

Lindsey Graham proposes invading Venezuela to oust Maduro

Graham believes the threat of an invasion could check what he says is Cuban influence in the country.



A rally for Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó. *Edilzon Gamez/Getty Images*

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC), a close ally of President Donald Trump, suggested the president take a tough stance in dealing with the ongoing Venezuelan crisis: A US invasion similar to the one executed by Ronald Reagan in Grenada back in 1983.

“Trump said rightly, Maduro’s not the legitimate leader of Venezuela. The entire region supports the Trump approach, that Guaidó is the legitimate leader,” Graham said on *Fox News Sunday*. “I would do exactly what Reagan did. I would give Cuba the ultimatum to get out of Venezuela. If they don’t, I would let the Venezuelan military know, you’ve got to choose between democracy and Maduro.

And if you choose Maduro and Cuba, we're coming after you. This is in our backyard."



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.@LindseyGrahamSC says we should be willing to invade Venezuela as Reagan invaded Grenada back in the 80's #FNS #FoxNews

Venezuela is currently in the midst of a presidential crisis following a massive economic collapse. The US has recognized opposition leader Juan Guaidó, the head of the National Assembly, as the country's rightful president.

Guaidó declared himself president this past January, arguing that the 2018 election that put President Nicolás Maduro in the executive's chair was invalid, in part because members of the opposition were banned from running. As head of the National Assembly, Guaidó said he will serve as Venezuela's president until new elections can be held. But Maduro refuses to step aside.

Graham called on the United States to be ready to intervene militarily in Venezuela last week in a piece in the Wall Street Journal. There, as in his Fox interview, the senator argued Cuba is helping to prop up Maduro, and that the US should use its military to counter what Graham called the "Western Hemisphere version of Iran."

White House national security adviser John Bolton has said Cuba has at least 20,000 soldiers in Venezuela assisting Maduro; Cuban officials have called that figure outrageous, saying they have no troops in the country.

Graham is clearly disinclined to believe Cuba, and told McClatchy, "We're not occupying Venezuela, but if Maduro refuses to go and the Cubans keep using their military apparatus to prop him up, it is in our national security interest to do in Venezuela what Reagan did in Grenada."

The Grenada invasion occurred in 1983, following a violent power struggle within the small Caribbean country's Marxist government. The Reagan administration said the invasion was necessary to protect American citizens on the island; it initially sent in 2,000 troops, with the number eventually swelling to 6,000. Around 20 American troops were killed — though the regime was in fact overthrown within a matter of days.

Reagan later called the invasion an important check on communist influence, telling the American people “when the thugs tried to wrest control of Grenada, there were 30 Soviet advisers and hundreds of Cuban military and paramilitary forces on the island.”

Graham has not outlined how an invasion of Venezuela using Grenada as a template would work. In 1983, Grenada had a population of less than 100,000, and as Reagan noted, the island is roughly twice the size of Washington, D.C. Venezuela, on the other hand, has a population of a little over 28 million people, is larger than Texas, and has roughly 160,000 troops in its military.

In speaking with Fox, the senator did advise caution in another area of foreign policy, voicing misgivings about the new round of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, which the Trump administration might execute using a legal loophole to circumvent Congress.

“I’ve got a real problem with going back to do doing business as usual with Saudi Arabia. Jordan is a great ally; the UAE has been problematic in Yemen, but a good ally,” Graham said. “Saudi Arabia is a strategic ally, but the Crown Prince was, in my opinion, involved in the murder of Mr. Khashoggi. And he’s done a lot of other disruptive things.”



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At the same time, Graham also called for a greater presence of American troops in the Middle East, claiming increased troop presence would serve as a check on Iran while arguing against invading the country.

“I do support American troops going into the Mideast in larger numbers, to deter Iran,” Graham said. “President Trump is putting a lot of pressure on Iran. They’re trying to break our will, and this is an effort to deter Iranian aggression — not to invade Iran.”

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