



# **The Attack on Venezuela: A Geopolitical Revolution**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The recent US military attack on Venezuela constitutes a turning point in the evolution of the international system. Contrary to claims that such actions are now “business as usual” in an anarchic world, the Americans’ unilateral and officially acknowledged use of military force for regime change without international authorization marks a profound erosion of the post-World War II international order. Unlike Cold War-era covert interventions, the Venezuelan case signals the breakdown of a key normative barrier separating indirect influence from overt coercion. This development undermines the legal and normative arguments employed by the West in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, revealing a structural similarity in strategic methodology irrespective of political intent or outcome. The attack on Venezuela is part of a wider American grand strategy centered on consolidating control over the Western hemisphere while reducing global engagement, and it will accelerate the transition toward a fragmented, multipolar, and increasingly anarchic international system.

## **A geopolitical revolution**

The American attack on Venezuela, at the specific geohistorical time in which it occurred, will accelerate a drastic mutation of the international system that has been going on for some time but is only now beginning to make itself apparent. This mutation may ultimately constitute a geopolitical revolution.

This action constitutes a dramatic escalation in both the disintegration of international law and the use of military force against governments of other states. During the Cold War, similar situations did not characterize American strategy. Of course, the United States repeatedly planned, organized, and executed the overthrow of foreign governments, but its secret services provided “discreet” assistance while domestic forces actually undertook the overthrow of the regimes. From Mossadegh's Iran to Sukarno's Indonesia to Allende's Chile, the American secret services contributed unofficially to the overthrow of governments. Their methods were “black ops”, not direct military intervention. The United States was very careful to avoid the use of direct military force when attempting to overthrow unfriendly regimes.

Not even the attack on Iraq in 2003 and subsequent overthrow of Saddam Hussein resembles what just occurred in Venezuela. This is because the overthrow of the Iraqi regime was preceded by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, which placed the US in a permanent state of conflict with that regime. The US was also in the midst of the chimerical “War on Terror”, in which the invasion of Iraq was justified by the purported existence in that country of weapons of mass destruction. Finally, the attack was within the context of an international action, the “alliance of the willing”, that viewed the Saddam regime as a danger to humanity.

The attack on Venezuela, in sharp contrast, was a direct, unilateral, official military action conducted by the United States, without any semblance of international legitimacy, against a foreign state.

The administration’s “legitimization” of Maduro’s kidnapping was a warrant for his arrest for criminal activities. When the greatest power on the planet, the guarantor of international legitimacy, does a thing like this, it sends the message that anyone with sufficient power can issue an arrest warrant for a foreign leader, based not on international but on national law, and arrest him using military means, including invasion. This represents a dramatic disintegration of the international order. As we will see below, it is likely that this action is part of a broader American geopolitical strategy.

There is the precedent of the American military intervention in Panama in 1989 and the arrest of Manuel Noriega, but there are crucial differences. One is Panama’s unique form of statehood. Panama was created in 1903 following an American intervention to prevent Colombia from having control of the Panama

Canal, which is crucial for global geopolitical balances and for American strategic interests. Panama was always a state of limited national sovereignty. Until 1977, control of the Panama Canal was directly held by the United States, with Panama essentially serving as part of the American geopolitical “critical infrastructure” zone around the Canal.

The most important difference, however, is the geohistorical context in which the two interventions occurred. The Panama case occurred at the advent of a new international system. An attempt was being made to implement a “New World Order”, in the historical terminology of President George H. W. Bush, with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the end of the Cold War. This new order was supposedly going to be based on international law and strengthened international legitimacy, and “criminal regimes” and dangerous revisionist forces had no place in it. Today, the geohistorical reality is completely different.

Until now, the core of the philosophy invoked to address the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been a defense of international law and the integrity of states. With the attack on Venezuela, the United States government has, as it were, “legitimized” the Russian attack on Ukraine *ex post facto*. Let no one bother to say the two interventions were different, because they were not. The only difference is how successful they were, at least in terms of their initial goals.

The Russians almost certainly did not seek to engage in a protracted war of attrition in Ukraine. Their object was to achieve quick and relatively bloodless regime change, much as they had done in Afghanistan in December 1979, when they overthrew President Hafizullah Amin. Just as the attack on Venezuela involved preparation by intelligence agencies and a rapid attack using special forces and heavy firepower, the initial Russian attack in Ukraine apparently aimed at a quick capture of the presidential palace by Spetsnaz and the rapid arrival of airborne troops to support the special forces. Those in turn were to be supported by mechanized and armored forces that would arrive to stabilize the outcome. The Russians appear to have attempted a modernized form of *Deep Battle*, the brainchild of the Greek Vladimir Triantafilov and father of Soviet military science, to achieve the desired result. The fact that they failed and were trapped in a prolonged war of attrition while the US achieved its immediate goals does not make their actions different. The successful attack on Venezuela and the failed attack on Ukraine are closely related.

In addition to the *ex post facto* “legitimization” of the Russian invasion of Ukraine within the current geopolitical reality, the attack on Venezuela – unlike the intervention in Kuwait in 1991, which aimed at a new international order – inaugurates a “new international disorder”. This is even more true as the action was taken by the US, which is supposed to be the guarantor of international legitimacy. In this historical period, when the entire West, and especially Western Europe, is attempting to build a new architecture of “containment” of Russia with international law as its basis, this action is extremely subversive.

The disintegration of the international order, as it emerged after the end of the Second World War, is unprecedented. The post-Cold War international order, with all its imperfections, injustices and double standards, nevertheless constituted an elementary organizational framework, and it is now in danger as a result of the actions of its former guarantor. A global vacuum has been created, unprecedented after the Second World War, but within a completely new international system.

In its new National Security Document, which was released a short time ago, the United States clearly states that it is implementing a renewed and strengthened Monroe Doctrine. However, the Monroe Doctrine involved not only the absolute sovereignty of the United States in the Western Hemisphere but also the removal of the United States from the rest of the world. This seems to be happening today, or may yet happen.

On the one hand, the US attack on Venezuela can be considered an act of geopolitical maximalism. It fundamentally violates international law and imposes a perception that the United States will act as it sees fit and without any restrictions to impose its sovereignty in the Western Hemisphere. On the other hand, it may also be an act of dramatic retreat. The “densification” of US dominance in the Western hemisphere may mean a dilution of its dominance in the rest of the world.

However, this should not be read as a policy of US weakness. On the contrary: it is probably part of a grand strategy that stems from the bowels of Anglo-Saxon geopolitical thought, as shaped by the triad of Mackinder, Spykman and Mahan. The core of American Anglo-Saxon thought and practice is to avoid the creation of a dominant power in Eurasia.

In the post-Cold War order of things and especially in the last decade, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the policy of “multiple containment” that the US attempted against Russia, China, Iran and others led to a coupling of the major Eurasian countries that was combined with a shift of economic and technological weight towards the East.

Looking at that state of affairs through the prism of traditional Anglo-Saxon geopolitical thought, the US must disentangle the Eurasian powers to allow the reactivation of competitive tendencies among them. But to do this, it must eliminate the primary factor that led them to band together – namely, American hegemony. Therefore, the US should withdraw (at least temporarily) to the safe fortress of the Western hemisphere, control it completely, and leave the Eurasian chessboard to descend to a Hobbesian state of all against all.

It can be argued that we are witnessing a kind of “Sovietization” of American strategy. Indeed, the interventions most closely related to the one in Venezuela are the Soviet imposition of regime change in Afghanistan and the Soviet armed interventions in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

By "Sovietization" we mean a domination of countries in the immediate geopolitical environment of the US and a more arbitrary use of force when they "threaten" to be placed outside American control, which roughly echoes the infamous Brezhnev Doctrine. This is in parallel with a reduction of US influence in other regions and a "respect" for the spheres of influence of other powers.

However, unlike the Soviet Union, the US is probably pursuing this strategy as an intermediate stage so the Eurasian powers, old and new, remember what divides them and the global chessboard can once again become a competitive field. This strategy includes a partial rapprochement with Russia and possibly with China, and may further include a policy of “considered distancing” from Europe, not to mention “considered conflict”.

In other words, we are seeing a movement toward a state-centered multipolar world that is divided into regions and spheres of influence. This system is not stable and static but anarchic and fluid. Relations between the actors are unclear, as there are not only old “imperial” powers on the scene but also new ones (probably the most ambitious of which is Turkey). They too will claim a role in the new Wild West of the international system.

We are witnessing a geopolitical revolution – that is, a dramatic change in the international system combined with an existing military revolution. This should concern us very seriously.

A caveat is necessary here. The behavior of international actors is influenced by a multitude of factors in chaotic and complex environments. Therefore, certainty of outcome is a conceit. It is not at all certain that even if this is indeed US strategy that they will be able to implement it. Absolute control over the Western hemisphere is by no means easy to achieve; nor is the disbanding of the Eurasian powers. Perhaps the only thing we can say for sure is we have entered a new period of world history and are in uncharted waters. The movements, choices and actions of states will be very cautious and ethnocentric, especially for countries – like Greece and Israel – that are in one of the most important regions of the planet for international development.

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