



The Venezuelan Air Defense System, the Great Lie

Published on 04/01/2026

The so-called Venezuelan “dome” has been one of the pillars of the Chavista narrative for years. **Nicolás Maduro** has long claimed to have the most powerful air defense system in Latin America: a wall of radars, missiles, and fighters capable not only of protecting Caracas but even of “keeping out” the United States. [The American operation that led to his capture on Venezuelan territory](#), beyond the intelligence work that made it possible, however, presents the image of a radically different scenario.

The Venezuelan air defense system was a narrative construction serving a precise political message: the Bolivarian revolution would be militarily unassailable, sovereign in the skies, and capable of deterring any external intervention. Behind the rhetoric, however, that supposed defensive dome increasingly appears as a **discontinuous, degraded, and full of gaps** structure, in which the declared strength does not match the real operational capability.



The real military capabilities of Venezuela have proven to be more a political weapon of the regime than a truly effective military tool

Russia and China, the Suppliers of "Chavismo"

To understand the origin of the myth, one must go back to the mid-2000s, when Venezuela was still benefiting from oil revenues and Chavismo had the resources necessary to acquire advanced systems, using them also as tools of geopolitical positioning. In that context, **Hugo Chávez** chose to progressively break the axis with Washington and rely on new strategic partners: primarily Russia and China, with openings also towards other actors hostile to the United States.

This is the phase of acquiring Chinese radars JY-11B, JYL-1, and subsequent models, capable on paper of extending alert coverage to hundreds of kilometers, alongside contracts with Moscow for **Sukhoi-30** fighters, transport and attack helicopters, and large quantities of portable **Igla-S** missiles.

The real leap forward came in 2009, when a credit of about **2.2 billion dollars** was signed in Moscow, which included, in addition to ground vehicles, the core of medium and long-range air defense: the **S-300VM** and **Buk-M2E** systems, accompanied by older but modernized apparatuses, like the **Pechora**, intended to cover the lower layer.

More recently, at the end of 2025, China delivered the new **JY-26** radar to Venezuela as part of the modernization of air surveillance. However, **there are no public confirmations** of its full operability or the actual level of training of the personnel in charge.

On paper, the package is impressive: long-distance interception, layered defense, credible threat against incoming aircraft and munitions. But an air defense is not the sum of expensive systems: **it is an integrated architecture**. And it is precisely on maintenance, coordination, and interoperability that, over time, vulnerabilities have emerged.



The long-range air defense system S-300VM, purchased from Moscow in 2009 as part of the 2.2 billion dollar agreement

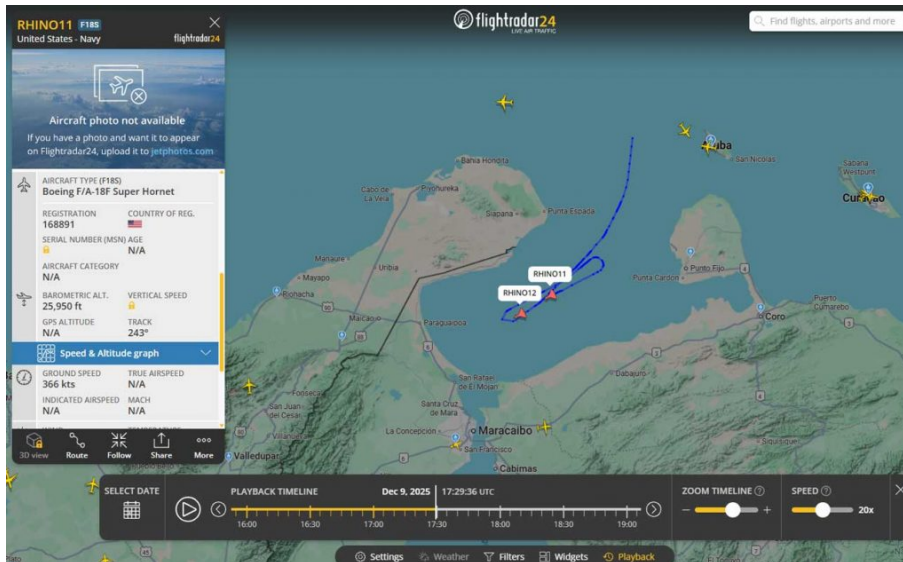
The Birth of CODAI

Since 2013, with the death of Chávez and the rise of Maduro, the economic crisis has become structural and has also affected the military apparatus. In this context, the **CODAI (Comando de Defensa Aeroespacial Integral)** was born, the body tasked with coordinating radars, missile batteries, and aviation in a single command and control architecture. In theory, the “brain” of the system, responsible for providing an integrated view of the airspace, distributing alerts, and guiding the response.

It is precisely here that the cracks become evident. **Numerous assets are turned off or out of service**; others survive thanks to the cannibalization of components, due to the chronic shortage of spare parts and intermittent technical support. Long-range systems, heavy and logistically complex, require dedicated means, adequate infrastructure, and constant maintenance: without investments and an efficient logistics chain, they end up becoming **symbols rather than deterrent tools**.

A [report by the Miami Strategic Intelligence Institute](#), dated June 16, 2025, estimates that **over 60% of Venezuelan radars and missile launchers are out of service** due to lack of

spare parts and technical support. An assessment corroborated both by the numerous drug trafficking flights crossing the country's airspace without being intercepted and by the events of **December 9, 2025**, when two American **F/A-18 Super Hornet** fighters allegedly conducted a raid penetrating an area considered an integral part of Venezuelan territory without generating any alert in Caracas.



December 9, 2025: two American F/A-18 Super Hornet fighters enter Venezuelan national territory

Personnel, Corruption, and Operational Degradation

Worsening the picture further is the crisis of human capital. **Radar operators, technicians, and missile specialists** require years of training and education: over time, the system has suffered a real hemorrhage of qualified personnel, between escapes abroad, political purges, continuous rotations, and replacements with less prepared figures. The **absence of complex exercises** and constant operational confrontation has contributed to a progressive doctrinal and tactical aging.

Over everything lies a structural factor: **corruption**. Not a marginal element, but a constant that has devoured maintenance funds, inflated contracts, favored the dispersion of components, and made command chains permeable. In some cases, radars and systems are deliberately inactive, turning air defense into a sieve serving other interests.



Satellite images show how the radar systems present at Fuerza Tiuna were largely inactive, folded in transport configurations or non-operational, and how the U.S. aviation subsequently neutralized them

Technological Incompatibility

Finally, perhaps the most critical issue: technological integration. A modern air defense lives on the ability of sensors to communicate in real-time with effectors. If the radar that detects the threat does not automatically communicate with the battery tasked with engaging it, the entire process slows down and becomes vulnerable.

In the Venezuelan case, the combination of **Chinese radars and Russian missile systems** generates severe operational problems. Many pieces of information do not travel on automated networks but must be transmitted with slow and easily disruptable procedures, exposed to interceptions, interference, and deception in a modern electronic warfare scenario. In summary: even when individual elements work, **the system as a whole does not function as such.**



The Chinese radar JY-26, delivered to Venezuela as part of the modernization of air surveillance, is emblematic of the system's structural problem: three countries, three languages, three different systems called to function as a single architecture

Conclusion

This is why the Venezuelan “dome,” although based on real acquisitions and systems that in ideal conditions can be formidable, today appears as a **fragile and fragmented air defense**, more useful for propaganda than for operational resilience.

The problem is not the total absence of means, but the deep gap between the image of an impenetrable wall and the reality of a degraded, disorganized, and poorly integrated network. **A gap that, at the moment of testing, has shown all its inconsistency.**