

Research Report: Nicolas Maduro's Telegram Ecosystem & The January 2026 Crisis

Date January 4, 2026 **Subject** Strategic Analysis of the Maduro Regime's Digital Migration, Repression Architecture, and Post-Arrest Information Warfare **Classification** Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) / Deep Dive Analysis

1. Executive Summary

U.S. forces executed a high-stakes military operation known as "Operation Absolute Resolve" on January 3, 2026, resulting in the arrest of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores. The detention of the Venezuelan executive leadership triggered an immediate and volatile vacuum of power characterized not only by kinetic confusion on the streets of Caracas but also by a ferocious battle for narrative dominance across the digital spectrum. While WhatsApp historically served as the primary communication utility for the Venezuelan populace, the regime executed a strategic and calculated pivot to Telegram over the eighteen months preceding the arrest. The report contained herein analyzes that migration and identifies how the platform is currently being used for both covert propaganda and overt repression. The analysis reveals that the regime did not merely adopt a new application but constructed a weaponized digital environment designed to bypass the moderation policies of U.S.-based meta-platforms and to construct a hardened ecosystem for command and control. "Operación Tun Tun" (Operation Knock Knock) serves as the primary case study of this weaponization, where Telegram channels such as @CazaGuarimbas functioned as intelligence clearinghouses that crowdsourced repression and fed target data directly to tactical police units. The information landscape following the arrest has fractured into three competing realities. A "Donroe Doctrine" narrative celebrates a resurgence of American hemispheric hegemony and resource control. A counter-narrative termed the "Oil Robbery" frames the intervention as a colonial extraction operation disguised as law enforcement. A third vector of "Chaos and Disinformation" clouds the actual chain of command, with deepfakes and conflicting reports obscuring whether a U.S. military administrator, a transitional council, or the remaining PSUV leadership currently holds the reins of power. Telegram has evolved from a passive messaging tool into critical infrastructure for both regime survival strategies and the subsequent insurgency or stabilization efforts.

2. The Regime's Telegram Architecture

The Maduro administration publicly severed ties with WhatsApp in August 2024. The President declared the application a tool of "imperialist threats" and espionage, creating a catalyst for a state-level migration to Telegram and WeChat. Analysts identify this moment not as a tantrum but as a calculated hardening of communications infrastructure in anticipation of future conflict.

The "Black Box" Migration Strategy

Security services in Venezuela faced a persistent problem with WhatsApp regarding the

platform's end-to-end encryption combined with its U.S. jurisdiction. The architecture made it difficult for the regime to intercept opposition communications while simultaneously exposing regime data to potential U.S. subpoenas. Telegram offered a solution that the regime marketed as "technological sovereignty".

President Maduro explicitly detailed the scale of this migration. The leader claimed to utilize Telegram for his core network and cited "500 contacts and 20 groups" dedicated to direct governance. The architecture suggests a concentric circle of communication. While the President's public broadcasting channels remained visible to the world, the true command structures migrated into closed, invite-only Telegram groups. These groups likely facilitated the "Black Box" operational style where orders could flow from the Miraflores Palace to tactical units without passing through servers subject to U.S. oversight.

The shift required a massive social engineering effort. State media labeled WhatsApp usage as dangerous and unpatriotic to effectively coerce the military, police, and public sector workers to install Telegram. The rhetoric framed the app deletion as a defensive measure against "cyber-fascist coups" and threats from "cowards hiding behind phones in Colombia, Miami, Peru, and Chile". The administration successfully moved the center of gravity for political discourse in Venezuela to a platform where they had developed sophisticated automated tools for monitoring and repression.

The timeline of this migration reveals a clear escalation strategy. The regime initiated the pivot in August 2024 following the disputed July elections. The subsequent months saw the systematic rollout of "Operation Tun Tun," which peaked in intensity as the regime solidified its digital infrastructure on Telegram. The culmination of this strategy arrived in January 2026 when the platform became the primary battleground following the arrest of the leadership.

Covert Propaganda Hubs: The Transformation of Mippci

The regime realized that official state media channels carried a stigma that limited their reach. The Ministry of Communication (Mippci) engaged in a sophisticated laundering operation of its digital assets to counter this limitation. The official Ministry X account (@Mippcivzla) underwent a rebranding to @LoQSeDic ("Lo Que Se Dice" / "What is being said").

The transformation converted a state organ into a pseudo-anonymous news hub. The account began cross-posting to Telegram and disseminating pro-regime narratives under the guise of neutral grassroots reporting. The operators retained approximately 355,000 historical tweets from the ministry era to provide the new "independent" channel with an unearned veneer of longevity and authority. The content strategy shifted from overt praise of the President to sharing "Tag of the Day" campaigns that aligned with state objectives but appeared organic. Telegram served as the backbone for this operation. The "Lo Que Se Dice" ecosystem likely utilized Telegram's broadcasting features to push content to thousands of subscribers instantly and bypass the algorithmic suppression that state media often faces on platforms like X or Facebook. The ability to forward messages rapidly allowed these covert hubs to seed narratives that would then propagate through family and community groups to effectively launder the propaganda through trusted local networks.

"Operation Knock Knock": Telegram as a Kinetic Weapon

The most distinct and disturbing feature of the regime's Telegram usage is "Operación Tun Tun" (Operation Knock Knock). The operation represents the full integration of digital surveillance with kinetic police action. The name itself—evoking the sound of a knock on the door—was designed to instill psychological terror in the population.

The Mechanics of @CazaGuarimbas

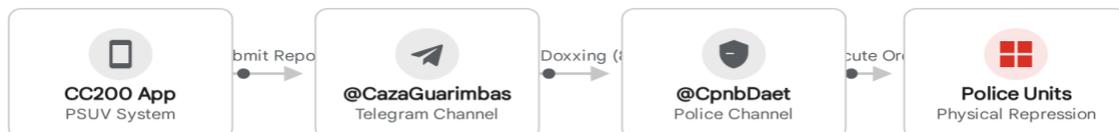
At the heart of this operation sat the Telegram channel @CazaGuarimbas ("Hunting Guarimbas"). The channel functioned as a crowdsourced intelligence platform linked directly to the "Venezuela Nuestra" campaign command. The administrators utilized the channel to dox opposition protesters and post their photographs, full names, and home addresses alongside "WANTED" labels.

The workflow demonstrated a high degree of state integration. Loyalist citizens or intelligence officers submitted photos and videos of protesters via the "CC200" mobile application, which serves as an internal organizational system for the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The @CazaGuarimbas administrators then vetted and formatted the data into "wanted posters". The channel broadcast the personal data to its 21,000+ followers to encourage harassment and further reporting. Evidence confirms a direct digital pipeline between @CazaGuarimbas and @CpnbDaet, which is the official channel of the Bolivarian National Police's tactical unit. Data flowed from the doxxing channel to the police units who then executed the arrests.

The efficiency of this system was terrifying. Timestamps reveal that messages from @CazaGuarimbas were forwarded to police channels within seconds to effectively crowdsource the targeting phase of repression while retaining state control over the execution phase. The operation turned neighbor against neighbor and used Telegram to weaponize social grievances and political polarization.

The Architecture of Repression: Operation Knock Knock Data Flow

Systematic Data Processing Pipeline



The integrated digital-kinetic repression cycle, demonstrating how citizen-submitted data via the PSUV's CC200 app was processed by @CazaGuarimbas and operationalized by the Bolivarian National Police (DAET).

Data sources: [El Clip \(S_S18\)](#), [El Clip \(S_S19\)](#)

3. The January 3, 2026 Crisis: "Operation Absolute

Resolve"

The strategic calculus changed irrevocably in the early hours of January 3, 2026. U.S. military forces launched "Operation Absolute Resolve" as a large-scale strike targeting the Maduro regime's leadership. The operation utilized helicopter-borne missiles to strike key installations including the Fuerte Tiuna military complex, La Carlota Air Base, and the port of La Guaira. The strikes resulted in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and First Lady Cilia Flores, who were subsequently transported to the United States to face narcoterrorism charges. The arrest shattered the "technological sovereignty" the regime had attempted to build. The Telegram channels that once projected strength immediately filled with confusion, denial, and competing narratives.

The Breakdown of Command

The immediate aftermath saw a fracturing of the regime's voice. Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello appeared on state television wearing a bulletproof vest and tactical helmet to urge calm and claim that the situation remained under control. His appearance on traditional media contrasted with the chaos on Telegram where rumors of his own capture or flight circulated wildly. Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López issued a defiant statement accusing the U.S. of a "cowardly kidnapping," yet the coordination that characterized "Operation Knock Knock" appeared to evaporate.

The centralized nature of the "Black Box" system became a liability. The invite-only command groups likely fell silent or became compromised with the removal of the primary node (Maduro). The structure that protected the regime from external moderation made it brittle in the face of leadership decapitation. The various security apparatuses—police, military, and intelligence—were left to operate on standing orders or local initiative without the central authority to issue orders via the secure channels.

4. Post-Arrest Narratives: The War for Reality

The arrest splintered the Venezuelan information space into three distinct, warring narratives. These narratives are currently fighting for dominance on Telegram and shaping how the population and the international community interpret the crisis.

Narrative A: The "Donroe Doctrine" (Pro-US / Opposition)

A triumphant narrative has coalesced around the term "Donroe Doctrine," a portmanteau of "Donald" and "Monroe". The term originated directly from President Trump, who cited the 1823 Monroe Doctrine as the basis for the intervention and claimed to have "superseded it by a lot".

Key Themes and Imagery: The narrative frames the arrest as a restoration of natural order and American primacy. Supporters circulate maps on Telegram depicting the Western Hemisphere as a unified block under U.S. protection and often labeling Venezuela as a liberated zone. The rhetoric emphasizes "tactical precision" and the "end of the regime" to celebrate the capture as a law enforcement action against a criminal enterprise rather than a political coup.

The "Donroe Doctrine" serves as a powerful meme for the opposition. It simplifies a complex geopolitical intervention into a branding exercise that signals strength and inevitability. The viral nature of the term on social media helps to drown out legal or ethical questions regarding sovereignty by focusing the public's attention on the outcome (Maduro in a US jail) rather than

the method (bombing of Caracas).

Narrative B: The "Oil Robbery" (Pro-Regime / Anti-Intervention)

Regime loyalists and international anti-interventionist groups promote a counter-narrative that focuses exclusively on resource extraction. The Progressive International and other leftist organizations denounced the operation as "imperial plunder" and a "kidnapping" designed to seize Venezuela's oil.

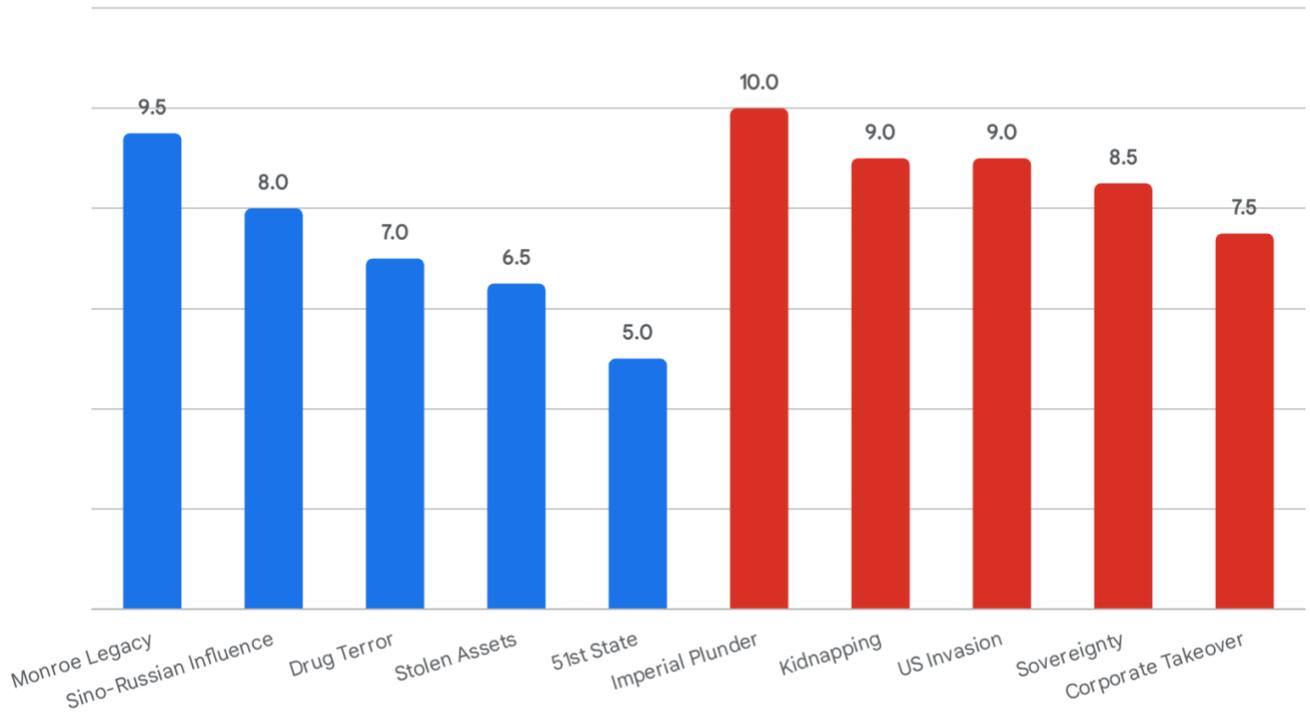
Key Themes and Rhetoric: The narrative leverages President Trump's own words against the operation. Trump explicitly stated that U.S. oil companies would "go in, spend billions of dollars, fix [the infrastructure]" and "make money for the country". Loyalists use these quotes to characterize the "Donroe Doctrine" not as liberation but as a colonial seizure of assets. The narrative argues that the arrest is a smokescreen for the theft of the world's largest proven oil reserves.

This narrative finds fertile ground on Telegram channels that have historically been suspicious of U.S. foreign policy. It reframes the chaos not as a transition to democracy but as the beginning of an occupation. The term "Oil Robbery" appears frequently in hashtags and channel descriptions and serves as a rallying cry for those who oppose the intervention regardless of their feelings toward Maduro personally.

Narrative Warfare: 'Donroe Doctrine' vs. 'Oil Robbery'

Narrative Intensity Score (1-10)

● Donroe Doctrine ● Oil Robbery



A comparison of key themes and rhetoric used in the two dominant post-arrest narratives on Telegram.

Data sources: [Hindustan Times](#), [Washington Post](#), [Chosun Ilbo](#), [Progressive International](#), [DW](#)

Narrative C: Chaos and Disinformation

The third narrative vector is one of pure confusion. The sudden removal of the head of state created a vacuum that disinformation agents are rushing to fill.

The Transitional Governance Crisis: Conflicting reports flood Telegram regarding who is actually running the country. Some channels claim a U.S. military administrator is in charge and cite Trump's comment that the U.S. would "run" Venezuela. Others report that Vice President Delcy Rodríguez has assumed power in accordance with the constitution. Still others suggest a transitional council is forming and draw parallels to the chaotic governance structures seen in Haiti. The lack of a clear authority figure exacerbates the anxiety on the ground and leads to hoarding of goods and localized unrest.

Deepfakes and AI Avatars: The regime's prior investment in AI propaganda complicates the situation. The regime previously deployed AI-generated avatars like "Noah and Daren" to broadcast fake economic success stories. Analysts warn that similar technology is likely being used to generate fake "proof of life" videos or audio messages from the detained leadership. A video circulating on social media purportedly showing Maduro in prison was quickly identified as a deepfake, yet it continues to be shared as fact in some Telegram circles. The use of

Synthesia technology to blur the line between fact and fiction has created an environment where no video can be trusted without independent verification.

5. The "Donroe Doctrine" Map: Visualizing Hegemony

The concept of the "Donroe Doctrine" is not merely rhetorical but has a visual component that is actively reshaping the geopolitical imagination of the region. President Trump's presentation of a map—whether real or metaphorical—has sparked intense debate about the boundaries of U.S. influence.

The "Donroe Map" circulating on opposition channels depicts a Western Hemisphere where national borders are secondary to a unified security umbrella. Venezuela is often highlighted not as a rogue state but as a reclaimed territory integrated into the North American energy and security grid. This visualization appeals to those who view the last two decades of Chavismo as a deviation from Venezuela's natural alignment with the West.

Conversely, for the rest of Latin America, the map represents a threat. The explicit mention of a "Donroe Doctrine" signals a return to unilateral interventionism where sovereignty is conditional on alignment with U.S. interests. This has triggered diplomatic alarms in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, who fear they may be next on the map if they deviate from Washington's directives.

The 'Donroe Doctrine': A Geopolitical Reimagining



A conceptual visualization of the 'Donroe Doctrine', illustrating the U.S. ambition for hemispheric dominance and the strategic integration of Venezuela's energy resources.

6. The Vacuum of Power and Transitional Chaos

The removal of the autocrat has not resulted in immediate democracy but rather in a dangerous interregnum. The U.S. declaration that it would "run" the country until a transition can be organized has created a legitimacy crisis for any local actor attempting to take charge.

The U.S. Administrator Model vs. Local Control

President Trump's statement implies a colonial-style administration likely led by a U.S. appointed official or a council of vetted opposition figures. This model faces immense resistance. The "Oil Robbery" narrative fuels the perception that any U.S.-backed transitional authority is merely a puppet for foreign oil interests.

In contrast, the remaining regime elements are attempting to assert continuity. Vice President Delcy Rodríguez's claim to the presidency relies on the constitutional line of succession. However, her authority is tenuous without the backing of the military high command whose loyalty is currently fractured. The silence or ambiguity of key military leaders suggests they are weighing their options and waiting to see which power center—the U.S. occupation force or the PSUV remnant—establishes dominance.

The Haiti Parallel

Analysts point to the situation in Haiti as a cautionary tale. The "Transitional Council" model intended to stabilize Haiti devolved into infighting and paralysis. A similar outcome in Venezuela is a distinct possibility. If the U.S. attempts to impose a governing council without broad domestic buy-in, the result could be a fractured state where Telegram channels become the primary governance mechanism for rival warlords who each control their own fiefdoms and "hunt" their enemies via digital militias.

7. Conclusion

The events of January 2026 demonstrate that Telegram has ceased to be merely a messaging app in Venezuela; it is now critical infrastructure for both the regime's survival and the opposition's coordination.

For the Regime, or what remains of it, Telegram is the last line of defense. It provides the tools for "Operation Knock Knock" and allows loyalists to maintain a campaign of terror even as the central government collapses. It also serves as the distribution network for the "Oil Robbery" narrative which aims to spark an insurgency against the U.S. intervention.

For the Public and the Opposition, Telegram is the primary source of news in a shattered information ecosystem. The battle between the "Donroe Doctrine" and the "Oil Robbery" narratives will shape the public's understanding of their new reality. The victor of this narrative war will likely determine whether the transition results in a stable democracy or a protracted insurgency.

The migration that began in August 2024 as a quest for "sovereignty" ultimately created a digital battlefield that is now as contested and violent as the streets of Caracas. The "Black Box" has been broken open, but the chaos it contained is now spilling out into the open.

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