

Hands off 'our hemisphere' or Venezuela pays the price: US Senator warns Russia

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The US staked a claim on half the world, as Senate Armed Services Committee chair Jim Inhofe said Washington might have to intervene in Venezuela if Russia dares set up a military base not just there, but “in our hemisphere.”

“I think that it could happen,” Inhofe (R-Oklahoma) told a group of reporters on Tuesday. *“You’ve got a guy down there that is killing everybody. You could have him put together a base that Russia would have on our hemisphere. And if those things happen, it may be to the point where we’ll have to intervene with troops and respond.”*

Should Russia dare encroach on the US’ neck of the woods, Inhofe said: *“we have to take whatever action necessary to stop them from doing that.”*

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As opposition leader Juan Guaido vies for power, the Russian government has stuck by President Nicolas Maduro. Russia has not, however, promised military aid to Maduro, and Russian diplomat Alexander Shchetinin said on Monday that Venezuela has not requested military aid from Moscow.

After Guaido declared himself interim president of Venezuela last month, US President Donald Trump immediately recognized Guaido as Venezuela's legitimate leader. Since then, the US has pledged humanitarian aid to Guaido, called on Venezuela's military to support him, and slapped Maduro's government with fresh economic sanctions. Maduro has denounced Washington's sponsorship of Guaido as a "vile" coup attempt but nevertheless called for talks with the opposition leader. The US has outright rejected taking part in any discussions with Maduro.

The US has stopped short of deploying troops to Venezuela, despite Trump and national security adviser John Bolton both saying the option is "on the table." Speaking on Tuesday, Inhofe agreed and suggested that Trump could launch a military operation in Venezuela without Congressional authorization.

"I don't think it's necessary," he said. "If there is a threat that reaches the threshold of the president having the ability, the constitutional ability of deploying troops, then that's an unknown. We don't know right now."

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Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned the United States against military intervention on Tuesday.

"Lavrov has warned against all interference in Venezuela's domestic affairs including the use of force threatened by Washington and which is in violation of international law," the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

'Our hemisphere'

Inhofe said that a flow of Russian troops or weapons into the Western hemisphere "would be a threat to the United States of America." The United States, meanwhile, reads from a different rulebook.

The US maintains nearly 800 military bases in over 70 countries worldwide, with a foothold on every continent. And, while Inhofe wants to keep an entire hemisphere free from Russian influence, the US is currently in talks to establish a permanent military base in Poland, right on Russia's doorstep. Given the long history of animosity between Poland and Russia, the Polish government has offered to cough up \$2 billion towards setting up the base.

Further afield, no hemisphere is beyond the reach of the United States. The US military divides the globe up into six Combatant Command 'Areas of

Responsibility,' which it maintains in times of peace and war. Russia, meanwhile, divides its territory into four military districts, all within its own borders.

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