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Community to Condemn
Attack on Venezuela



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has called on the United Nations and the international community to take a firm stand against the recent U.S. operation targeting Venezuela, describing it as a "dangerous breach of international law" and a direct challenge to the sovereignty of the South American nation.

Aragchi condemned the military incursion into Venezuelan territory and the reported abduction of President Nicolás Maduro, calling the action a clear violation of the UN Charter and fundamental principles of international law.

In a phone conversation with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez, Araghchi praised Cuba's resilience in the face of "illegal economic blockades and foreign threats" and reaffirmed solidarity with Havana. Rodríguez, in turn, denounced the U.S. aggression against Venezuela and the abduction of Maduro and his wife, urging friendly nations to coordinate against the "belligerent unilateralism" practiced by Washington. He reiterated Cuba's refusal to yield to external pressure.

Expanding the diplomatic effort, Araghchi also held talks with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira. The Iranian minister warned of the broader implications of U.S. actions, asserting that such unilateral acts normalize the illegal use of force and endanger the global rule of law. Vieira echoed Iran's concerns, labeling the abduction of a sitting president as a direct violation of the UN Charter, and pledged that Brazil would pursue the matter through the UN Security Council, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Judiciary Chief
Warns Rioters Will
Face Firm Action
Without Leniency



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Judiciary chief warns that the United States and Israel have openly "supported insecurity" in the Islamic Republic, adding that rioters taking advantage of the economic protests will be dealt with firmly and without leniency.

Addressing a meeting with judicial officials, Gholamhossein Mohseni-Eje'i said during periods of unrest, the Islamic establishment always offers a chance for those who have been deceived or inadvertently involved in harmful acts to distance themselves from rioters and distinguish their position.

He said the concerns of protesters and critics regarding livelihood and economic welfare will be heard.

"However, we will deal firmly in accordance with the law with those elements who seek to exploit this situation to incite unrest and disrupt the security of the country and the people. We will not remain silent in the face of rioters," the judiciary chief stated.

He cautioned rioters that the country will offer no leniency to them, unlike in the past, "because the main enemies of our people, namely the US and Zionist regime, have officially and openly supported unrest in our country at the current juncture."

Therefore, no rioter can any longer claim to have been deceived, Mohseni-Eje'i said.

President Criticizes Hypocrisy of Western Powers, Calls for Strategic Domestic Planning

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Masoud Pezeshkian criticized what he described as the dual and deceptive policies of the United States and other Western powers, accusing them of obstructing Iran's development while portraying themselves as defenders of human rights.

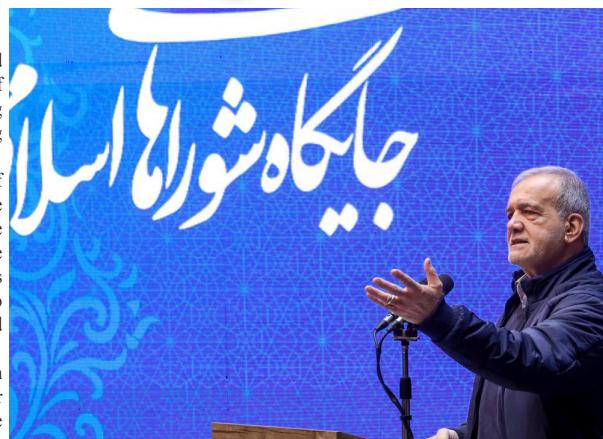
Speaking at the National Congress on "The Role of Islamic Councils and Public Participation in the Constitution" on Tuesday, Pezeshkian said: "On one hand, sanctions and economic restrictions block the nation's development; on the other, the same actors present themselves as caring for our people. Those who have turned the world into a scene of killings and plunder now claim to uphold human rights."

Pezeshkian highlighted that the country's core problem is not a lack of authority, but the absence of a clear development plan and vision for cities and regions. He stressed that granting authority without a comprehensive plan leads to chaos. "Until we know where our cities are headed and what plans are in place for each region, delegation of authority will not be effective," he said.

He noted that Tehran, Karaj, Qazvin, Varamin, and surrounding areas face serious challenges, including severe water shortages, land subsidence, and environmental issues. "If a comprehensive, science-based plan had been established from the beginning to determine how much development and population load these areas could sustain, we would not be facing such crises today," Pezeshkian said. He emphasized that each city and building must be constructed according to precise technical, social, economic, and environmental guidelines, after which authority can be responsibly delegated to local officials.

The president also addressed foreign pressures, asserting that external actors see Iran as vulnerable due to perceived difficulties within the country. "They apply sanctions and economic restrictions while pretending to care for our people. Those same powers, who have committed widespread massacres, now claim to defend human rights," he said.

Turning to domestic policy, Pezeshkian outlined recent structural reforms, particularly in currency allocation, aimed at eliminating rent-seeking, monopolies, and corruption. He clarified that government subsidies were not removed but redistributed directly to all citizens, ensuring



fairness and reducing hidden inequality.

He explained that each citizen now receives a monthly subsidy equivalent to one million tomans, calibrated to account for inflation, and sufficient to cover basic necessities. "This approach benefits lower-income households while addressing the longstanding unfair distribution that previously favored wealthier groups," Pezeshkian said.

On fuel and energy pricing, Pezeshkian emphasized that revenues would be transparently and fairly directed to all citizens, rather than being captured by specific groups exploiting the system. "The government's priority is justice, not the enrichment of special interests," he said.

Pezeshkian highlighted the importance of empowering local councils and community-based initiatives. He stressed that reform starts at the neighborhood level, where citizens can actively participate in solving issues related to employment, healthcare, and welfare. "Neighborhoods themselves are a source of power," he said. "When people come together with clear plans, they can address local challenges without direct government intervention."

He encouraged active participation, saying: "Anyone who claims they can solve a problem is welcome to take responsibility. The government is prepared to delegate authority and resources to those willing to act—but the tasks and objectives must be clearly defined."

The president called on media and oversight bodies to closely monitor government actions. "If any favoritism or misallocation occurs, the public should know. Our goal is to ensure that government resources reach everyone fairly," he said. He emphasized that political motivations do not guide these reforms; the priority is preventing rent-seeking and corruption.

Acknowledging the difficulties in structural reform, Pezeshkian cautioned that progress would take time. "Problems are not new; they have accumulated over years. Effective reform requires realistic assessments of our capacities, limits, and threats, and collective decision-making based on these realities," he said.

Pezeshkian reiterated that successful change begins with clear planning and responsible delegation. Citing ongoing projects involving universities such as Sharif and Tarbiat Modares to address water management and energy efficiency, he stressed that authority has been given to capable institutions to implement practical solutions.

"Until we can properly organize neighborhoods, expecting to transform the entire country overnight is unrealistic," Pezeshkian concluded. "The government is ready to delegate responsibility and authority, but precise objectives and actionable plans must first be established."

Sanctions Represent Full-Scale
War Against Iran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Saeed Khatibzadeh, Deputy Foreign Minister and Head of the Political and International Studies Center at Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, described international sanctions as the "heart of a full-scale economic war" against the Iranian nation. He made the remarks during a pre-congress session for the National Foreign Policy Congress at the Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, reflecting on the current global landscape and Iran's foreign policy challenges.

Khatibzadeh said the world is experiencing an unprecedented phase of disorder and lawlessness in the international system. "Powers that long claimed to uphold the status quo are now revising their positions and openly violating international law," he said. He emphasized that in such a context, universities and scientific elites bear a heavy responsibility. "Defending any position without deep understanding and addressing difficult questions is neither ethical nor effective. Universities are not platforms for repeating slogans; they are places to pose fundamental questions," he stressed.

The deputy foreign minister also referred to the recent 12-day conflict involving Iran, calling it a "real-world laboratory" for students and scholars of political science and international relations. He asserted that many claims propagated by Western mainstream media for years were disproven during this period.

Iravani Condemns U.S. Abduction of Venezuelan Leaders, Criticizes Hypocrisy on Iran

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

NEW YORK - Amir Saied Iravani, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, strongly condemned the United States for the alleged abduction of Venezuela's elected president and first lady, calling it a "blatant violation of international law" and a "grave assault on the principle of sovereign equality of states." Speaking at an emergency UN Security Council session convened to discuss the U.S. attack on Venezuela, Iravani framed the action as an illegal and aggressive act with serious implications for international peace and security.

"The abduction of the elected president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the first lady by the United States constitutes a flagrant violation of customary international law, including principles governing the immunity and inviolability of heads of state and government," Iravani said. He stressed that such acts represent a dangerous precedent, undermining the equality of sovereign states and the international system based on the UN Charter.

During his remarks, Iravani described the U.S. military attack on Venezuela as illegal, equating it with state terrorism. He highlighted that the act violates peremptory norms of international law as well as the UN Charter, particularly Articles 2(4) and 2(7), and constitutes an internationally wrongful act amounting to full-scale aggression. "Such military intervention against an independent UN member state represents a serious breach of regional and international peace and security, with broad and profound consequences for the international community," he stated.

Iravani emphasized that the Islamic Republic of Iran fully supports Venezuela's inherent right to self-defense and called on the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to take urgent action to halt the illegal aggression. "All perpetrators of this act must be held accountable," he added, reiterating Iran's steadfast support for the people and the legitimate, elected government of Venezuela.

Another part of his address, Iravani criticized recent public threats made by the U.S. president against Iran, stating that repeated threats to use force constitute a clear violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter. He accused the United States of hypocrisy, claiming to support the Iranian people while simultaneously maintaining a record of intervention and unilateral coercive measures against Iran.

Iravani highlighted specific examples of U.S. actions, including political, military, and operational support for the Israeli regime's joint and illegal war of aggression against Iran from June 13 to 24, 2025. The conflict, he noted, resulted in civilian casualties, attacks on non-military infrastructure,



and serious violations of the fundamental human rights of the Iranian people.

"Once again, the Islamic Republic of Iran asserts its inherent right to defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security, and to protect its people against any foreign intervention," Iravani said. He warned that the United States would bear full responsibility for any consequences arising from its unlawful threats or actions that escalate tensions further.

Iravani opened his statement by thanking the Security Council for convening the emergency session and welcoming the participation of the UN Deputy Secretary-General. He also expressed appreciation for the analytical briefing provided by Professor Jeffrey Sachs and congratulated Somalia on assuming the Council presidency for the month as well as Bahrain, Colombia, the Republic of the Congo, Latvia, and Liberia on their election as new Council members.

Aligning Iran with a statement delivered by Eritrea on behalf of the "Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations," Iravani laid out several key points:

Condemnation of U.S. Military Aggression Against Venezuela: He reiterated that the attack is illegal, constitutes state terrorism, and represents a serious threat to international peace and security.

Violation of Sovereign Immunity: The abduction of Venezuela's leaders is a flagrant breach of international law and a serious challenge to the principle of sovereign equality among nations.

Undermining International Law: He warned that the U.S. attempt to substitute domestic law for international law undermines the UN Charter, threatens the foundations of the international legal order, and promotes a dangerous precedent. He criticized the U.S. policy of "peace through strength" as prioritizing power over law, potentially rendering the collective security system ineffective.

Security Council Inaction: Iravani cautioned that continued paralysis within the Security Council emboldens unlawful behavior and contributes to a climate of impunity, posing a serious risk to regional and global peace.

In conclusion, Iravani rejected what he described as baseless accusations against Iran made by the U.S. representative during the session. He stressed that on-the-ground realities are clear and cannot be obscured by political rhetoric or fabricated narratives.

"Thank you, Mr. President," he concluded, emphasizing that the international community must uphold the principles of the UN Charter, ensure accountability for unlawful acts, and support the legitimate rights of states under international law.

Venezuela's Independence, Sovereignty Non-Negotiable



TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Venezuelan ambassador to Iran says his fellow citizens are prepared to defend their homeland and that his country will never compromise on its independence and sovereignty.

José Rafael Silva Aponte made the remarks in a recent interview with Iran's Spanish-language news channel, Hispan TV, after the US military carried out illegal strikes on oil-rich Venezuela, and kidnapped President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their residence in the capital, Caracas.

The ambassador said that the US aggression against Venezuela threatens peace and security in Latin America and the Caribbean.

He further noted that the time has come for Venezuela to stand against the United States, which he described as the most violent, genocidal, and corrupt empire in today's history.

"Venezuela's dignity, peace, independence, and sovereignty are non-negotiable and shall never be subject to compromise," he added, calling on the international community, including movements, governments, and organizations, to take a clear stance on the US military attack and condemn it.

The US forces took Maduro and his wife to a detention center in New York, where they are expected to stand trial for alleged drug trafficking-related charges.



Iran, Brazil Sign MoU to Strengthen Foreign Investment Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at strengthening foreign investment and expanding economic cooperation between Iran and Brazil has been signed between the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce and the Association of Iranian and Foreign Joint Investments affiliated with the Iran Chamber of Commerce.

According to Iran Chamber Online, the cooperation agreement was officially concluded with the objective of broadening bilateral economic relations and enhancing the attraction of foreign capital into Iran. The document was signed by Seyed Fakhrudin Amerian, President of the Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce, and Mehdi Azadvar, President of the Association of Iranian and Foreign Joint Investments.

The signing of this memorandum marks a new step in institutional cooperation between the two entities, focusing on facilitating the entry of foreign investors into the Iranian market and promoting the development of joint investment projects across key economic sectors. Both sides emphasized the importance of structured collaboration to unlock new investment opportunities and reduce existing barriers to cross-border economic engagement.

South Pars Gas Output Reaches 725m Cubic Meters Per Day



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Oil Minister announced that natural gas production from the South Pars gas field has reached a new record of approximately 725 million cubic meters per day, marking a significant milestone in the country's energy sector.

Mohsen Paknejad made the remarks on Monday during a visit to offshore gas platforms operating in the South Pars field. He expressed appreciation for the tireless efforts of operational personnel working in the region and praised their role in achieving the new production record.

Paknejad described the South Pars region as the first and most critical link in Iran's gas production, processing, transmission, and distribution chain. He emphasized that employees of Pars Oil and Gas Company work around the clock under difficult conditions on offshore platforms to ensure continuous gas production and delivery to consumers nationwide.

"These efforts ensure that households remain warm, industrial activities continue uninterrupted, value is created in sectors such as petrochemicals, and gas supplies are secured for all designated uses," the minister said.

Referring to developments over the past 14 months, Paknejad noted that 13 new wells have been drilled in the South Pars field through the efforts of Pars Oil and Gas Company personnel. These new wells have added approximately 22 million cubic meters per day to Iran's raw gas production capacity. He described this increase as particularly significant given the current challenges related to energy supply-demand imbalances in the country.

The minister added that, based on existing plans, an additional four wells are expected to come online by the end of the current Iranian year—within the next two and a half months—as part of an infill drilling project. With these wells included, total additional gas production from South Pars is projected to reach around 30 million cubic meters per day.

Highlighting recent cold weather conditions and the sharp rise in gas consumption across the country, Paknejad said that despite severe temperatures and increased demand in residential, commercial, and industrial sectors, a new production record was successfully achieved at South Pars. "Under these conditions, gas output from the field reached about 725 million cubic meters per day," he stated.

Rail Freight Transport Rises 12% in Eight Months, Boosting Exports to Afghanistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Chief Executive Officer of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (RAI) announced a 12 percent increase in rail-based freight transport during the first eight months of the current Iranian year, highlighting the growing role of rail transport in expanding exports, particularly to Afghanistan.

Speaking on Monday at a ceremony marking the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the development of rail transportation with the Middle East Mines and Mineral Industries Development Holding Company (MIDHCO or MIDCO), Jabarali Zakari said the expansion of rail transport would significantly reduce steel production costs while also lowering social costs such as air pollution and improving road safety.

Zakari, who also serves as Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development, referred to MIDCO's prominent position in Iran's steel industry and its annual transportation of around 30 million tons of cargo. He noted that for the first time this year, exports of sponge iron to Uzbekistan were carried out via rail in



exceeds 1.5 million tons.

According to Zakari, rail freight shipments to Afghanistan have reached 70,000 tons in the current month and are expected to surpass 100,000 tons next month. He explained that goods transported via rail to Afghanistan include ceramic products from Yazd, steel products from various companies, as well as petroleum products transited from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Russia. He emphasized that this new eastern export corridor could play a significant role in strengthening Iran's export capacity.

Why Washington Still Cannot Ignore Venezuela

By Masoud Dashti Derakhshan

Senior Oil and Energy Analyst

In the official narrative of U.S. foreign policy, Washington's close monitoring of tanker movements off the Venezuelan coast is typically justified by concerns over drug trafficking, organized crime, and broader security threats. Yet a closer look at the structure of the global energy market—and, more importantly, the technical realities of the U.S. refining system—reveals that these explanations tell only part of the story. Oil, and specifically heavy crude, remains a less visible but decisive variable in this equation.

Recent developments in Venezuela have once again demonstrated that the country's case is not merely a political or human rights dispute. At a deeper level, it is closely intertwined with energy security, refinery configuration, and the geopolitics of heavy crude oil.

Beyond Production Volumes: The Question of Oil Quality

At first glance, one fundamental question arises: why should the United States, now the world's largest oil producer, still care about Venezuelan crude? Over the past two decades—particularly after the shale revolution—U.S. oil output has surged to historic levels, transforming the country from a major importer into a dominant global producer. Meanwhile, Venezuela's oil industry has suffered from years of declining production, infrastructure decay, and capital flight, significantly reducing its share of the global market.

However, the core issue is not volume; it is quality. The bulk of U.S. oil production comes from shale fields, which yield light, low-density, and relatively sweet crude oils. These grades are highly valuable on the export market. By contrast, a significant portion of U.S. refineries—especially along the Gulf Coast in Texas and Louisiana—were built and upgraded over decades to process heavy and extra-heavy crudes. These refineries are legacies of an era when heavy oil from Venezuela, Mexico, and, to some extent, Canada formed the backbone of U.S. refining feedstock.

Fully converting these facilities to run primarily on light shale oil would require multi-billion-dollar investments and prolonged shutdowns—an option that is neither simple nor economically attractive. As a result, despite record-breaking domestic production, the United States remains dependent on crude imports.

Today, those imports are not meant to compensate for a lack of supply, but rather to secure the right type of crude for its refinery system.

U.S. crude production has stabilized in the range of 12–13 million barrels per day, with roughly 8–9 million barrels coming from shale. Shale oil typically has an API gravity of 40–50 degrees and sulfur content below 0.5 percent, placing it firmly in the category of very light, sweet crude. Venezuelan crude, particularly from the Orinoco Belt, often has an API gravity below 10–15 degrees and sulfur content exceeding 3 percent, classifying it as extra-heavy and sour.

This qualitative gap has direct implications for refinery economics. Gulf Coast refineries—whose combined capacity exceeds 9 million barrels per day—have been equipped with advanced delayed coking units, high-pressure hydrocrackers, and sulfur recovery systems. Many of these refineries have a Nelson Complexity Index above 10, reflecting their dependence on heavy, discounted feedstocks. Processing large volumes of light shale oil in such facilities reduces cooking efficiency and compresses refining margins.

This structural mismatch explains why the United States still imports around 3–4 million barrels of crude per day, mostly medium and heavy grades. Before sanctions, Venezuela exported 700,000 to 800,000 barrels per day of heavy crude to the U.S., ranking among the top suppliers to Gulf Coast refineries.

Following the removal of Venezuelan barrels, Canada largely filled the gap, pushing its share of U.S. crude imports above 60 percent. Yet excessive reliance on a single dominant supplier carries its own geopolitical, environmental, and logistical risks.

In this context, Venezuelan heavy crude matters not merely as a volume of supply, but as a balancing factor in the heavy oil market—one that cannot be replaced simply by increasing light oil production.

The Heavy Oil Market: Limited Supply, Few Players

Over 23K Foreign Tourists Visit Iran's Fars Province in H1

TEHRAN (IRNA) - More than 23,000 foreign tourists visited Iran's southern Fars province in the first half of the current Iranian year, starting on March 21, 2025, according to a provincial tourism official. Heydarali Zahedian, acting head of the Tourism Department at the Fars Provincial Office of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, said on Monday that 23,319 foreign tourists traveled to the province during the six-month period.

"Although Fars hosted tourists from various countries, Russia, China, France, Germany, and Austria accounted for the largest number of visitors to the province," Zahedian told IRNA.

Public Expects Officials to Resolve the Country's Problems



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture said the public expects government officials and members of parliament to stand by the people during the current critical conditions and to resolve problems in a manner befitting the great nation of Iran and the Islamic Republic system.

Speaking at the 134th meeting of the Government-Private Sector Dialogue Council, Samad Hassanzadeh stated that the private sector expects greater support from the government and decision-makers, particularly under the difficult circumstances the country is currently facing.

He added that the private sector hopes Economy Minister Madani-Zadeh, who attended the meeting as the government's representative, will provide stronger support to help reduce existing problems.

Hassanzadeh continued by stressing the need for closer attention to certain economic issues, especially in the foreign exchange market and its severe volatility. He noted that decisions taken by the government in recent weeks have led to protests in some parts of the country.

He emphasized that everyone believes the noble and dignified people of Islamic Iran have no intention of disrupting the system or the country. Rather, he said, these protests stem from livelihood pressures and difficulties in people's daily lives, which are largely economic in nature.

Tehran to Host 9th Int'l Rubber and Related Industries Exhibition



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Ninth International Exhibition of Rubber and Related Industries, along with the Seventeenth National Conference of the Rubber Industry, is set to open on Tuesday, January 6, 2026, at the Iran Mall Exhibition Center in Tehran. The three-day event will run until January 8, bringing together key stakeholders from across the rubber value chain, including manufacturers, suppliers, industry experts, and business leaders.

This major industry gathering aims to showcase the latest developments, technologies, and innovations in the rubber sector and its associated industries. It is expected to attract a wide range of domestic and international participants, reflecting the growing importance of the rubber industry in Iran's industrial landscape.

During the exhibition days, the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIM) will also play an active role by hosting industry participants at its dedicated booth. The chamber will welcome economic actors, producers, and specialists in the rubber industry from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Booth J15 in Hall E1 of the exhibition venue.

According to organizers, the Tehran Chamber of Commerce's presence at the event will go beyond offering routine advisory services. The chamber plans to host visiting trade delegations and provide a professional platform for business matchmaking, networking, and the exchange of expertise among industry participants. This initiative is intended to strengthen links between manufacturers, suppliers, investors, and potential business partners within the rubber sector.

Unlike light crude, the heavy oil market is structurally tight, with only a handful of major suppliers. Canada and Venezuela represent the two primary pillars of global heavy crude, while Russia also holds substantial reserves. In recent years, Canada has significantly expanded its role as the main supplier to U.S. refineries.

Venezuela's share, by contrast, has been virtually eliminated due to sanctions, mismanagement, and collapsing output. Yet this does not render the country irrelevant. Venezuela still holds the world's largest

proven oil reserves, the majority of which consist of extra-heavy crude and bitumen. This reality makes Venezuela a geopolitical asset that cannot be written off, even if its current production remains marginal.

For the United States—already facing heightened tensions with Russia and other geopolitical constraints—losing access to a potential source of heavy crude in the Western Hemisphere is not merely an economic issue. It is a strategic one.

A Shift in U.S. Policy: From Pressure to Direct Action

Recent developments in Venezuela, including the detention of the country's president by the United States, signal a clear shift in Washington's approach. This move suggests that the U.S. is no longer relying solely on economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure when dealing with certain sanctioned states.

When geopolitical importance overlaps with structural energy needs and diplomatic avenues are exhausted, more direct and costly measures remain on the table. The message is unambiguous: sanctions are not the ceiling of U.S. pressure. In this sense, Venezuela is not an anomaly, but rather a warning case that illustrates an evolving U.S. strategy at the intersection of energy and power politics.

Implications for the Global Oil Market

The political instability generated by these developments has cast serious doubt on any near-term return of Venezuelan oil to global markets. Even under a new political arrangement, rebuilding Venezuela's oil sector would require time, capital, and sustained stability—none of which are readily available.

As a result, the global heavy oil market is likely to remain structurally constrained. This will continue to pressure refineries dependent on heavy crude and intensify competition over a limited pool of suitable feedstocks.

Iran's Position in the Emerging Equation

Iran is often overlooked in Western-centric analyses, despite the fact that parts of its crude slate—particularly its heavy and sour grades—share key refining characteristics with Venezuelan oil. Complex refineries designed for heavy crude can process Iranian oil with minimal technical adjustments.

The Venezuelan case delivers two contrasting messages for Iran. On the one hand, Venezuela's marginalization could enhance the geopolitical value of Iranian heavy crude, creating new opportunities should sanctions be eased. On the other hand, it underscores how deeply energy can become a vulnerability when entangled with security and geopolitics.

Moreover, Venezuela's experience highlights the fragility of cooperation among sanctioned states in the absence of political and economic stability. Energy cooperation between Tehran and Caracas, pursued in recent years, now faces heightened risks—reinforcing the need for Iran to reassess its long-term energy strategy.

Conclusion

Venezuela's case serves as a reminder that in energy geopolitics, the number of barrels produced is only part of the equation. Crude quality, refinery configuration, technical constraints, and security considerations play equally decisive roles. The United States produces

more oil than ever before, yet it still needs the type of oil it produces least.

Within this framework, Venezuela, Canada, Russia—and potentially Iran—matter not simply as producers, but as holders of strategic heavy crude resources. Understanding this reality is key to deciphering the hidden layer of recent developments in the political economy of energy, where oil is no longer just a commodity, but an instrument of power.

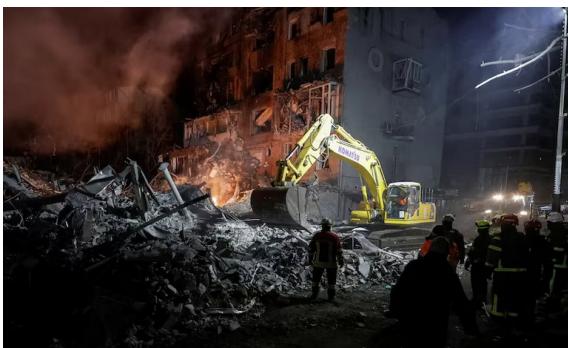
Rodriguez Formally Sworn In as Venezuela's Interim President

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuela's vice president and oil minister Delcy Rodriguez was formally sworn in on Monday as the country's interim president, as U.S.-deposed President Nicolas Maduro appeared in a New York court on drug charges, after the Trump administration removed him from power in a dramatic weekend military action. Rodriguez, a 56-year-old labor lawyer known for close connections to the private sector and her devotion to the ruling party, was sworn in by her brother Jorge, who is the head of the national assembly legislature. Also sworn in on Monday were 283 lawmakers elected last May. Just a small number of are classed as opposition - most of the opposition, especially the faction directed by Nobel Prize winner Machado, boycotted the contest. The only lawmaker not in attendance was first lady Cilia Flores, who is in U.S. custody.



IRAN NEWS

Ukraine Says Russian Strike on Kyiv Leaves First Civilians Dead This Year



KYIV (Dispatches) - An overnight Russian air attack on Kyiv and its region killed two people, Ukraine's authorities said on Monday, in what appeared to be the first reported deaths in Russian strikes on the Ukrainian capital this year.

Ukraine's State Emergency Service said the strike set ablaze a medical facility in the Obolonsky district in Kyiv's northern sector, where an inpatient ward was operating. After the fire was extinguished, a body was found inside, the service added.

A woman was also injured and 25 people were evacuated, the service said on the Telegram messaging app.

It released a nighttime photo showing emergency responders carrying a body on a stretcher past an ambulance outside a building, with snow on the ground.

Russia also hit towns and villages across the Kyiv region, damaging homes and critical infrastructure, and killing a civilian in the Fastiv district, just southwest of the capital, the region's governor Mykola Kalashnyk said on Telegram.

Small parts of the region were left without power, Kalashnyk added.

There was no immediate comment from Russia. Both sides deny targeting civilians in their attacks.

Russia has repeatedly attacked Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with missiles and drones during the nearly four-year-old war, saying it strikes military targets, while Ukraine says civilians and civilian infrastructure are often hit.

Colombia to Continue Work With U.S. on Drug Trafficking



BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Colombia will continue to work with the United States to fight drug trafficking using Washington's intelligence and technology, the South American nation said on Monday.

"The government of Colombia has let the U.S. government know ... that we are going to keep coordinating and cooperating in the fight against drug trafficking," Interior Minister Armando Benedetti said in a video with Justice Minister Andres Idarraga sent to journalists by the government.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday called his Colombian counterpart Gustavo Petro "sick" and said a U.S. military operation in the country was possible.

Over the weekend, U.S. troops entered Venezuela and captured President Nicolas Maduro, who on Monday pleaded not guilty in a New York court to narcotics charges.

Benedetti said that Colombia's anti-drug operations would target drug laboratories, criminal organizations and their camps.

"We will continue to emphasize the fight against this scourge, particularly on the Colombian-Venezuelan border," Idarraga said.

Colombia has criticized Trump's Sunday comments and said any potential U.S. incursion would be "undue interference."

UN Chief Raises Concerns About Instability in Venezuela, Legality of U.S. Operation

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres raised concerns on Monday about greater instability in Venezuela after the U.S. capture of President Nicolas Maduro, while the United States said it does not plan to occupy the Latin American country.

The 15-member Security Council met at U.N. headquarters in New York just hours before Maduro was due to appear in a Manhattan federal court on drug charges including narco-terrorism conspiracy. Maduro has denied any criminal involvement.

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"I am deeply concerned about the possible intensification of instability in the country, the potential impact on the region, and the precedent it may set for how relations between and among states are conducted," Guterres said in a statement delivered to the council by U.N. political affairs chief Rosemary DiCarlo.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Mike Waltz told the Security Council the United States carried out "a surgical law enforcement operation facilitated by the U.S. military against two indicted fugitives of American justice," referring to Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores.

"As Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said, there is no war against Venezuela or its people. We are not occupying a country," said Waltz, as he laid out the U.S. case against Maduro at the Security Council.

"We're not going to allow the Western Hemisphere to be used as a base of operation for our nation's adversaries," Waltz said. "You cannot continue to have the largest energy reserves in the world under the control of adversaries of the United States, under the control of illegitimate leaders, and not benefiting the people of Venezuela."

Venezuela's U.N. Ambassador Samuel Moncada called the U.S. operation to capture Maduro "an illegitimate armed attack lacking any legal justification." Moncada told the council that Venezuelan institutions are functioning normally, constitutional order has been preserved, and the state exercises effective control over all of its territory.

Guterres called on all Venezuelan actors to engage in an inclusive and democratic dialogue, adding: "I welcome and am



ready to support all efforts aimed at assisting Venezuelans in finding a peaceful way forward."

Guterres also expressed concern that the U.S. operation to capture Maduro in Caracas on Saturday did not respect the rules of international law. The U.N. Charter states that members "shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state."

The United States has cited Article 51 of the U.N. Charter, which says that nothing "shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations."

Russia, China and Colombia condemned the U.S. military operation as illegal. Most remaining council members did not directly criticize the United States and instead stated the importance of abiding by international law and the U.N. Charter.

"Unintelligible murmurings and attempts to avoid principled assessments by those who in other circumstances froth at the mouth and demand that others respect the U.N. Charter today seem particularly hypocritical and unseemly," said Russia's U.N.

Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia.

Russia has been denounced by the United Nations for its 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Colombia, which requested Monday's meeting, condemned the U.S. operation as a clear violation of the sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of Venezuela. Russia, China and Venezuela called on the United States to release Maduro and his wife.

The United States cannot be held accountable by the U.N. Security Council, which is charged with maintaining international peace and security, for any such violation. The United States wields a veto - along with Russia, China, Britain and France - so it can block any action.

Maduro Pleads Not Guilty as Trump Seizes Control of Venezuela



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Toppled Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro appeared in a Manhattan federal court on Monday to face narcotics charges, following a dramatic US operation that captured him in Caracas. The stunning move by President Donald Trump sent shockwaves through world capitals, and raised urgent questions about the legality of American actions in the region.

"I am innocent. I am not guilty. I am a decent man. I am still president of my country," Maduro, 63, said through an interpreter, before being cut off by U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein in Manhattan federal court.

Maduro's wife Cilia Flores also pleaded not guilty. The next court date was set for March 17. Dozens of protesters, both pro- and anti-Maduro, gathered outside the courthouse before the half-hour hearing.

Hours later in Caracas, Maduro's vice president, Delcy Rodriguez, was sworn in as Venezuela's interim president with words of support for Maduro but no indication she would fight the US move.

A recent intelligence assessment determined Rodriguez would be best positioned to lead a temporary government in Maduro's absence, finding that opposition figures such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Corina Machado or one-time presidential candidate Edmundo Gonzalez would struggle to gain legitimacy, the Wall Street Journal reported, citing people familiar with the classified report.

While many anti-Maduro activists had assumed this would be their moment, Trump appeared to have sidelined the Venezuelan opposition for now. Instead, he has suggested Rodriguez was willing to work with

Washington.

In Caracas, senior officials from Maduro's 13-year-old government remain in charge of the South American oil producer of 30 million people, alternating between spitting defiance and possible cooperation with the Trump administration.

The intelligence assessment concluded that Rodriguez was among the few Venezuelan leaders capable of maintaining order, along with the interior and defense ministers, in a government dominated by ideological opponents of the US, the Wall Street Journal said.

Rodriguez's brother, Jorge Rodriguez, was reappointed president of the overwhelmingly pro-Maduro National Assembly on Monday. He pledged "to use all procedures, forums and spaces" to bring Maduro back.

Trump told NBC News the US was not at war with Venezuela. Rather, "we're at war with the people that sell drugs," he said.

The US would need to help address the South American country's problems before any new elections, Trump said, calling a 30-day timeline for a vote unrealistic.

"We have to fix the country first. You can't have an election. There's no way the people could even vote," Trump told NBC.

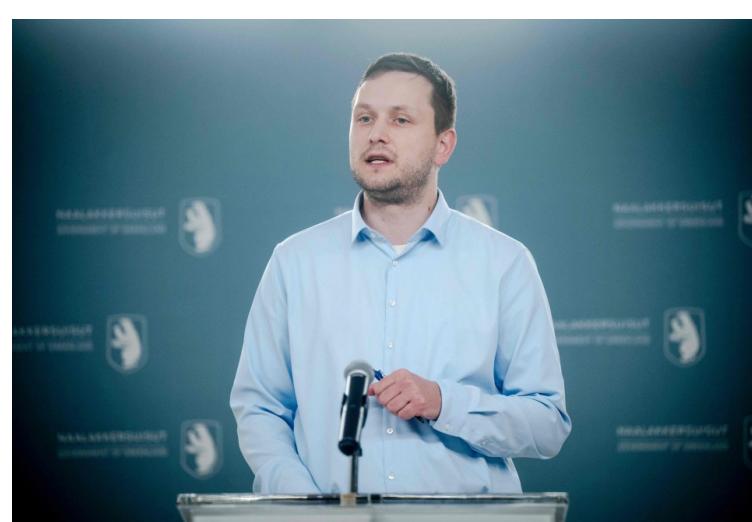
Maduro is accused of overseeing a cocaine-trafficking network that partnered with violent groups including Mexico's Sinaloa and Zetas cartels, Colombian FARC rebels and Venezuela's Tren de Aragua gang.

He faces four criminal counts: narco-terrorism, cocaine importation conspiracy and possession of machine guns and destructive devices.

Maduro has long denied the allegations, saying they were a mask for imperialist designs on Venezuela's rich oil reserves. Trump has made no secret of wanting to share in Venezuela's oil riches. US oil companies' shares jumped on Monday, fueled by the prospect of access to those vast reserves.

While world leaders and US politicians grappled with the extraordinary seizure of a head of state, the United Nations Security Council debated the implications of the raid, which was condemned by Russia, China and leftist allies of Venezuela.

Denmark Warns U.S. Against Taking Greenland by Force



COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) - Denmark's prime minister warned that any U.S. move to take Greenland by force would destroy 80 years of transatlantic security links, after President Donald Trump repeated his desire to annex the mineral-rich Arctic territory.

Washington's military intervention in Venezuela has reignited fears about Trump's designs on the autonomous Danish territory, which has untapped rare earth deposits and could be a vital player as polar ice melts, opening up new shipping routes.

"We need Greenland from the standpoint of national security, and Denmark is not going to be able to do it," the U.S. leader said Sunday.

In response, Greenland's Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen told Trump to back off, while several European countries and the European Union rushed to back Denmark, which has urged Washington to stop threatening a NATO ally.

In Copenhagen, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen told the TV2 network: "If the U.S. decides to military attack another NATO country, then everything would stop — that includes NATO and therefore post-World War II security."

Greenland is on the shortest route for missiles between Russia and the U.S., and Washington already has a military base there.

With the situation in Venezuela more pressing, "we'll worry about Greenland in about two months," Trump quipped Sunday.

Nielsen told Trump on social media: "That's enough now. No more pressure. No more

insinuations. No more fantasies of annexation."

"We are open to dialogue," he said. "But this must happen through the proper channels and with respect for international law."

Yesterday, he called for renewed contact with the US and urged against panic.

"The situation is not such that the US can conquer Greenland. That is not the case. Therefore, we must not panic. We must restore the good cooperation we once had," Nielsen said in Nuuk.

Trump rattled European leaders by seizing Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro, who is now detained in New York.

Trump has said the U.S. will "run" Venezuela indefinitely and tap its huge oil reserves.

The U.S. leader has similarly ramped up pressure on Greenland over recent months, saying in December that Russian and Chinese ships were "all over" the territory's coast.

The foreign ministry in Beijing hit back, urging Washington to "stop using the so-called China threat as an excuse to seek personal gain".

Aaja Chemnitz, who represents Greenland in the Danish parliament, accused Trump of "spreading lies about Chinese and Russian warships".

"The people of Greenland should go into preparation mode," she told AFP, adding that Greenlanders needed to start taking Trump much more seriously.



U.S. Rally Past Spain at United Cup

BRISBANE (Dispatches) - Taylor Fritz saved a match point against Spain's Jaume Munar and the United States rallied to beat Spain 2-1 to reach the United Cup quarterfinals in Australia.

After Coco Gauff suffered a stunning three-set loss to Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in the opener, Fritz leveled the match in Perth with a 7-6 (4), 3-6, 7-6 (6) defeat of Munar. Gauff and Christian Harrison clinched the Group A victory with a 7-6 (5), 6-0 win against Yvonne Cavalle-Reimers and Inigo Cervantes in mixed doubles.

In Sydney, Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurkacz led Poland over Germany in Group F and the Czech Republic posted a 3-0 win against Norway in Group D. Greece leads Great Britain 2-0 in Group E (Perth) after Stefanos Tsitsipas rallied to beat Bily Harris 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (4) and Maria Sakkari defeated Emma Raducanu in three sets.

Meanwhile Poland's Hubert Hurkacz returned from a near seven-month injury layoff to stun German world number three Alexander Zverev 6-3 6-4 in the United Cup on Monday, before Iga Swiatek beat Eva Lys 3-6 6-3 6-4 to secure the Group F tie in Poland's favour.

Former Wimbledon semi-finalist Hurkacz had surgery for a right knee injury in July, shortly after withdrawing from the Grand Slam's 2025 edition.

The 28-year-old was nearly flawless in his comeback contest, landing 21 aces and committing no double faults as he beat three-time Grand Slam finalist Zverev in an hour and 23 minutes in Sydney.

"It's been a while since I've been competing, seven months. I've been going through difficult times with the team and it was very challenging," Hurkacz said.

"I was just trying to cherish and enjoy every moment here on the court today."

Six-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek held her nerve and fought back from a set down to beat Lys in the women's singles clash and seal the tie 2-0.

Poland will play Netherlands in their last group match on Wednesday.

Top-seeded Daniil Medvedev of Russia cruised to a 6-2, 6-3 win against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics in 70 minutes in the opening round in Australia.

Medvedev converted six of 10 break points and took advantage of 26 unforced errors from Fucsovics to set up a second-round clash with Frances Tiafoe.

No. 3 seed Jiri Lehecka outlasted fellow Czech Tomas Machac 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-2 in the only other match involving a seeded player. Also advancing were Americans Sebastian Korda, Alex Michelsen and Reilly Opelka, French qualifier Quentin Halys and lucky loser Kamil Majchrzak of Poland.

No. 8 seed Nuno Borges of Portugal advanced to the second round with a 6-4, 6-3 victory against Damir Dzumhur of Bosnia.

Borges struck five aces and converted five of eight break opportunities in the 76-minute win, finishing with twice as many winners (18) as Dzumhur (nine). Up next for Borges is Croatian Marin Cilic, a 6-3, 6-2 winner against France's Adrian Mannarino.

Chinese wild card Yibing Wu won his opening match 6-4, 6-2 against Hungary's Fabian Marozsan and will face No. 3 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia in the Round of 16.

NFL Cardinals, Raiders, Browns and Falcons Fire Coaches



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The NFL's Arizona Cardinals, Las Vegas Raiders and Cleveland Browns fired their head coaches on Monday, joining the Atlanta Falcons in making changes after losing campaigns ended on Sunday.

Vegas axed Pete Carroll after a 3-14 mark in his only season guiding the Raiders, who will have the first pick in April's NFL Draft.

Carroll, 74, had previously been a head coach with the New York Jets, New England Patriots and Seattle, where he directed the Seahawks to a Super Bowl victory in 2014. His record in 19 years as an NFL coach is 173-134-1.

Raiders majority owner Mark Davis said part-owner Tom Brady, a seven-time Super Bowl winner, will be a key adviser in the search for a new coach and have a greater role with the club.

"Moving forward, general manager John Sypiel will lead all football operations in close collaboration with Tom Brady, including the search for the club's next head coach," Davis said in a statement.

"Together, they will guide football decisions with a shared focus on leadership, culture and alignment with the organization's long-term vision and goals."

The Raiders snapped a 10-game losing streak on Sunday with a season-ending 14-12 victory over Kansas City.

Arizona sacked Jonathan Gannon after a 3-14 season and a 15-36 tenure over three campaigns. The Cardinals have reached the playoffs only once in the past 10 seasons, earning a winning record only once in that span.

Cleveland fired Kevin Stefanski after six seasons following a 5-12 campaign. His overall record with the Browns was 45-56 and he had guided the Browns to their only playoff victory since 1994 in 2020, when he was named NFL Coach of the Year as he was again in 2023.

Egypt Survive Benin Scare to Reach Cup of Nations Quarters

AGADIR (Dispatches) - Yasser Ibrahim's superb header and Mohamed Salah's breakaway strike earned record seven-time champions Egypt a hard-fought 3-1 extra-time victory over Benin in the Africa Cup of Nations round of 16 on Monday.

Egypt led after 69 minutes through a brilliant 25-metre strike from Marwan Attia, but Benin forced the game into an additional 30 minutes when they equalised late on through Jodel Dossou.

Defender Ibrahim scored his first international goal on 97 minutes when he met Attia's cross with a header from 15 yards that looped into the top corner of the net, and Salah raced clear to add the third with the last kick of the game.

"It was a very difficult match, Benin are a tough opponent," Egypt coach Hossam Hassan said. "We are mentally prepared to play for 90 minutes or extra time. I have confidence in my team and my staff, especially the medical team, for a proper recovery of the players before the next match."

Benin's energy and never-say-die spirit stood up well to Egypt's more composed artistry.



Omar Marmoush was put through one-on-one with Benin goalkeeper Marcel Dandjinou but delayed his shot too long and the gloveman was able to make the save at his feet.

Egypt went closer when Marmoush poked the loose ball goalwards but defender Yohan Roche cleared the ball off the line.

Egypt finally broke the deadlock when the ball came to Attia outside the box and he curled his shot into the top corner.

Benin equalised with eight minutes remaining in normal time though and there was a touch of good fortune about it.

Junior Olaitan's cross from the right took a wicked deflection off Ahmed Fatouh and although Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy made a superb save, Dossou bundled the ball over the line from close range.

After Ibrahim had restored Egypt's advantage, Salah raced clear in the 124th minute and produced a typically composed finish as he beat the back-pedalling keeper from 25 metres.

Head Powers to 162 as Australia Reel in England at 5th Ashes Test



SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Run-machine Travis Head slammed his third century of the Ashes series to be 162 not out at lunch on day three as Australia rapidly ran down England's first innings 384 in the fifth and final Test at Sydney.

The destructive opener brought up his hundred off just 105 balls to go with the phenomenal match-winning 123 he made in Perth and 170 at Adelaide.

It steered the hosts to 281-3 at the break, adding 115 to their overnight 166-2 to trail England by 103, whose total was built on the back of Joe Root's magnificent 160.

Steve Smith, who was dropped on 12, was not out 16 alongside Head, who was also put down on 121.

The hosts lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne.

Head resumed on 91 and nightwatchman Michael Neser on one after Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48) were out before stumps on Monday.

Neser frustrated England for 90 deliveries before becoming the only wicket to fall in the session after a gritty 24, caught behind off Brydon Carse.

Head clattered an early boundary through midwicket off Ben Stokes and reached three figures with his 17th four, crunched through the covers from Josh Tongue, windmilling his bat in celebration.

It was his 12th Test century and first in Sydney to cement his reputation as one of the game's most versatile batsmen.

The 32-year-old only moved to the top of the order in the second innings of the first Test in Perth due to Usman Khawaja's back injury, but he has made the position his own.

Man United Sack Amorim After Turbulent Tenure



LONDON (Dispatches) - Ruben Amorim's turbulent 14-month tenure as Manchester United manager ended abruptly on Monday when he was sacked a day after voicing a passionate defence of his role and vowed not to quit in the wake of a disappointing 1-1 draw with Leeds United.

"With Manchester United sitting sixth in the Premier League, the club's leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change. This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish," the club said in a statement.

The Portuguese coach, 40, took over from Erik ten Hag in November 2024, ending his first season with the club 15th in the Premier League - their worst placing since they were relegated in 1974 - and losing to Tottenham Hotspur in the

Europa League final.

This season they are sixth after 20 games - 17 behind leaders Arsenal - having won three of their last 11 matches and the Leeds result triggered a fiery outburst in a press conference from the usually mild-mannered and refreshingly honest coach.

He bristled at questions about his job security, delivering a defiant message that he came to United as a manager with full authority and not merely a coach taking orders.

"If people cannot handle the Gary Nevilles and the criticisms of everything, we need to change the club," he said, in reference to the former full back-turned pundit who has been a regular critic of Amorim's tactical inflexibility as he remained wedded to his three/five at the back formation.