the audience and said the U.S. should aggressively pursue any American citizen who continues to do business with Maduro.

“We know there [have] to be people in Miami who are prospering off of Maduro and Chávez. Are we holding those people accountable?” Scott said, adding that doing business with Venezuela should be condemned like doing business with apartheid South Africa was 30 years ago. “When Mandela took over South Africa, that’s what you like.”

President Ronald Reagan’s veto of a bill that banned investment in South Africa was overruled by Congress amid widespread disapproval of apartheid, though Nelson Mandela’s political party maintained close ties with Cuba and Russia. Some Democrats have argued that the U.S. should not be involved in Venezuela, though South Florida Democrats and party leaders like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi support Guaidó’s interim government.

“Some have criticized the mere mention of the crisis in Venezuela by those like myself as American imperialism or a U.S.-backed coup,” Scott said. “I reject that. This is our fight.”

*McClatchy DC reporter Franco Ordonez contributed to this report.*