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Putin Reaffirms Support for Venezuela's Maduro Amid U.S. Tensions

By AFP

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Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday reaffirmed his support to Venezuela in a phone call with longtime ally President Nicolás Maduro, the Kremlin said.

The call came after the United States seized an oil tanker off Venezuelan coast, the latest of several points of friction between the two countries.

Russia has fostered warm ties with Venezuela and Maduro visited Moscow earlier this year, attending an annual military parade and signing a broad partnership agreement with Putin.

In a phone call on Thursday, "Vladimir Putin expressed solidarity with the Venezuelan people," the Kremlin said in a read-out.

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on Venezuela’s Maduro

The Russian leader also "confirmed his support for the Maduro government's policy aimed at protecting national interests and sovereignty in the face of growing external pressure," the statement added.

Caracas, for its part, said the leaders "reaffirmed the strategic, solid and growing nature of their bilateral relations."

It added that Putin had "reiterated that the channels of direct communication between the two nations remain permanently open and assured that Russia will continue to support Venezuela in its struggle to uphold its sovereignty, international law and peace throughout Latin America."

The U.S. military seized a Venezuelan oil tanker on Wednesday, with troops rappelling onto the tanker's deck from a helicopter and entering the ship with rifles raised.

Washington has accused Venezuela's leftist leader of leading a drug cartel, which he denies. Maduro has said the U.S. is seeking regime change because of Venezuela's vast stores of oil.

U.S. President Donald Trump has deployed warships within striking distance of Venezuela, and at least 87 people have been killed in at least 22 strikes on boats in the Eastern Pacific and the Caribbean Sea.

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