

A few days ago, the United States performed a swift operation in Venezuela, cutting its electrical power, bombing strategic facilities, and abducting Nicolás Maduro, all in the course of approximately three hours. As early as February 2025, the Trump administration accused Maduro of organizing criminal activity with the Tren de Aragua organization, a claim that contradicted US intelligence [1]. On March, Trump imposed 25% tariffs to all countries importing crude oil or petroleum products extracted, refined, or exported from Venezuela [2, 3]. In October, Trump explicitly authorized the CIA to carry out secret operations in Venezuela [4], and it seems Maduro was under constant surveillance by stealth drones prior to his abduction [5]. In November, the United States announced the «Southern Spear» mission, with numerous, unlawful attacks on Caribbean vessels which the US claims—with no evidence—were trafficking drugs [6, 7, 8]. During the same month, the US deployed the largest aircraft carrier to the Caribbean and near the coast of Venezuela [9] and effectively closed Venezuelan airspace [10]. So Maduro's abduction is nothing but the foreseeable culmination of relatively open and transparent events.

Discussions of these events, in my opinion, revolve too much around the personal figure of Maduro. Though not extensively, I have written about the blatant human rights violations under Maduro's regime elsewhere [11] and have been following Amnesty International's coverage of political violence and repression in the country. I do not wish to repeat myself nor dwell on all-too-known facts and sources, accepting not only that Maduro's regime was brutal and corrupt, but also that the 2024 elections were likely fraudulent and sustained only by unacceptable violence and use of force [12]. The question is whether these facts are relevant to explaining or justifying the US intervention.

I believe internal corruption or government violence do not justify exterior intervention, neither morally nor legally. The US actions are a direct violation of the UN Charter, which prohibits «threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state» [13]. The act unequivocally constitutes the Crime of Aggression as specified in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court [14]—though both the US and Venezuela withdrew from the statute [15, 16], obviously because neither could seriously claim to respect its clauses—.

If one accepts that domestic corruption or authoritarianism justifies regime change, invasion, or any other form of foreign aggression, one must then elaborate an impossible argument detailing how and who determines which governments are corrupt or not. Furthermore, one must readily accept and in fact endorse that similar actions are taken, effective immediately, against equally corrupt states, such as those of Saudi Arabia, Israel, or Serbia. In fact, as should be evident, accepting this principle would lead to such general chaos that human civilization

would become an impossible project.

There is, I grant, one sense in which Maduro's own political gravitas may be relevant to understanding the events hereby described. Namely, that had he not been a brutal oppressor, the reputational cost of overthrowing him would have been greater, perhaps sufficiently greater so as to discourage such direct operation. But this is speculative, and in general terms one should examine the overthrow of Maduro independently of the fact that he was a dictator.

Venezuela, as everyone knows, is rich in oil, and Donald Trump has declared US will run the country and tap into its oil reserves [17]. In fact, the shares of US oil companies are already on a rise [18]. Trump declared that Venezuela had «stolen» US oil through force. In fact, Venezuelan oil was nationalized in 1976—decades before Chávez came to power—with \$1 billion dollars being agreed as compensation for oil companies [19, 20]. Venezuela is also rich in coltan [21], coal, gold, and gas [22, 23], all of which are important resources.

Venezuela is not only an economic interest, but a geopolitical one. Securing Venezuelan oil means not only revenue for the United States but cutting Russian and Chinese access to it. Russia and Venezuela had long-standing and multi-millionaire oil deals [24]. Venezuela is the fourth-biggest recipient of loans from China—the US is the first—and prior to Maduro's abduction, most of Venezuelan oil was being sold to China and the US [25]. The Cuban government, which still has a powerful symbolic charge attached to it, strongly depended on Venezuelan oil [26], and Trump has stated that «Cuba is ready to fall» [27].

The openness with which the United States committed this illegal attack, as well as the transparency of its motives, should be unsurprising when viewed as nothing but a continuation of the long-standing Monroe doctrine. Henchmen and minions are rewarded, while anyone opposing US interests is more or less brutally destroyed. But however unsurprising, the record being set is preoccupying. The Trump administration is hardening its grip on the Western hemisphere, making dangerous military threats to Colombia [28] and Denmark [29].

It is worrisome to see how political discourse is being configured in social media. Polarization abounds in the political atmosphere: so-called «libertarians» in Argentina see any word of caution against US intervention as a defense of Maduro or his political system, while the ever-lasting right-wing deviations of socialist thought incomprehensibly argue in favor of Maduro's regime. Hopefully these are only loud but small segments of the population, and people can appreciate this preoccupying scenario with all its nuances and different hues.

Ultimately, to my view, the removal of Nicolás Maduro is nothing more than a calculated assertion of hemispheric dominance. Trump's administration keeps

signaling that the principles of non-intervention and self-determination are subordinate to US strategic interests. We cannot accept this revival of the Monroe Doctrine as a «necessary evil» in the overthrow of a dictator, as doing so implicitly consents to the erosion of the very legal frameworks designed to prevent global conflict. It is now commonplace to claim that international law is meaningless, with hegemon acting as they please in both hemispheres. But we must insist on international law, if only because it is all we have.

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/04/maduro-indictment-trump-trend-aragua> [2] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/imposing-tariffs-on-countries-importing-venezuelan-oil/> [3] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/3/24/trump-to-impose-25-percent-tariffs-on-countries-that-buy-oil-from-venezuela> [4] <https://www.bbc.com/mundo> [5] <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/03/world/americas/cia-venezuela-maduro.html> [6] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/14/us-announces-southern-spear-mission-as-forces-deploy-to-south-america> [7] <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwyr3q3xlqzo> [8] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/12/16/qa-us-military-operations-in-the-caribbean-pacific> [9] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/nov/12/trump-caribbean-warships-venezuela-conflict> [10] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/11/23/airlines-cancel-flights-to-venezuela-amid-us-military-buildup> [11] <https://slopezpereyra.github.io/2024-12-07-TorturaNi> [12] <https://www.amnistia.org/en/news/2024/08/27038/venezuela-international-organizations-condemn-the-high-levels-of-violence> [13] <https://legal.un.org/repertory/art2> [14] <https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2024-05/Rome-Statute-eng.pdf> [15] <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/12/12/venezuela-seeks-withdrawal-from-international-criminal-courts-rome-statute> [16] <https://www.icj.org/us-unsigned-of-icc-treaty-threatens-grave-consequences-for-international-law/> [17] <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkr4y717k7o> [18] <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/chevron-us-refiners-shares-surge-after-trumps-move-toward-venezuela-oil-2026-01-05/> [19] <https://www.bbc.com/news/live/ckgx05erygvt> [20] <https://www.vox.com/today-explained-newsletter/474027/venezuela-oil-industry-trump> [21] <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/nov/07/drug-trafficking-extortion-kidnapping-the-lawless-rush-for-rare-earth-minerals-in-venezuela> [22] <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/venezuelan-oil-industry-worlds-largest-reserves-decaying-infrastructure-2026-01-03/> [23] <https://www.minhidrocarburos.gob.ve/index.php/somos-gas/> [24] <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/venezuela-approves-15-year-extension-russia-linked-oil-joint-ventures-2025-11-20/> [25] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/05/venezuela-trump-attack-china-interests-analysis> [26] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/jan/05/us-capture-nicolas-maduro-anxiety-cuba> [27] <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/world/venezuela-cuba.html> [28] <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/05/espanol/america->

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