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Venezuelan and Guyanese Leaders Set for Historic Face-to-Face Meeting Over Essequibo Dispute

Planned neutral ground meeting in Saint Vincent & The Grenadines to Address Venezuela-Guyana border tensions

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The Essequibo region constitutes two-thirds of Guyana's total land area. By. MARTIN SILVER, AFP

The leaders of Venezuela and Guyana have agreed to meet on neutral ground this week, in an attempt to de-escalate an [escalating border dispute](#) between the two countries.

The face-to-face meeting, the first since Venezuela reignited simmering tensions over the long-disputed Essequibo region of Guyana, will take place in Saint Vincent & the Grenadines on Thursday December 14, under the auspices of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean

States (CELAC), of which the Vincentian Prime Minister currently sits as chair, as well as the Caribbean Community CARICOM, currently chaired by Dominican President Roosevelt Skerrit.

Upon the request of both parties, Dr. Gonsalves also invited Brazilian President “Lula” Da Silva to the summit.

Both President Irfaan Ali of Guyana and Nicolas Maduro of Venezuela have previously committed to maintaining the Caribbean as a “Zone of Peace”, something that regional and international bodies have become increasingly concerned might be under threat, as Venezuela moved swiftly last week to order the annexation of the Essequibo following a [referendum](#) in which voter turnout numbers were disputed by international figures.

Following Maduro’s declaration that state-owned entities “immediately” begin the exploitation of the Essequibo for minerals, oils, and gas, the United States conducted [joint military drills](#) in a show of support for Guyana, while Venezuela and Brazil began massing military assets along their respective borders with the disputed region.

Meanwhile, the United States — [which on Thursday conducted joint military flight drills with Guyana](#) — has reiterated its backing of the country in the escalating conflict with Venezuela over the Essequibo region, an area abundant in oil reserves. The region, claimed by both nations, has been under Guyanese administration since 1899 and constitutes two-thirds of Guyana's total land area.