Regime Change, Power Precedent, and the Collapse of Constraint in Global Politics

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Disclaimer: This essay is written from a strictly realist perspective on international relations. It describes the behavior of states based on power, strategic interest, and historical precedent, without moral judgment, advocacy, or endorsement of any action. References to military, economic, or political events are analytical, intended to illustrate patterns of state behavior, not to encourage violence or conflict. Any interpretations of specific countries or leaders are made solely within the context of geopolitical analysis and historical outcomes.

The contemporary international system has entered a phase in which restraint has eroded and precedent governs behavior. The forced removal of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela represents not a moral anomaly but a strategic act that clarifies the operating rules of global politics: power overrides sovereignty when the cost is acceptable. Once this threshold is crossed, all states must adjust accordingly. The United States, through repeated interventions and abandoned commitments, has demonstrated that promises, alliances, and norms are contingent tools rather than binding constraints.

The withdrawal from Afghanistan followed by continued interventionism in Syria and Venezuela illustrates a consistent pattern: engagement is maintained only when it serves strategic interest. The 2025 National Security Strategy's emphasis on "America First" does not signal a policy shift but a formal acknowledgment of long-standing behavior. From a realist perspective, the United States has reverted to its default condition as a hegemonic actor unconstrained by moral obligation. Leadership change does not alter this structure; it only modifies tactics.

Once regime change becomes normalized, it ceases to be exceptional. The Venezuelan case contributes to a cumulative precedent that reshapes calculations elsewhere. Russia's actions in Ukraine and China's position on Taiwan are consistent with this logic. States interpret intervention not through moral categories but through opportunity, risk, and precedent. Legal arguments, historical claims, and strategic depth are invoked as instruments to justify actions already determined by power calculations. China's position on Taiwan is shaped by unresolved civil conflict, strategic geography, and historical memory, including the "Century of Humiliation," during which external powers dictated outcomes without Chinese consent. Whether intervention occurs depends not on legitimacy but on the expected cost of resistance. Direct U.S. intervention would escalate the conflict to a level where costs may exceed strategic benefit, thereby constraining action regardless of rhetoric.

Iran's pursuit of deterrence and self-defense follows the same logic. Survival in a hostile environment necessitates capacity development. External opposition figures advocating regime change are relevant only insofar as they influence foreign intervention or internal balance of power. Their ideological positioning is secondary to their utility as leverage.

Historically, the United States has avoided high-cost engagements until outcomes were favorable. Entry into global conflicts has been calculated, not reactive. This pattern shapes contemporary perceptions: states understand that avoiding confrontation may allow U.S. dominance to persist, while collective resistance increases bargaining power. However, realism recognizes that coalitions form only when interests align and costs are shared. Moral outrage alone does not produce coordination. Military power remains decisive, but it is not absolute. No major power can be neutralized unilaterally. Outcomes depend on coalition depth, economic resilience, and strategic patience. Fear has historically preserved hierarchy; shifts occur when fear diminishes or costs of submission exceed costs of resistance.

International institutions function only when aligned with power distributions. The United Nations does not constrain major actors; it reflects their agreements. When consensus collapses, institutional relevance declines. Calls for systemic acceleration emerge from this fatigue—not as policy solutions, but as indicators of declining faith in reform. Japan's postwar economic trajectory illustrates structural dependency without ideological framing. Monetary policy, low yields, and capital flows bind Japan into a financial architecture that benefits U.S. liquidity while constraining Japanese autonomy. The assassination of Shinzo Abe altered domestic policy continuity but did not change structural constraints. States embedded in such systems face limited exit options without incurring high economic cost.

In conclusion, the current international order is not collapsing because norms failed; it is reverting to its underlying condition. States act to preserve power, reduce vulnerability, and exploit precedent. Regime change, sanctions, alliances, and interventions are tools, not moral statements. The United States operates according to this logic, as do China, Russia, Iran, and others. Stability will not emerge from appeals to values but from recalibrated power balances and credible deterrence. Realism does not predict peace or war—it explains why both remain permanent possibilities.