FROM SHENZHEN TO CARACAS: HEGSETH RESTORES MILITARY TIES, KAST GOES TO BEIJING AND CHILE TAKES TO THE STREETS

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On Wednesday 18th, as US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth announced in Caracas the return of military cooperation with Venezuela, suspended since 2005, and hours later promised in Bogotá to 'hunt down and defeat' narco-terrorists, thousands of people marched through central Santiago de Chile against the 2027 Budget cuts, chanting 'Not one peso less'. Two scenes from the same continent: governments signing security agreements with Washington, and societies taking to the streets over the cost of living.

The rest of the week revolved around them: the APEC summit in Shenzhen, with the first-ever meeting of Donald Trump, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin; a Strait of Hormuz that Iran says it is closing 'day by day'; and a COP31 that ended without an agreement.

LATIN AMERICA: BASES, TARIFFS AND STREETS

Venezuela: military cooperation with the US and a dialogue with no election date. On the 18th Hegseth made a surprise visit to Caracas, the first by a Pentagon chief since the capture of Nicolás Maduro on 3 January, and announced with Delcy Rodríguez the resumption of technical-military cooperation, broken off in 2005 on Hugo Chávez's orders. Rodríguez said she hopes it will reach 'its best levels' in the face of 'common threats'; Hegseth praised her 'close cooperation' in stabilising the country (AP, CNN en Español). According to teleSUR, cited by La Diaria, the recent oil agreement was also discussed. On Monday 23rd the fourth round of dialogue between the caretaker government and the delegation of the 2015 National Assembly, led by Jorge Rodríguez and Dinorah Figuera, ended in Caracas: ten days of sessions and eight agreements, including changes on media, a consultation to reform the Law against Hatred and the management of state assets frozen abroad; but not a line on the new National Electoral Council (CNE) or on the date of the elections (CNN en Español, La Patilla). There are 1,343 applications to renew the Supreme Court, a step Marco Rubio places in mid-December.

On the 24th the IACHR called for independence and transparency in that selection and warned that the renewal must reverse political control of the judiciary. The fifth round is expected in the first weeks of December. Mechanism: the political calendar is set by the sequence Washington describes (Supreme Court, then CNE, then elections), and it is now accompanied by a military pact.

Source comparison (Venezuela). The basic facts are confirmed by AP, AFP and Al Jazeera: Hegseth signed in Caracas a defence cooperation document with Defence Minister Gustavo González López, according to his own post on X (reported by BioBioChile), and Rodríguez said it seeks training, operational equipment and access to technology for the Bolivarian National Armed Force (AFP). What changes depending on who is speaking is the assessment: Hegseth said Venezuela went from being the most aggressive regional threat to a compliant security partner, and thanked Rodríguez for helping rid the country of 'narco-terrorists' (AP, Al Jazeera). teleSUR, cited by La Diaria, stressed that the recent oil agreement was also discussed. Rodríguez had returned that morning from a tour of Arab countries and COP31 (AFP). The Colombian and Spanish press highlighted the image of Hegseth jogging in Fuerte Tiuna, the complex attacked on 3 January to capture Maduro. Still to be checked: the text of the document and the scope of the joint training and intelligence sharing that, according to Diario Primicia, Hegseth described.

Colombia: Hegseth, troops and an opposition on the streets. After Caracas, Hegseth landed in Bogotá on the afternoon of the 18th, met Defence Minister Jorge Mora and Foreign Minister Omar Bula, and handed over a C-130 Hercules aircraft donated by the US. Medellín will host the 'Shield of the Americas' meeting in 2027, a hemispheric alliance promoted by Trump (EFE, Infobae). Bula announced that the government of Abelardo de la Espriella, in power since 7 August, will seek Congress's approval for US military operations in the country (Publimetro); authorising foreign troops is a matter for the Senate, or the Council of State when it is in recess (La Silla Vacía). Meanwhile the Pacto Histórico, with Gustavo Petro now a former president, confirmed a national strike for the 19th against the tax reform despite the official announcement that VAT on basic goods would be scrapped, and called another mobilisation for the 24th against the 2027 budget of 634.9 trillion pesos (El Espectador, La Silla Vacía, Semana).

Cuba: threat of force and two languages. After Trump's statements of the 12th (that he would 'certainly consider' military action and wants to settle the Cuba issue before leaving office), Díaz-Canel said on the 22nd that he seeks a 'respectful' dialogue, without pressure and with respect for the island's political system (Canal Caribe, via América TeVé), and wrote on X that Cuba attacks and threatens no one but is preparing for that threat (CNN, via Quartz). According to NBC News, Rubio posted on X a call to those who want 'positive change' in Cuba for a 'discreet partnership with the CIA'. CNN reports that

Cuba has spent months preparing soldiers and civilian militias for a possible invasion. Havana activated 'wartime' structures in early November, and on the 23rd Díaz-Canel launched with them a 15-day national exercise against crime, which he blamed on 'the enemy' (CiberCuba, a Cuban exile outlet). Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez accused the US that day of imposing its power on the weak by lies, extortion and force (teleSUR, aligned source). A state is threatened with force and, at the same time, invited to make a deal; solidarity does not mean justifying the Cuban government, but it does mean naming that combination as coercion.

Source comparison (Cuba). Trump's statements of the 12th are his own and are reported by Al Jazeera, Politico and, from the British left, the Morning Star (13 November), which also recalls that the de facto oil blockade began in January, after Maduro's capture, and that an executive order declared Cuba an 'unusual and extraordinary' threat to US security and threatened tariffs on anyone supplying it with fuel. AP confirms the energy blockade since January and the military threats. Prensa Latina highlighted on the 25th and 26th the ten years since Fidel Castro's death and the Cuban demand for the right to live in peace and without a blockade (front-page headlines), and on the 22nd reported calls to the incoming US Congress to change its Cuba policy; it is a Cuban state agency, useful for understanding Havana's position but not a neutral source on the island's internal situation.

Mexico: a 'new era' with Beijing and tariffs in preparation. On Tuesday 17th Claudia Sheinbaum and Xi Jinping agreed to raise the relationship to a 'higher level', without signed agreements; Sheinbaum ruled out negotiating a free-trade agreement with China and said this will not affect relations with the US (Proceso, Estrella Digital). On Wednesday 18th she spoke for about 20 minutes with Trump in Shenzhen, with no concrete results: Trump arrived with the threat of doubling tariffs if the migrant caravans are not stopped, and with Stephen Miller newly appointed chief of staff. Sheinbaum says no caravan has reached the northern border since Trump returned to the presidency. On the 24th it was reported that Washington is preparing new tariffs on Mexico, China, the EU and other economies over their industrial subsidies, with no rate yet set for Mexico (El Imparcial). The USMCA review has been postponed to 2027 and Sheinbaum expects to see Trump in December.

Chile: Kast with Xi, the street against the Budget and the vote on Rabat. On Tuesday 17th, in Shenzhen, Kast met Xi Jinping for almost 45 minutes, their first meeting since he took office in March; they signed an economic and trade roadmap and a memorandum of understanding, and Kast invited Xi to visit Chile (Cooperativa, Reporte Minero). According to the South China Morning Post, cited by Emol, Kast told him that he represents 'the state, not a political faction', at a moment of tension over US pressure. Kast also welcomed the Trump–Xi–Putin trilateral meeting and called for an APEC of

'sovereign nations' (EFE). At home the picture is different. The Agenda Criteria poll of the 15th put his approval at 18% and disapproval at 72%, his lowest since taking office; the poll of the 22nd has them at 23% and 68%, with Justice Minister Fernando Rabat on 73% disapproval and Finance Minister Jorge Quiroz on 70%. On the 18th the Frente Común (CUT, Confech, Renace and residents' organisations) marched between Plaza Los Héroes and the UC's Casa Central against cuts to education, health, security and culture (EFE, Radio Universidad de Chile, France 24). The government denies that this is a budget of cuts: it says spending is rising and that it is reviewing more than 600 programmes. On Wednesday 25th Parliament approved it with a 1.7% rise in spending, and Minister Quiroz said 'cut' is not the right word; EFE notes that approval gives Kast a breather, with popularity below 20% in most polls. After the 18th came a week of protests (ANEF 'banderazo' on the 23rd, teachers' strike and march on the 24th, march against violence towards women on the 25th), and municipal workers and Fundación Integra staff are demonstrating on the 26th, residents on the 27th demanding the resignation of Housing Minister Iván Poduje (BioBioChile), and on Monday 30th the Chamber votes on the constitutional accusation against Rabat over the decrees reducing sentences for people convicted of sexual offences against minors (Pauta, El Desconcierto). A majority of the deputies present is needed (78 if all 155 vote); the accusation entered with 65 supporters and the Partido de la Gente has not made up its mind. The review committee also asked Kast and Rabat to clarify whether the President knew of and signed off those decrees.

Chile, from the left: the PC(AP)'s 'Fuera Kast' campaign. The Chilean Communist Party (Proletarian Action) has been pushing a recall referendum against Kast since October, via the platform fuerajosekast.cl; SolidarioGB publicised the campaign on 19 October. The site then spoke of more than 40,000 signatures and Eduardo Artés said on 5 November that they exceeded 50,000 (Diario La Región); Esquina Sur had reported on 15 October that the campaign stood below 1% of the target set by its promoters. In the sources consulted there are no new party statements between 16 and 25 November. The campaign's arguments (cuts of more than 793 billion pesos across 220 social programmes, tax cuts for big business and the 'Shield of the Americas' as a loss of sovereignty) are the party's, not verified facts.

Analysis: two tables in Chile too. A government aligned with Washington on security signs an economic and trade roadmap in Shenzhen with its main trading partner. And a government with approval between 18% and 23% faces at once an organised street (the 18th, the 27th, further days until December), a constitutional accusation with an uncertain outcome and a left-wing campaign calling for an exit the Constitution does not provide. Whether the left turns the discontent into a reform, an accusation or a strike depends on whether the Frente Común, the parliamentary opposition and the PC(AP) agree on a timetable, and for now they run in parallel; approval of the Budget on the 25th removes the Frente Común's main legislative target, but not the underlying

grievances, and the CUT has announced another day of action for the first week of December.

Ecuador. Decree 532 of 11 November keeps the 30-day state of exception in eight provinces, and on the 15th Noboa announced arms purchases from Italy and talks with South Korea to acquire ships (EFE, Teleamazonas). A meeting between Noboa and Hegseth at the Carondelet Palace was scheduled for Thursday 19th, the third stop of his tour (El Comercio).

MIDDLE EAST: HORMUZ, YEMEN AND GAZA

Hormuz: the strait that is closing 'day by day'. On the 24th the Iranian army commander, Amir Hatami, said the strait is closed to unauthorised traffic and must be closed 'ever more each day' until Tehran's seven conditions are met, which include lifting the naval blockade, releasing frozen funds and oil sanctions and ending the war on all fronts (CBS, AFP). Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said there will be no talks or action until then. Between the 22nd and the 24th, Iran's navy and the Revolutionary Guard claimed that several tankers hit mines, even under US escort; the JMIC centre said those claims were unconfirmed and that it recorded 114 transits through the strait with US assistance between the 19th and the 21st. UKMTO confirmed a fire aboard a vessel anchored off the Emirates on Monday 23rd. Trump said on Sunday 22nd that Iran launched more drones and missiles in the past week than in over a year, though all were shot down, and that US strikes could resume after the New Year; on Saturday 21st he had said he seeks a 'permanent' deal (CBS, Euronews). Qatar is trying to revive mediation: its prime minister saw Rubio in Washington on the 23rd. The US Treasury sanctioned two dozen people and entities in Iran's 'shadow banking' that day, and the rial fell by nearly 5% on the black market (AFP). Sources cited by CBS say the US and Israel are weighing a new attack; Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz claimed that Iran is developing chemical weapons (Iran denies it) and left open pre-emptive action, while Gadi Eisenkot said he sees no immediate threat. Who pays and who profits: Brent fell below $90, its lowest since late August and far from the summer peak near $120, and the IEA estimates that Gulf crude exports recovered to about 74% of their pre-war level (CBS); the US says more than 95% of ships pass without incident.

Source comparison (Hormuz). Iranian claims about tankers hitting mines are not new: the Revolutionary Guard has repeated them since October (Europa Press, EFE, AFP) and at times says the mines were laid by its own Navy. On 15 November it said a supertanker had sunk; on the 24th and 25th, that two or three tankers, some escorted by the US, suffered explosions and fires (Europa Press, La Tercera). Prensa Latina reports it on the 26th as an established fact; the JMIC did not confirm it, and we have found no independent verification of the damage. Trump claimed on the 24th that no Iranian ship

has got through the naval blockade (Daily Signal), and the US says more than 95% of vessels pass without incident; Iran says it will use 'all means' to break it (Reuters). Traffic indicators contradict each other: the JMIC counted 114 transits in three days, while an AND Magazine summary of the 25th describes traffic as still low. Tehran and Washington are working from different numbers for the same week.

Yemen and Saudi Arabia: the front that is rising. On the 24th an attack attributed to the Houthis hit a tower in Riyadh's financial district and left 11 injured, according to Saudi Civil Defence. The Saudi-led coalition ordered civilians to evacuate Hodeidah, and the Houthis threatened to attack the port of Jeddah and other Red Sea ports (CBS, AFP). Since July more than 1,600 people have died and more than 300,000 have been displaced in Yemen, according to UN data. The Houthi health ministry, an aligned source, attributes 1,421 civilian deaths to Saudi attacks since 2 September; the figure is unverified.

Gaza: a 'ceasefire' with targeted killings. Since Tuesday 24th, Israel has killed three senior Hamas officials, including Khaled Abu Nada, a Hamas-appointed deputy education minister, on the night of the 25th to 26th, the third consecutive night of air strikes, with at least nine dead (Reuters, Al Jazeera). Hamas says these killings violate the agreement and international law; Israel says it is targeting Hamas, although many civilians have also died. On the 21st a drone killed three people travelling in a food-aid delivery vehicle in Gaza City (Al Jazeera). Since the October 2025 ceasefire at least 1,600 Palestinians and five Israeli soldiers have been killed, according to each side's counts; Gaza's Health Ministry counts 1,679 up to the 24th and more than 74,700 in total. Hundreds of displaced people protested on the 21st near the 'yellow line' over the destruction of homes beyond that line.

Source comparison (Gaza). Prensa Latina headlines on the 26th that Israel seeks to keep 70% of Gaza uninhabited (aligned source). The 70% figure matches what independent media have reported: NPR calculated in July that Israel controlled about 70% of the territory, compared with about half at the start of the ceasefire, and in May Netanyahu said he had ordered the military to reach that percentage (Reuters, AFP); Reuters also reported that Israel moved the blocks marking the 'yellow line'. What we could not confirm in independent sources is the intention to keep that area uninhabited. The UN considers the figures of Gaza's Health Ministry reliable, although the ministry operates under Hamas authority (AFP).

Israel and Lebanon. Netanyahu remains caretaker prime minister and on the 23rd called for a unity government while Eisenkot tries to form a coalition (CBS). Israel occupies a strip of southern Lebanon that it has declared a 'security zone', and Lebanon counts more than 4,300 deaths since March (CBS, AFP).

CHINA–US–RUSSIA: SHENZHEN, WITHOUT BIG DEALS

What the 16 November bulletin treated as unconfirmed happened: on Thursday 19th Trump, Xi and Putin met in Shenzhen, all three together for the first time, for just over 80 minutes (PBS). The joint declaration, of about 250 words and published by the Kremlin, Xinhua and the White House, has four points: UN reform, more oil production, reining in the International Criminal Court and avoiding nuclear war; it promises dialogue to reduce nuclear risks without mentioning inspections or arsenals, and names neither Iran nor Ukraine (The Globe and Mail, RFE/RL, Al Jazeera). Trump said Xi agrees that Hormuz must stay open and that Iran cannot have nuclear weapons; we have not seen this confirmed by Beijing. Trump said the meeting was a '12' on a scale of zero to ten and left immediately; Putin ruled out direct negotiations with Ukraine after a Ukrainian attack on a bridge in Crimea; Xi called it 'positive, constructive and fruitful', according to Xinhua (aligned source, cited by RFE/RL). Earlier, Trump and Xi agreed to prepare an action plan for their relationship, with no change to tariffs (China Briefing), and APEC's 21 members adopted the Shenzhen Declaration by consensus, with an open split between the US and China over artificial intelligence governance. Analysts cited by CNBC and RFE/RL see few concrete results on trade, rare earths or technology. Five days later, on the 24th, Washington was preparing tariffs on China and 15 other economies over subsidies, and a New York jury convicted Huawei on 10 of 12 counts, including doing business with sanctioned countries such as Iran. The trade truce expires on 10 January 2027. For Latin America, Shenzhen was a showcase with two tables: Sheinbaum and Kast spoke with Xi, and Sheinbaum also with Trump.

UN AND CLIMATE: COP31 ENDS WITHOUT A DEAL

COP31 in Antalya, scheduled for 9 to 20 November, ended on Sunday 22nd, after two extra days, without an overall political agreement: references to fossil fuels, the key point of dispute, disappeared from the final drafts, and the EU rejected the text over that omission (EFE, AP). Brazil, as outgoing COP30 presidency, had presented on the 10th its roadmap for moving away from fossil fuels, outside the formal negotiation (WRI). India asked who had used up the world's carbon budget (Open Magazine). Funding for the most affected countries remains unresolved.

UNITED STATES: THE AP FIGURES

According to AP's count at 11:57 GMT on 26 November, in the House of Representatives the Democrats have 259 seats won and the Republicans 173; 3 seats are not shown in those results as won by either party, and those results do not say why or where they will go. The 'Majority reached' label next to the Democrats is not an AP call. In the Senate, at

11:56 GMT, AP shows the Democrats with a total of 56 (22 won and 34 continuing, including 2 who vote with them) and the Republicans with a total of 44 (13 won and 31 continuing); every Senate seat appears in one of the two rows. The 'Control reached' label next to the Democrats is not an AP call. These figures may have changed since. Trump linked the midterm result to the escalation with Iran and said voters 'did not understand' what they were voting on; Vice-President JD Vance attributed some of the Republican defeats to the war (CBS). Al Jazeera reports pressure on Hegseth to leave his post after the midterms.

BOX: WHAT IS VERIFIABLE AND WHAT IS NARRATIVE

Verified with independent sources: Hegseth's visit to Caracas, Bogotá and Quito and the signing in Caracas of a cooperation document with Venezuela's defence minister (AP, AFP, Al Jazeera, Hegseth himself on X); the eight agreements of the fourth round in Venezuela and the absence of agreement on the CNE; the 18 November march in Santiago; the approval of Chile's 2027 Budget on the 25th with a 1.7% rise in spending (EFE); the Criteria polls of the 15th and 22nd; the date of the vote on Rabat (30 November); the 19 November Trump–Xi–Putin meeting and its four-point declaration; the outcome of COP31; that Israel controls about 70% of Gaza (NPR, July; Reuters, May); Israeli air strikes in Gaza, with death tolls that vary by source.

Claims by one party, not independently verified: that several tankers hit mines, repeated by the Revolutionary Guard since October and reproduced as fact by Prensa Latina (the JMIC does not confirm it); that no Iranian ship has crossed the blockade and that Xi agrees Hormuz must stay open (Trump; Beijing has not confirmed it); that more than 95% of ships cross Hormuz without incident (US); that Iran is developing chemical weapons (Israel; Iran denies it); that the US and Israel are weighing a new attack (anonymous sources cited by CBS); that 1,421 civilians died in Saudi attacks in Yemen (Houthi ministry); that Israel wants to keep 70% of Gaza uninhabited (Prensa Latina); that Venezuela is now a compliant security partner (Hegseth's assessment); that Rubio called for a 'discreet partnership with the CIA' (NBC News; we have not seen the original post); that Cuba is preparing for an invasion (Havana and CNN); that Chile's 2027 Budget is a budget of cuts (CUT and Frente Común) or is not (government); that fuerajosekast.cl has more than 50,000 signatures (Eduardo Artés, PC(AP)); that Kast signed the 'Shield of the Americas' behind the people's back (PC(AP) campaign).

LEGAL AND CITIZENS' NOTE

Cuba. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against the political independence of a state. A public invitation to work with an intelligence agency

to change another state's system also falls within the principle of non-intervention. Anyone invoking these rules must apply them equally to Cuba, Iran or Venezuela.

Colombia and Venezuela. The presence of foreign troops in Colombia requires the Senate's approval, or that of the Council of State when it is in recess. In Venezuela, the cooperation document signed on the 18th with the defence minister does not appear to have been published in the sources consulted; ask for its text, not just the announcement.

Chile. The Constitution does not provide for a recall referendum on the President: the PC(AP) campaign requires a prior reform. A constitutional accusation against a minister is approved by a majority of the deputies present; if it succeeds, the minister is suspended until the Senate decides, and if the Senate approves it, the minister is removed and barred from public office for five years.

Hormuz. Iran invokes Article 51 of the UN Charter to justify its attacks against the US blockade, which it regards as aggression; the US defends the blockade as a response to the closure of the strait. The law of the sea recognises transit passage through international straits (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982), and both positions, the Iranian closure and the naval blockade, are legally disputed.

Gaza. Hamas and Israel accuse each other of violating the October 2025 agreement. Whether the victim is a civilian political official or a combatant is the central question of humanitarian law: ask each source to explain its criterion.

WHAT YOU CAN DO THIS WEEK

- Write to your MP and ask what position the British government takes on threats of force against Cuba, and whether it stands by what Keir Starmer said in April: that the UK would not join the US blockade of Hormuz.
- Ask your MP what climate-finance commitments the UK took to COP31 and what stance it took on the omission of fossil fuels from the final text.
- Follow the vote of 30 November in the Chilean Chamber on the accusation against Rabat and the residents' day of action on the 27th; share the information with the Chilean community in the UK.
- Donate to humanitarian organisations with a verifiable presence in Gaza and Yemen.
- If you read a war casualty figure, ask who issued it and who verified it.

CLOSING THESES

1. Pressure on Latin America is negotiated through visits and signatures: the Pentagon signs in Caracas, promises in Bogotá and threatens Cuba; the street answers in Santiago.
2. Shenzhen showed once again that the region negotiates at two tables, Washington and Beijing, with neither offering sovereignty on its own.
3. Useful solidarity means demanding verifiable facts, the texts of agreements and respect for the UN Charter for everyone, without acting as spokesperson for any state or any party.

SolidarioGB Editorial Team

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