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# Maduro's capture is a blow to China. But on Chinese social media it's being hailed as a blueprint for Taiwan

UPDATED 1 HR 5 MIN AGO

Analysis by John Liu and  Steven Jiang

Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro met China's top envoy to Latin America Qiu Xiaoqi at the ...



As US special forces were in the final stages of planning a daring nighttime operation into the heart of the Venezuelan capital, President Nicolás Maduro was posing for photographs with China's top envoy to Latin America and lavishing praise on Beijing's leadership.

"I thank President Xi Jinping for his continued brotherhood, like an older brother," Maduro told Chinese diplomat Qiu Xiaoqi, as laughter echoed through the exchange at the Miraflores Palace in Caracas.

Hours later, Maduro was snatched from his bedroom by elite Delta Force commandos from the US Army and China was staring at the stark reality it had just lost one of its staunchest partners in Latin America.

China and Venezuela have maintained close relations for decades, forged by a shared political ideology and mutual distrust of a world led by the United States.

Through an "**all-weather strategic partnership**" established in 2023, Beijing pulled Caracas further into its orbit with deepened economic aid and diplomatic support.

The bulk of Venezuelan oil exports flow to China, and Chinese companies finance extensive infrastructure projects and investments across the country, with Beijing lending billions to Caracas in recent decades.

Trump's move has appeared to upend that relationship, at least for now, raising questions over China's preferential access to Venezuelan oil and the future of its political and economic influence in the wider region.

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Beijing has been quick to denounce Maduro's capture, condemning Washington for behaving like the world's policeman. Chinese social media has also erupted with

excitement and discussion about the US' actions.

If the US can snatch a leader in their backyard, many ask, why can't China do the same?

By late Monday, topics linked to Trump's capture of Maduro had received more than **650 million impressions** on Weibo, China's X-like social media platform, with many users suggesting it could offer a template for Beijing's own potential military takeover of Taiwan.

China's ruling Communist Party claims the self-governing democracy as its territory, despite never having controlled it, and has vowed to absorb the island, by force if necessary. In recent years Beijing has ramped up its military intimidation of Taiwan, including by simulating blockades.

## 'Unilateral bullying'



China's President Xi Jinping talks to Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin during a bilateral meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China, on Monday. (Andy Wong/AFP/Getty Images)

But while the prospect of capturing Taiwan's leader may have stoked nationalist fever online, officially Beijing has adopted a markedly different tone, portraying the US raid as a "hegemonic act" while calling for the immediate release of Maduro and his wife.

On Monday, Xi took a further veiled swipe at Washington when he condemned "unilateral bullying" that "seriously undermines the international order" during a meeting with the visiting Irish prime minister.

"All countries should respect other peoples' independent choice of development paths and abide by international law and the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter – with major powers in particular setting the example," he said.

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State-run media has wasted little time seizing on the incident to highlight what it described as US hypocrisy: "The US invasion has made it increasingly clear to everyone that what the United States calls a 'rules-based international order' is in reality nothing more than a plunder-based order driven by US interests," a commentary by state-run Xinhua news agency wrote.

A social media account linked to the People's Liberation Army focused more on China's strength and security, warning that weak military capabilities could invite crises.

"Without hardened, core capabilities, it is impossible to deter predatory great powers – let alone protect the people's safety when a crisis strikes suddenly," it

wrote.

Yet Beijing's rhetoric on sovereignty has been notably absent in other conflicts.

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When Russia, another strategic partner, invaded Ukraine in 2022, China stopped short of condemning Moscow or opposing the war, instead parroting Russian narrative of blaming on the United States and its NATO allies for provoking the conflict.

## **China's growing influence in Latin America**



Oil storage tanks at a China Petroleum & Chemical Corp. (Sinopec) facility near Ningbo, China, on Monday. (*Qilai Shen/Bloomberg/Getty Images*)

China has emerged as the largest buyer of Venezuelan crude in recent years after Trump imposed sanctions against the South American nation in 2019. In the last few months of 2025, as much as 80% of its exports likely went to China, according to a market update published by data analytics firm **Kpler** last month.

Oil investors and analysts, however, believe US actions against Venezuela are unlikely to have a major impact on China's oil supply, given Venezuela's relatively modest output and the role of non-state buyers.

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Under the governments of Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chávez, Venezuela's crude output has fallen by two-thirds from its peak, dropping to around one million barrels per day – a level starkly at odds with its status as the holder of the world's largest proven oil reserves.

Most of Chinese importers of Venezuelan crude are also small, independent refiners, known as teapots, which are drawn to the oil largely because of its steep discounts.

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Trump has suggested that China could continue buying some Venezuelan crude, but at reduced volumes. The arrangement under Trump would likely end the deep discounts that have made the oil attractive to teapots.

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Beyond energy, Beijing has also hailed Venezuela as an “important trading partner and investment destination for China in Latin America.”

In the decade since 2007, China lent Venezuela \$62.5 billion, nearly half of all Chinese lending to South America for the period, making the country the single

largest recipient of Chinese finance worldwide, according to research by Washington-based Stimson Center.

## 'Taiwan is not Venezuela'



Wartime anti-tank obstacles sit on a beach in Kinmen, Taiwan with the city of Xiamen, China, in the background on October 7, 2023. (Alex Wong/Getty Images)

As talk now inevitably turns to whether the US attack on Venezuela could embolden China, in Taiwan many are shrugging off such threats.

Wang Ting-yu, a lawmaker from Taiwan's ruling party who sits on the legislature's foreign affairs and defense committee, rejected the idea China might follow the US precedent and attack the island.

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“China is not the US, and Taiwan is not Venezuela. Comparisons that China can carry out the same thing in Taiwan is wrong and inappropriate,” Wang said, adding that “China has never been short of hostility towards Taiwan militarily; what it lacks is feasible means.”

Although China’s Xi has long described “reunification” with Taiwan as inevitable, experts say Beijing will continue to tread cautiously.

William Yang, senior analysts at Belgium-based thinktank International Crisis Group, said the US move against Venezuela is unlikely to have “any direct and fundamental impact” on China’s calculation over a potential invasion of Taiwan.

Instead, Yang said the factors determining Beijing’s timeline to take over Taiwan boil down to China’s domestic economic situation, the People’s Liberation Army’s capabilities, Taiwan’s domestic political situation, as well as Washington’s policy toward Taiwan and China.

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But Washington’s actions create a new normal, he warned.

“The takeaway for Taiwan is that resorting to military options to pursue certain foreign policy goals is likely going to become a new norm and new reality around the world,” Yang told CNN. “Taiwan should really take this by heart and start to think about how to improve Taiwan’s defense capabilities and improve Taiwan’s ability to maintain deterrence against China.”

And further afield in Latin America, questions remain over the future of China's longer-term strategy in what Washington has traditionally viewed as its "backyard."

Dan Wang, China director at political risk consultancy Eurasia Group, said although the ousting of Maduro represented a "major setback" for Beijing's broader strategic influence in the region, it could continue to leverage its investment in South America, especially in power supply and telecommunication – where any effort to remove Chinese companies from critical infrastructure projects could lead to social instability.

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Yang echoed the sentiment, saying that Beijing is more likely to prioritize minimizing the fallout on its economic interests – rather than engaging in an all-out geopolitical competition with the US in the region.

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CNN's Wayne Chang in Taipei and Joyce Jiang in Beijing contributed to this report.



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