

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2026

Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters Aboard Air Force One En Route to Joint Base Andrews, Maryland

January 4, 2026

The President. Hello, everybody.

Q. Hi, Mr. President. You came from a different way this time.

The President. We have some great—yes, a little bit different. We have some good people. We have Senator Lindsey Graham.

Senator Lindsey O. Graham. Hello, everybody.

The President. We have Howard Lutnick, Commerce. We have Steve Miller. We have a lot of people. We have Erin. We have a lot of people.

Go ahead.

Q. Hi, Mr. President.

The President. Hi.

U.S. Military Operation in Venezuela

Q. Have you spoken with any of the U.S. servicemembers who were injured during that operation in Venezuela?

The President. Yes. We have calls in to them. I don't want to speak—they're all in good shape. But we have calls in to them.

Q. Can you detail what watching that was like, when all this played out in Venezuela, and what Maduro was doing that moment when U.S. Forces——

The President. Well, I knew the possible danger. I mean, it was a very dangerous operation. It was amazing that we had a few injured, but all are in good shape right now. But I knew there was great danger.

You got off a helicopter. The helicopters were being shot at. They got on the ground. They—amazing—talent and—tremendous patriotism, bravery. The bravery was incredible. Lindsey, the—they got off the helicopter, and the bullets were flying all over the place.

As you know, one of the helicopters got hit pretty badly, but that—we got everything back.

Q. And the——

The President. We got everything back and nobody killed.

Interim President Delcy Rodriguez Gomez of Venezuela

Q. The next question is who's in charge of Venezuela right now. Have you spoken to the newly sworn-in President there, Rodríguez? And what are your thoughts on the entire situation? When you said the U.S. would run Venezuela——

The President. We're dealing with the people. We're dealing with the people that just got sworn in. And don't ask me who's in charge, because I'll give you an answer, and it will be very controversial.

Q. What does that mean?

The President. It means we're in charge.

Q. Have you spoken with her?

The President. We're in charge.

Q. Have you spoken with her?

The President. No. No, I haven't, but other people have.

Q. Do you want to?

The President. Yes, at the right time, I will.

Venezuela-U.S. Relations

Q. Did the U.S. give Delcy Rodríguez any guarantees in exchange for cooperating with your administration?

The President. No. No, but she's cooperating.

Transitional Administration of Venezuela

Q. Is she—are you going to demand free and fair elections in the short term in Venezuela?

The President. Well, it depends, you know, what you're talking. We have to do one thing in Venezuela: bring it back. It's a dead country right now. It's a country that, frankly, we would have been, if—I had lost the election, we would have been a dead country. Venezuela—we would have been Venezuela on steroids.

Venezuela right now is a dead country. We have to bring it back, and we're going to have big investments by the oil companies to bring back the infrastructure.

Q. How soon do you——

Q. Can you talk about——

The President. And the oil companies are ready to go. They're going to go in. They're going to rebuild the infrastructure.

You know, we built it to start off with many years ago. They took it away. You can't do that. You can't do that with me. They did it with other Presidents.

Venezuela/Oil Supply and Refining

Q. How soon do you think an election can take place in Venezuela? How soon can an election take place?

The President. Well, I think we're looking more at getting it fixed, getting it ready first, because it's a mess. The country is a mess. It's been horribly run. The oil is just flowing at a very low level, much lower than—even if it was badly run, it should have more income, more oil than what they're doing.

So we're going to have the big oil companies go in, and they're going to fix the infrastructure, they're going to invest money.

We're not going to invest anything. We're going to just take care of the country. We're going to cherish the country. We're going to take care, more importantly, of the people, including Venezuelans that are living in our country that were forced to leave their country.

Q. Have you spoken with the——

The President. And they're going to be taken very good care of.

Yes, ma'am.

Venezuela/Investment by Foreign Oil Companies

Q. Have you spoken with the oil companies about going into Venezuela?

The President. Yes, I have.

Q. Which ones? Which ones?

Q. Have you received any commitments?

The President. All of them, basically.

Q. Any commitments from the oil companies?

The President. They want to go in so badly.

The President's Prior Consultations With Oil Companies

Q. Did you speak with them before the operation took place about——

The President. Yes.

Q. Did you maybe tip them off about what was coming?

The President. Before and after. And they want to go in, and they're going to do a great job for the people of Venezuela, and they're going to represent us well.

Q. What happens to those——

The President. But you know, the infrastructure is rusty, rotten, most of it unusable. It's old. It's broken. You see pipes laying all over the ground. Hasn't been—nothing's been invested for years.

Chevron is in, as you know. They've done a good job. But even they—they haven't been in a position to invest money because they're on a month-to-month basis.

Q. What happens to those——

The President. They're only there because I wanted them to be there.

Future Governance of Venezuela Following the Ouster of President Nicolas Maduro Moros

Q. Yes. Are there any contingencies in case the military in Venezuela is unhappy with the U.S. and the way it's running Venezuela? Do you guys have plans for anything?

The President. So Venezuela, thus far, has been very nice, but it helps to have a force like we have. You know, we were ready for a second wave. We were all set to go, but we don't think we're going to need it.

Venezuela/Oil Reserves/Future Governance/U.S. Economy/Tariffs

Q. There's about \$17 billion worth of oil reserves in Venezuela.

The President. More.

Q. Is that going to be——

The President. You mean, trillion.

Q. Is—and is that going to be something——

The President. Did you say billion or trillion?

Q. I said billion.

The President. You said \$17 billion? [*Laughter*] It's much more than that.

Q. Okay. So what is going to happen to those reserves?

The President. Well, we're going to run everything. We're going to run it, fix it. We'll have elections at the right time. But the main thing, you have to fix. It's a broken country. There's no money. There's inflation—like we would have had—if I didn't win this election, we would have been Venezuela on steroids. Lindsey would know that.

You might say something on that, because you were—we were talking before. We would have had a doubling up of very bad things—things that cost us a lot of money, like welfare, frankly. We wouldn't have had jobs. And instead of having \$18 trillion in, we would have had at least \$5 to \$10 trillion leaving the country.

So our costs would have gone up, and all of the money that's—you know, we're setting a record. It's long broken. And that's 10 months. We haven't included the 11th month yet.

So we think we're going to hit over \$20 trillion. The alltime record is three, by another country known as China. About 10 years ago, they did three. We're doing to do close to \$20 trillion.

There's—by the way, there has never been anything like this ever before, and it's all because of tariffs—and the election, but it's because of tariffs. Without tariffs, we wouldn't have 10 cents being invested.

Regime Change and Nation-Building Operations/The President's Foreign Policy

Q. There was a time, back in 2016, in, I remember, your RNC speech, and you were saying that regime change and nation building—

The President. Where? Where?

Q. When you were speaking at the RNC back in 2016. You were criticizing—

The President. Go ahead. What did I say?

Q. You were criticizing regime change and nation building, the U.S. being involved in that. It seems, obviously, that your stance has changed on that. What led to that?

The President. Well—

Q. Is the U.S. nation building now? Is that what we do?

The President. Well, this isn't a country that's on the other side of the world. This isn't a country, like, where you have to travel 24 hours in an airplane.

This is Venezuela. It's in our area. The "Donroe" Doctrine.

Colombia/Drug Production and Trafficking

Q. So is that all you would say, that we're in the—we're in the business of nation building now?

The President. Well, no. No. We're in the business of having countries around us that are viable and successful, and where the oil is allowed to freely come out, because that's good. It gets the prices down. That's good for our country.

We have a very sick neighbor—it's not a neighbor, but it's close to a neighbor—and that's Venezuela. It's very sick.

Colombia is very sick too—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, let me tell you.

Q. What does that mean, "He's not going to be doing it very long"?

The President. He's not doing it very long. He's—he has cocaine mills and cocaine factories. He's not going to be doing it very long.

Q. So there will be an operation by the U.S. in Colombia?

The President. It sounds good to me, yes.

Q. Secretary Rubio mentioned Cuba——

The President. You know why? Because they kill a lot of people.

Yes.

Cuba/U.S. Military Operation in Venezuela

Q. Secretary Rubio mentioned Cuba yesterday in his remarks. Does the U.S. have a plan to do a similar action in Cuba?

The President. Well, Cuba always survived because of Venezuela. Now they won't have that money coming in. They won't have the income coming in.

You know, a lot of Cubans were killed yesterday. You know that. A lot of Cubans were killed, the bodyguards.

Q. Do you know how many? Does the administration know?

The President. No, they're looking. But a lot of death on the other side. No death on our side, but there was a lot of death on the other side, unfortunately. But a lot of Cubans were killed yesterday trying to protect him.

Iran/Political Demonstrations/Venezuela/U.S. Drug Interdiction Efforts

Q. Are you, though—there's been protesters killed in Iran. You said we were locked and loaded, ready to go. What is the line there for when the U.S. is going to get involved in those protests?

The President. We'll take a look. We're watching it very closely. If they start killing people, like they have in the past, I think they're going to get hit very hard by the United States.

Q. Is that—is that——

Sen. Graham. Can I just add something?

So, when he first got elected in January, we met—you know, biggest comeback ever. We talked about, like——

The President. You think so, really? [*Laughter*] I didn't feel it was a comeback, actually.

Sen. Graham. So the——

The President. ——because the first one was rigged.

Sen. Graham. The bottom line is, we talked about a drug caliphate in our backyard. You know, we had Venezuela, we have Cuba, we have Colombia in our backyard, and these three countries have been condemned ever since I've been in politics.

Joe Biden put a \$25 million bounty on Maduro's head. Chris Smith, the day he got Inaugurated, said, "I hope Trump will hold Maduro's feet to the fire." You did.

So what has he done? He's going to clear our backyard of a drug caliphate—countries run by narcoterrorist dictators who murder, rape, send drugs into our country to kill thousands of our citizens.

To my Democratic friends, you should be celebrating this. When bin Laden went down, I was the first to applaud President Obama. This was one of the most sophisticated military operations in the history of the country. What they were able to do was amazing.

They knew we were coming. We had part of the—a good part of the navy, and they were able to capture this man alive. No military in the world could have done it.

And as to this Commander in Chief, he did something people talked about doing. You just wait for Cuba. Cuba is a communist dictatorship that's killed priests and nuns. They've preyed on their own people. Their days are numbered.

We're going to wake up one day—I hope in '26—in our backyard, we're going to have allies in these countries doing business with America, not narcoterrorist dictators killing Americans. This is a big frigging day, and everybody in the world is thinking differently than they were just a few days ago because of what you did.

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

The President. By the way, you know, you mentioned something that's interesting. Lindsey mentioned bin Laden. Do you know, I wrote about bin Laden 1 year before the attack on the World Trade Center? And I said, "You've got to go after bin Laden." It was in my book. And very few people want to say that, but it was in my book. You know that, I think. You've actually talked about it.

But if they would have had—if they would have listened to me, they would have taken out bin Laden, and you wouldn't have had the World Trade Center tragedy.

Q. Yes, this is certainly going——

The President. Did you know that? I predicted bin Laden.

Sen. Graham. I learn something every day.

The President. No, but did you hear that? Did you know that?

Sen. Graham. Well, I didn't know. And I just heard it right now.

The President. Yes. No, I wrote a book. It was 1 year before the attack that the book came out, and it talked about—there's a whole page, a whole section dedicated to a guy named bin Laden who's a bad guy who you have to take out.

Sen. Graham. So I'll get the book.

But right after the election, he told me, "I'm going to clean up our backyard."

Now, this was long—this was before he took office. This is one of the President's priorities is to make sure that people in our backyard, narcoterrorist states, will not continue to kill Americans without a—the number of people that will be alive today because Venezuela will be in different hands is going to be tens of thousands. This is something to be celebrated.

The President. And not just——

Sen. Graham. ——whether you like him or not.

The President. Not just Venezuela. It's what's coming out of Venezuela——

Sen. Graham. Yes.

The President. —in the form of ocean-going and Gulf-going and sea-going boats.

Every time we knock out a boat—and we've done a lot of them. We did three over the last few days. They're very rare now. You don't see too many of them.

Sen. Graham. Hard to recruit—[inaudible].

The President. But drugs by sea are down 97 percent. Think of that. And now we're going to stop them by land too.

The land is easy. We had to do the sea before we did the land, because it just works out right.

Mexico/U.S. Drug Interdiction Efforts

Q. Yes, you were just talking about the land, but it sounds like you weighed out——

The President. And by the way, have to do something with Mexico. Mexico has to get their act together, because they're pouring through Mexico, and we're going to have to do something. We'd love Mexico to do it. They're capable of doing it. But unfortunately, the cartels are very strong in Mexico.

Q. I remember one time, you actually—speaking of Mexico, I asked you about Claudia Sheinbaum, and you told me at one point you had offered to send U.S. troops into Mexico——

The President. That's true. I did.

Q. ——to combat drug trafficking there. Is that something you have spoken to her about?

The President. Well, I like Claudia. I think she's a terrific person.

I would say, every single time I talked to her, I offered to send troops.

Q. And she's just not willing?

The President. She's concerned. She's a little afraid. The cartels are running Mexico, whether you like it or not.

Sen. Graham. Like it or not, it's a fact.

The President. It's not nice to say, but the cartels—the cartels are running Mexico.

Sen. Graham. It's a fact.

Venezuela/Future Governance/Relations With U.S.

Q. Yes, speaking of U.S. troops, I mean, one thing that Americans and a lot of people are wondering—you just sounded like you weighed out another strike—another land strike, at least, in Venezuela. You sound like you weighed that out, but——

The President. Well, we haven't—we didn't need it.

Q. Yes, but——

The President. We were prepared to do a second strike if we needed. We're totally prepared.

Q. But that's off the table——

The President. And we're still prepared.

Q. That's off the table now?

The President. No, it's not. If they don't behave, we will do a second strike.

Q. Will you demand that the Venezuela——

Q. Buy the question is that——

Q. Sorry.

Q. ——the American troops, are they going to be on the ground there doing any kind of peacekeeping? I think Americans are very——

The President. It depends. It depends on what happens. It depends a little bit on the new administration, if you want to call it that.

Q. So if you see that pushback from Rodríguez, and ultimately——

The President. Well, I don't think it was pushback. I think that, frankly——

Q. She called it—she——

The President. Well, you know, you hear a different person than I hear.

Q. Really? So you have spoken with her?

The President. We talked to them, yes.

Q. Oh, you did speak?

The President. They've been very good.

Q. Because she called it "kidnapping" of Maduro.

The President. It's all right. It's not a bad term.

Go ahead.

Venezuela/Status of Political Prisoners/Oil Supply and Refining

Q. Now, are you—are you going to demand that Delcy Rodríguez let opposition figures return or free any political prisoners?

The President. We haven't gotten to that yet. Right now what we want to do is fix up the oil, fix up the country, bring the country back, and then have elections.

Q. Now, is it fair——

The President. We'd better bring the country back. Otherwise, you're just going to have—you're going to have a mess that's so bad. It was really bad. It's going to get a lot worse unless we go in and fix it.

Venezuela/U.S. Embassy in Caracas

Q. Is the U.S.—is the U.S. going to reopen its Embassy in Caracas or get the DEA——

The President. We're thinking about it. We've been asked to do it.

Q. You had——

The President. We've actually been asked to do it.

Q. You had Putin and—on the phone, of course—and then Zelenskyy at Mar-a-Lago.

The President. Yes.

Q. You told me that you're——

The President. Numerous times.

Thailand/Cambodia/Russia/Ukraine

Q. You told me that your New Year's resolution was peace on Earth. Do you think that 2026—in—if you could set a deadline of when the Russia-Ukraine war——

The President. I don't do deadlines. But I would say that—you know, like, as an example, Thailand and Cambodia. I was very proud of that.

Q. Well, where does it—where does it actually stand——

The President. Wait a minute.

Q. ——between Russia——

The President. And they started up again, and I got it solved.

Q. Where does it actually stand?

The President. I give myself one quarter of a point for that. So, now I'm eight and one-quarter points because they started up—Thailand and Cambodia—and now it's okay.

Q. So where does it actually stand between Russia and Ukraine right now?

The President. I think we'll have a deal at—at some point, hopefully, in the not-too-distant—so I don't know if you saw. The numbers just came out: Thirty thousand soldiers were killed——

Sen. Graham. Yes, a month.

The President. ——this current month.

Q. And there was that intelligence——

The President. Thirty thousand. Twenty-seven thousand the month before.

Russia/U.S. Sanctions/Venezuela

Q. Have you and Senator Graham discussed additional Russia sanctions?

The President. We discuss it all the time. There's nothing else I talk to him. I don't consider him very exciting to talk to, except—[laughter]—except when we're talking about legislation, and we talk about legislation all the time.

You think that's an exciting relationship? It's not. But we talk a lot about legislation, and we have great legislation coming.

You want to tell them?

Sen. Graham. So the tariff bill—so here's what I believe. I don't think we could have secured the border without the threat of tariffs. I don't think we'd have a European trade deal without the threat of tariffs.

So, if you want to end this conflict, then put pressure on Putin's customers.

He sanctioned the two largest oil companies in Russia, which is the biggest pressure anybody's put on Putin since the war started. But we have 85 cosponsors to give this President——

The President. It's hurting Russia very bad, the sanctions we put on them.

Sen. Graham. Oh, yes.

So this bill would allow——

The President. And India also is pulling way back.

Sen. Graham. Yes, sir.

So he put a 25-percent tariff on India for buying Russian oil. I was at the Indian Ambassador's house about a month ago, and all he wanted to talk about is how they're buying less Russian oil. "Would you tell the president to relieve the tariff?" This stuff works.

So I'm hoping we'll bring the bill up. And it's from zero to 500. He picks the number. Nobody else does. But if you're buying cheap Russian oil, keeping Putin's war machine going, we're trying to give the President the ability to make that a hard choice by tariffs.

I really do believe that what he did with India is the chief reason India is now buying substantially less Russian oil. So I hope we pass this bill soon.

And after this——

The President. Well, and they wanted to make me happy, basically. He wanted to—Modi is a very good man.

Sen. Graham. He is.

The President. He's a good guy. He knew I was not happy, and it was important to make me happy. They do trade.

Sen. Graham. Yes.

The President. And we can raise tariffs on them very quickly, and it would be very bad for them.

Sen. Graham. People are afraid of that.

Q. All of that to say, you told me you weren't very thrilled with——

The President. And I'll tell you something, the Russian economy is lousy. But what's really lousy is the Venezuelan economy.

The Venezuelan economy is——

Sen. Graham. Right. Right.

The President. ——I think, the worst economy I've ever seen. If you look at inflation, it's—things are doubling every day. It's——

Sen. Graham. It's stolen money.

The President. It's a disaster. We've got to fix the country fast.

Venezuela/Business Investment/Critical Minerals

Q. President Trump, are there going to be any more—you said the oil companies are going to go in there. Are there any other companies that you've talked to about dealing with Venezuela? Maybe Mr. Lutnick could talk about that. Are there any other corporations, entities, outside of oil?

The President. Many, outside of the oil business.

Q. Like who?

The President. Well, the oil business, yes. But outside, yes.

Howard, do you want to take that?

Secretary of Commerce Howard W. Lutnick. So you have steel. You have minerals, right? All the critical minerals. They have a great mining history that's gone rusty.

So steel, aluminum, minerals. I mean, this is all—it's a rich—it was, once upon a time, one of the great economies and cultures of the world, and it was destroyed. And now, President Trump is going to fix it and bring it back for the Venezuelans.

The President. It's got potential, but it's not easy.

Secretary Lutnick. Oh, no.

The President. It's really gone bad.

Q. Maybe rare earth minerals?

The President. But it's got potential.

What?

Q. Maybe any rare earth minerals?

The President. They have rare earth, but everybody has rare earth. [*Laughter*] Rare earth is not rare. What's rare is the processing.

Sen. Graham. We got almost all of it. [*Laughter*]

The President. And we're doing processing plants all over.

There's no such thing as rare earth. The rare earth is everywhere. What isn't everywhere is the processing of rare earth. And we have a lot of places going up right now.

Minnesota/Somalia/Illinois/California

Q. One thing we haven't heard you specifically react to is the Minnesota fraud that we've seen play out. We——

The President. Well, it just doesn't get worse. I've reacted. It's almost not even believable. This very stupid, low-IQ Governor—he's a very stupid man because, you know, I had a campaign against him with J.D., and he's a stupid man, and he's a corrupt politician. And the Somalians are ripping off our country to the tune of—looks like \$19 billion dollars, but that's only what they can find. So usually, when you look at it, 19, that would mean it could be 50, but the numbers are astronomical.

Think of it. They have a dead country. They don't have government. They don't have anything. They don't have a military. All they do is run around shooting people and trying to capture ships. You know, we don't let them take ships anymore. You know why? We use the same exact missile on them that we use on the drug carriers, and it's very effective.

Q. So——

The President. Do you notice there's nobody capturing ships anymore? Because as they head out to go capture the ship—and the ship doesn't want to fire back, because it's very flammable stuff in many cases. And the insurance companies don't want—because they've—you know, they build a billion-dollar ship, and they don't want anybody firing rockets into the ship. But we're hitting them so hard. And it's very similar. Same missile system. It's called "deadly accurate." And do you notice that ships aren't being taken anymore? The pirates are——

Sen. Graham. That's right, I hadn't thought about that.

The President. ——the pirates aren't—well, no, it's——

Sen. Graham. No Somali pirates.

The President. It's actually very easy. They head out. We say, "Guess what? There's pirates." Bing, that's the end of the pirates.

The shipping—the shipping business is coming back because—see, these are little things that we're doing. And I'm doing it not just for American ships, I'm doing it worldwide, because we don't want ships taken by Somalia, Somalia pilots—pirates.

But what they are doing is, they're stealing money from the American taxpayer, and every one of them should be forced to leave this country, including Ilhan Omar, who's a total crook. And she's one of the leaders of it—not the only, because she's not that smart. But think of it: \$19 billion at least, they've stolen from Minnesota and from the United States. It's actually more from the United States, because Minnesota puts in—and we're not going to pay it anymore. We're going to have Walz go pay.

We're not going to pay them, and we're not going to pay California, and we're not going to pay Illinois with that big slob of a Governor that they have that doesn't want—you know, we brought down crime by 25 percent. He didn't do anything. He's not doing anything, but they want us to leave. He had a—day where they had 17 murders not too long ago—17 murders and 77 people shot, but 17 died. And then he talks about, "Oh, we can handle it." He can't handle it. But we pulled back and we'll go in at the appropriate time, but we're the ones that brought the crime down. We brought it down 20 percent. They didn't bring it down. Pritzker didn't bring it down.

Same thing with Gavin Newsom. If we didn't go in to Los Angeles 7 months ago, when they had the riots—even the police commission, the head of police, said if we didn't have the Federal Government go in, we would have lost total control of the city of Los Angeles, and they would have had to cancel the Olympics.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Portland, Oregon

Q. Speaking of Los Angeles, the National Guard. You pulled out the National Guard out of Portland—

The President. We did.

Q. —and Los Angeles.

The President. And you know what? Do you know that Portland, we got it down to almost no crime? Do you know that? But we pulled it out. We had a Supreme Court decision. We can go back. We're allowed to go back in. But we'll go back in when the crime starts.

Look, the crime will soon start because that—they now know that we're out. And at the appropriate time, we'll go back in. And we may, if we—you know, we're allowed to—most powerful thing we have we haven't used: the Insurrection Act.

Q. You're considering using the Insurrection Act?

The President. I would always—I've always considered it—

Q. Where?

The President. —but we haven't needed it anywhere.

Forty-eight percent of the Presidents of this country have used it. Bush used it, I think, 22 times or something. You know that, right? I mean Bush the elder.

Venezuela-U.S. Relations

Q. And what are your short-term—what are your short-term—next 2 weeks, what do you need from Delcy Rodríguez? You're—you've threatened—

The President. Just total access. We need total access. We need access to the oil and to other things in their country that allow us to rebuild their country.

Q. What ,other things?

The President. A lot of things. Roads that aren't built, bridges that are falling down. You have bridges that are falling down. Nobody can go anywhere.

Greenland/Arctic Security

Q. And on Greenland. You know——

The President. On Greenland now?

Q. Yes, on Greenland——

The President. How did we come up to Greenland?

Q. So do you expect to take an action against Greenland?

The President. Well, I don't want to talk about Greenland. Let's talk about——

Sen. Graham. Cuba.

The President. Venezuela, Ukraine, and——

Sen. Graham. Let's talk about Cuba. [*Laughter*]

The President. ——we'll worry about Greenland in about 2 months. Let's talk about Greenland in 20 days.

Q. On Venezuela. We talked so much about energy——

The President. By the way, I have to——[*laughter*]——

Sen. Graham. Let's talk about Cuba.

The President. I will say this about Greenland: We need Greenland from a national security——

Sen. Graham. Strategic. It is.

The President. ——situation. It's so strategic. Right now, Greenland is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place. We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security. And Denmark is not going to be able to do it, I can tell you.

Greenland

Q. Sir, what would the justification be——sir, what would the justification——

The President. You know what Denmark did recently to boost up security in Greenland? They added one more dogsled. [*Laughter*] It's true.

Q. Sir, what would be the——

The President. They thought that was a great move.

Q. What would the justification be for a claim to Greenland? What would the justification be?

The President. Oh, I don't want to talk about Greenland now. I just say this: We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and the European Union needs us to have it, and they know that.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

China-U.S. Relations

Q. Are you concerned at all that your—that the operation in Venezuela will affect your relationship with Xi Jinping in China?

The President. No, I don't think so. I have a very good relationship. We have the power of tariffs, and he has other powers on us. Yes.

Q. Are you still planning to travel to see him in April?

The President. Yes. I'll be going in April.

Interim President Delcy Rodriguez Gomez of Venezuela

Q. I think there's some confusion from Americans and maybe the community in the world when it comes to what you said about Rodríguez earlier today in a phone interview.

The President. Why? What?

Q. You said—you said that she would face the same fate, if not worse——

The President. Worse.

Q. ——than Maduro.

The President. Much worse.

Q. But it sounds like you're talking to her on the phone——

The President. I am.

Q. ——and wanting to work with her——

The President. Not me, my people are—it's the same thing.

Q. ——and you are considering her in power. Can you just clarify where you stand on Delcy Rodríguez right now being in power?

The President. I don't have to tell you. I just say that she will face a situation probably worse than Maduro, because, you know, Maduro gave up immediately.

Q. So she could also be captured?

The President. He raised his hand, he gave up. And he did the right thing, but he gave up. So we were actually—we were so effective, and it was so fast and violent. It was very violent, but we were so effective. He raised his hands, he gave up.

U.S. Military Operation To Capture President Nicolas Maduro Moros of Venezuela

Q. What was the most violent moment during the raid?

The President. I don't want to tell you.

Q. Did you get a briefing——

The President. There were some bad moments, but there were some very violent moments—— I don't want to tell you.

Criminal Processing of President Nicolas Maduro Moros of Venezuela in New York City/Cuba

Q. Did you get a briefing at all on Maduro's first night in U.S. custody?

The President. Yes.

Q. And what can you tell us about that?

The President. I had a total briefing on every aspect of it, but I don't think it's appropriate to talk to the press about it. You'll find out.

Q. When it comes to him in court tomorrow, I mean, what's the endgame here with Maduro? Does he just rot in a U.S. prison?

The President. There is no endgame. We're just going to go through a slog of a trial, and a judge that's very respected, Judge Hellerstein—he's a highly respected judge. We'll see how we do. The case is—it's infallible.

People are so happy with what we've done. You know, you go down to Miami, you go down to a lot of places, and they're all dancing in the streets of this country. No, he was a rough—he was a rough man. Killed millions of people. He killed millions and millions of people.

Q. After he stands trial, would you ever—

Sen. Graham. Can I just say something? We got this—this is a good thing, not a bad thing. President Biden put a \$25 million bounty on the guy's head. Why? Because he was a horrible criminal, murderer, poisoning our people. Every administration has been saying he's a threat to our country. He's a bad guy. This is the first guy that has actually done something about it.

Here's the story for me: He could be in Turkey today, but he's in New York. So, if you tell people in Cuba, "You need to stop being a communist dictatorship threatening America, you should go somewhere else," you'd better take the offer. Maduro has nobody to blame but himself. He gave him a way out. He chose to defy Trump and the U.S. military, and his ass is in jail where he deserves to be. And every President has said the same thing, but he did it.

The President. You know, one of the things that is happening, and I think you see it—you see it all the time—Howard, you've seen it—that Cuba is ready to fall.

Sen. Graham. Yes.

The President. You know, Cuba looks like it's ready to fall. I don't know how they—if they're going to hold out—

Q. Was there a final straw—

The President. —but Cuba now has no income. They got all of their income from Venezuela—from the Venezuelan oil. They're not getting any of it. And Cuba, literally, is ready to fall. And you have a lot of great Cuban Americans—

Sen. Graham. Yes.

The President. —that are going to be very happy about this.

Vice President James D. "J.D." Vance/Secretary of State Marco A. Rubio

Q. Marco Rubio has really had your ear, it seems, throughout this entire process. I know that Vice President Vance was just down the street—

The President. Right.

Q. —when this whole operation was playing out, but would you say that Marco Rubio has your ear more than the Vice President right now?

The President. No, they both do. No, J.D. is very smart, doing a great job. And so is—no, both, I would say equal.

Cuba

Q. It sounds like he's been the go-to, and you were just talking about Cuba and what could come next there. Are you considering U.S. action in Cuba?

The President. We're not going—I think it's just going to fall. I don't think we need any action. It looks like it's going down. It's going down for the count. You ever watch a fight?

Q. I have.

The President. They go down for the count, and Cuba looks like it's going down. What do you think, Howard?

Secretary Lutnick. It's going down. They—they've lived off of Venezuela, right? The economics were all Venezuelan, right? That's why you said—they—the protective force of Maduro was Cuban, right? They were Cuban guards, so they were just paying Cuba. When that money stops——

Sen. Graham. Don't—hire them in the future. [*Laughter*]

Secretary Lutnick. Yes, they weren't very good. [*Laughter*]

The President. People from our country who were forced to come over—they really didn't want—you know, they were from Cuba—people from different countries like to stay in those countries, whatever, whether it's good, bad, or indifferent. And people want to go back to Cuba, and they want to work in Cuba, but Cuba is going down for the count.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Former White House Senior Adviser Elon R. Musk

Q. Mr. President, is Elon Musk back in the fold? You had dinner with him last night at Mar-a-Lago.

The President. Who? Leon?

Q. Elon.

The President. Elon. Elon is great. I say, about Elon, he's 80 percent super genius and 20 percent he makes mistakes. But he's a good guy. He's a well-meaning person.

Q. Can I ask you about one more thing that I've been wanting to ask you the last couple of days? You were—said that you were very angry—

The President. She's got a lot of questions.

Q. I do. I do have a lot of questions. [*Laughter*]

The President. Tell—who you're with. Go ahead.

The President. I'm with NewsNation. My name is Libbey Dean.

Secretary Lutnick. Excellent.

Russia/Ukraine

Q. So you said that you were really very angry with the Ukrainian President, Zelenskyy, if he was the one who conducted that strike on Putin's residence. And Putin——

The President. I don't believe that strike happened.

Q. Right. So Putin had said in that phone call to you that that strike happened. You came out and said that, and you believed Putin, and there was some criticism——

The President. There is something that happened fairly nearby, but had nothing to do with his house.

Q. Why did you believe Putin in that moment and then go say that about Ukrainian President Zelenskyy?

The President. Because nobody knew at that moment. I mean, that was the first I heard about it.

Q. So why not wait?

The President. He said that his house was attacked. We don't believe that happened as of—you know, now that we've been able to check.

Q. Yes.

The President. But that was the first we ever heard about it. We just hope that Russia and Ukraine get it settled.

Sen. Graham. Amen.

The President. You know, it's costing us nothing. In fact, we make money, because unlike Biden—Biden gave \$350 billion—gave it away.

Now, I got a lot of it back because we did a rare earth deal, going into rare earth, and we're going to get a lot of that money back, maybe all of the money, maybe more than all of the money. But we get paid now. Whenever we send anything, they pay.

So this isn't an economic thing for us, this is a soul—this is a situation where, on average, 25,000 souls, 25,000 soldiers, mostly, and some people from Kyiv and different cities, but a very small number by comparison—but 25,000 to 30,000 soldiers are being killed every single month, and they're not from America. They're from Russia and they're from Ukraine. And if I could get it stopped, I'd like to get it stopped, and I think we will.

Thank you very much, everybody.

Venezuela/Illegal Immigration

Q. Mr. President, one more on oil? You've talked about returning some control to American companies. Did that play at all into your decision to capture Maduro?

The President. No. What really played is the fact that he sent millions of people into our country, from prisons and from mental institutions and drug dealers, and every drug addict in—every drug addict in that country, in his country, was sent into our country. Think of that. Every single drug addict from Maduro's country—which isn't really his country, and it's certainly not his country anymore—every drug addict and every drug dealer is—has been sent into our country.

Now, we're getting them back, but it's a very laborious job to get them back, very hard job to—and of course, we're not getting a lot of good backup from certain judges, from certain radical-left. But we're doing well on appeals, because the people doing the appeal—seems that the judges are much more sane. What these super radical-left judges are doing to our country, it's incredible.

But if you take a look, Maduro sent hundreds of thousands and even millions of people from jails, from prisons, from mental institutions—drug dealers, drug addicts, everybody. He sent anybody with a—with a problem into—it could never be forgiven. And other countries have done the same, but nothing like Maduro has done.

Venezuela/U.S. Drug Interdiction Efforts

Q. During your campaign, you talked about ending American foreign intervention. What changed your mind with Venezuela? What kind of grew your interest there?

The President. The fact that he sent drugs into our country. We're stopping it rapidly with what we're doing with the sea, because they come in—a lot of it comes in by sea, but it's not coming. The drugs coming in, as I said before, by sea are down 97 percent. You should be saying: "Thank you very much, President Trump. Great job." Now they can't get anybody to pilot those boats. You know, it's 97 percent. I'm trying to figure out who are the other 3 percent.

Q. Would you say that Operation Resolve—

Venezuela/Tren de Aragua Criminal Organization

Q. What's your response—what's your response to supporters who voted for you, who may be glad and relieved to see Maduro in custody—

The President. The voters that voted for me, yes.

Q. —but may be worried about a forever war with Venezuela?

The President. Let me just tell you, the voters that voted for me are thrilled. They said, "This is what we voted for."

Sen. Graham. So let's just think about it. What is the right response when a country sends in tens of thousands of people to overwhelm your system? When a country is a narco-terrorist state that floods your country with cocaine, that's aligned with Hizballah, what's the right response? You blow up the boat before they get here. You take down the source of the problem.

President Trump didn't wake up one day and say, "Hey, let's take Venezuela." He did what other people talked about but didn't have the balls or the guts to do it. This is a good thing. This is not interventionism. This is making America safer. We're going to be more prosperous because of the business deals, and there are going to be Americans alive today because he shut down a narcoterrorist state called Venezuela.

This is a good thing, not a bad thing.

The President. And the oil companies are going to go in and rebuild their system. They're going to spend billions of dollars, and they're going to take the oil out of the ground, and we're taking back what they stole.

Remember, they stole our property. It was the greatest theft in the history of America. Nobody has ever stolen our property like they have. They took our oil away from us. They took the infrastructure away. And all that infrastructure is rotted and decayed, and the oil companies are going to go in and rebuild it. We're not going to spend very much money at all, if anything, but the oil companies are going to go—we're going to take our oil back.

But we're going to also do things that—when you look at what he did, the drugs are terrible. But also terrible, he sent hundreds of thousands of people into our country that should not be here. And that means from prisons. That means Tren de Aragua, the gang.

Sen. Graham. Awful. Yes.

The President. Tren de Aragua, that comes out of Maduro's country. He was very friendly with that gang. Well, they're having a hard time right now.

You know, we had Tren de Aragua all over Washington, DC, and they got the hell beat out of them. Washington, DC, is the safest city right now in the United States.

Thank you very much, everybody.

U.S. Military Operation To Capture President Nicolas Maduro Moros of Venezuela

Q. Mr. President, if you had to sum up Operation Absolute Resolve, would you say that it was about oil or it was about regime change?

The President. It's about peace on Earth.

Q. How is it peace on Earth——

The President. Peace on Earth.

Q. ——by——

The President. You've got to have peace. It's our hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine was very important when it was done. And other Presidents, a lot of them, they lost sight of it. I didn't. I didn't lose sight. But it really is, it's peace on Earth.

Thank you very much.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:40 p.m. in the press cabin. In his remarks, he referred to White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Stephen Miller; President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo of Mexico; Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India; Gov. Timothy J. Walz of Minnesota; Rep. Ilhan A. Omar; Gov. Jay R. "J.B." Pritzker of Illinois; Gov. Gavin C. Newsom of California; Chief of Police Jim McDonnell of Los Angeles, CA; Alvin K. Hellerstein, judge, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York; and President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. Sen. Graham referred to Rep. Christopher H. Smith; and India's Ambassador to the United States Vinay Kwatra. The transcript was released by the Office of Communications on January 5.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Air Force One.

Locations: Air Force One.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Graham, Lindsey O.; Hellerstein, Alvin K.; Lutnick, Howard W.; Maduro Moros, Nicolas; McDonnell, Jim; Miller, Stephen; Modi, Narendra; Musk, Elon R.; Newsom, Gavin C.; Omar, Ilhan A.; Petro Urrego, Gustavo; Pritzker, Jay R. "J.B."; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Rodriguez Gomez, Delcy; Rubio, Marco A.; Sheinbaum Pardo, Claudia; Vance, James D. "J.D."; Walz, Timothy J.; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: Arctic security, improvement efforts; California, Governor; Cambodia, relations with Thailand; China, President; Colombia, drug production and trafficking; Colombia, President; Counterterrorism and homeland security; Critical minerals, supply chain improvements; Cuba, economic and political stability; Economic improvement; Greenland, political status with respect to Denmark; Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Illegal immigration; Illinois, crime in Chicago; Illinois, Governor; India, Prime Minister; Iran, political unrest and violence; Mexico, counternarcotic efforts; Mexico, President; Minnesota, Governor; Minnesota, Somali immigrants; National Guard; News media, Presidential interviews; Russia, conflict in Ukraine; Russia, President; Secretary of Commerce; Secretary of State; Somalia, piracy on commercial shipping; Suspected drug-trafficking vessels, U.S. airstrikes in Caribbean Sea and Eastern Pacific; Thailand, relations with Cambodia; Ukraine, critical minerals supply; Ukraine, Russian invasion and airstrikes; Venezuela, Interim President; Venezuela, investment by foreign oil companies; Venezuela, oil supply and refining; Venezuela, relations with U.S.; Venezuela, Tren de Aragua criminal organization; Venezuela, U.S. Embassy in Caracas; Venezuela, U.S. military capture and exfiltration of President Maduro; Vice President; White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy.

DCPD Number: DCPD202600005.