

FREE



THE US- VENEZUELA CRISIS EXPLAINED

A 360-DEGREE
UNDERSTANDING



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Context: What Has Happened Recently

Recently, the United States carried out a direct military operation inside Venezuela. During this operation, U.S. forces entered Venezuelan territory and took into custody the sitting Venezuelan President, Nicolás Maduro, and



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brought him to the United States to face criminal charges. This action was not authorised by the United Nations and was done unilaterally by the U.S. government. Because this involved the arrest of a serving head of state of a sovereign country through military force, the incident immediately drew global attention and controversy. To truly understand why this happened and why it matters so deeply, we need to examine the situation slowly and holistically.

1. Understanding the Event First: What Exactly Happened and Why It Shocked the World

First, the most shocking element of this event was that a sitting president of a sovereign country was taken into custody by another country's military. In international relations, heads of state usually enjoy immunity and are dealt with through diplomacy, sanctions, or international courts—not through direct military capture. This action broke with long-standing diplomatic conventions and immediately raised questions about whether international rules are still being respected.

Second, the operation was carried out inside Venezuelan territory, not in international waters or a third country. This meant a direct violation of territorial sovereignty, which is one of the most fundamental principles of the international system after World War II. Sovereignty means that no external power has the right to enter another country militarily without consent or international approval.

Third, the United States justified the action by calling it a law-enforcement and counter-narcotics operation rather than a war. It accused President Maduro of leading a criminal network involved in drug trafficking and organized crime. However, many countries questioned how a domestic criminal charge can justify military action against another sovereign state, especially when no international court mandate exists.

Fourth, the operation was conducted without United Nations Security Council authorization. Normally, when force is used internationally, it is either for self-defense or under UN approval. In this case, neither condition clearly applied. This is why many countries immediately described the action as illegal under international law and a violation of the UN Charter.

Fifth, the incident did not occur in isolation but in a world already facing multiple conflicts—Ukraine, Gaza, Red Sea tensions, and great-power rivalry. Because of this background, the U.S. action was seen not just as a Venezuela-specific move, but as part of a broader pattern where powerful states increasingly act unilaterally when institutions fail to constrain them.

Sixth, the capture of Maduro also created political uncertainty inside Venezuela. A sudden removal of a head of state through external force risks state instability, power struggles, and internal repression. For ordinary Venezuelans, already suffering from economic crisis, this event added fear and unpredictability rather than immediate relief.

Seventh, globally, the incident shocked even U.S. allies because it blurred the line between diplomacy, law enforcement, and warfare. Many countries feared that if such actions become normalized, then any powerful country could justify intervening militarily in weaker states by framing leaders as criminals.





Eighth, this event challenged the idea of a “rules-based international order.” For decades, global stability has rested on the belief that even powerful countries are constrained by rules. This incident raised a fundamental question: are rules still binding, or are they applied selectively based on power?

2. Going Back in Time: Why the US and Venezuela Were Already on a Collision Course

- 1. The Shift from Partners to Enemies under Hugo Chávez:** For most of the 20th century, the U.S. and Venezuela were actually very close partners, largely because Venezuela was a reliable "gas station" for America. Everything changed in 1999 when Hugo Chávez came to power; he wasn't just another politician, but a revolutionary who wanted to end what he called "U.S. imperialism" in Latin America. By trading a pro-American stance for a socialist, anti-U.S. platform, he began a "Bolivarian Revolution" that fundamentally shifted Venezuela's loyalty away from Washington and toward America's global rivals, setting the stage for decades of hostility.
- 2. The 2002 Coup Attempt and the Birth of Deep Distrust:** A massive turning point in this relationship happened in 2002, when a short-lived military coup briefly removed Chávez from power. Although he returned to the presidency 48 hours later, he remained convinced for the rest of his life that the United States government had secretly masterminded the plot to get rid of him. This event created a "poisoned well" of distrust; from that moment on, every problem in Venezuela was blamed on U.S. sabotage, and every move by the U.S. was seen by the Venezuelan government as a hidden attempt to steal their oil and overthrow their leaders.
- 3. The Nationalization of Oil and the Exit of U.S. Giants:** One of the most practical reasons for the collision was the battle over who gets to control the world's largest oil reserves. In 2007, Chávez moved to "nationalize" the oil industry, essentially telling major American companies like ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips that they had to hand over their projects to the Venezuelan state. When these companies were forced out, it didn't just hurt their profits; it turned the Venezuelan oil industry into a political tool for the government, which the U.S. saw as a direct threat to global energy security and a violation of international business rules.
- 4. Forging Alliances with U.S. Adversaries:** As the relationship with Washington soured, Venezuela began looking for new "big brothers" to protect it. This started with Hugo Chávez, who formed deep military and economic ties with Russia, China, and Iran back in the mid-2000s. When Maduro took over, he doubled down on these relationships. By allowing Russian nuclear-capable bombers to land on Venezuelan soil and inviting Iranian technicians to help with the country's oil and power infrastructure, Venezuela became a strategic "foothold" for America's enemies right in the U.S.'s own backyard. This was a red line for many in Washington, who felt that both the Chávez and Maduro governments were essentially acting as a gateway for hostile foreign powers to exert influence in the Western Hemisphere.
- 5. The Transition to Maduro and Economic Freefall:** When Nicolás Maduro took over after Chávez's death in 2013, the country's economy began to collapse under the weight of corruption and falling oil prices. Instead of trying to fix the relationship with the U.S., Maduro doubled down on the anti-American rhetoric, using it to distract from the fact that people were starving and inflation was out of control. The U.S. responded with the first major round of targeted sanctions, creating a "vicious cycle" where the U.S. squeezed the economy to force change, and Maduro used that squeeze to justify tightening his grip on power even further.





6. **The 2018 Election and the "Two Presidents" Crisis:** The collision course hit a peak in 2018 when Maduro claimed victory in an election that the U.S. and dozens of other countries called a total fraud. This led to a bizarre and dangerous situation where the U.S. officially recognized an opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, as the "true" president, while Maduro still sat in the palace with the support of the military. This essentially "de-legitimized" Maduro in the eyes of the U.S. legal system, making it much easier for American officials to eventually view him not as a world leader, but as a criminal "usurper" who had no right to be in power.
7. **The "Narco-State" Designation and Federal Indictments:** By 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice took the unprecedented step of formally indicting Maduro and his inner circle on charges of "narco-terrorism." They accused the Venezuelan leadership of running a drug cartel called the "Cartel of the Suns" to flood the U.S. with cocaine as a way to weaken American society. This changed the conflict from a political disagreement into a criminal manhunt; once the U.S. put a \$15 million bounty on his head, the path toward a physical capture like the one we saw in 2026 was already being paved in the American court system.
8. **The 2025 Military Escalation in the Caribbean:** In the months leading up to the 2026 capture, the U.S. significantly increased its military presence in the waters near Venezuela under the guise of "stopping drug shipments." Since late 2025, there were reports of the U.S. Navy sinking dozens of vessels and even carrying out airstrikes on northern Venezuelan ports used by smuggling gangs like Tren de Aragua. This was the "final approach" on the collision course—a period where the U.S. moved from economic pressure to active military engagement, making the eventual raid on Caracas the final, inevitable step in a conflict that had been building for over a quarter-century.

3. The Economic Collapse of Venezuela: How Internal Weakness Made External Intervention Easier

1. **The Bankruptcy of the "Oil Giant":** To understand how a superpower could just walk in, you have to look at the state of Venezuela's oil industry. Even though the country sits on the world's largest oil reserves, the government had lost the ability to turn that oil into actual money. Because of years of mismanagement and a lack of maintenance, production had dropped so much that the state was essentially cash-poor. This meant they didn't have the funds to maintain modern radar systems, keep their high-tech defence equipment running, or even provide enough fuel for their own fighter jets. Because the government couldn't use its underground wealth to fund a working defence, the country's borders were left vulnerable, making it much easier for a high-tech U.S. military team to enter and exit without being stopped.
2. **The "Hunger Crisis" within the Military:** While the top generals were kept happy with mansions and gold, the actual soldiers on the ground—the ones supposed to be guarding the president—were suffering from the same starvation as the rest of the country. By the time the U.S. forces arrived, many low-ranking troops had already deserted or were so malnourished and demoralized that they had no "will to fight" for a government that couldn't provide them with three meals a day. This meant that the U.S. didn't face a wall of motivated defenders, but a hollowed-out force that was more concerned with their own survival than protecting a leader who had failed them.





3. **The Loss of the "Best and Brightest":** The economic collapse forced over 7 million people to flee the country, and this "brain drain" included the very engineers, technicians, and strategists needed to run a functioning state. When the 2026 crisis hit, the government was essentially a "skeleton crew" of political loyalists who lacked the technical skills to manage a national emergency or coordinate a complex military response. This internal "hollowing out" of human talent meant that when the U.S. special forces moved in, there was no one left in the Venezuelan government smart or capable enough to outmanoeuvre them.
4. **A Nation in "Survival Mode":** Because hyperinflation had made the currency worthless and basic services like electricity and water were constantly failing, the Venezuelan public was in a state of total exhaustion. People were so focused on the daily struggle of finding food and medicine that the "social contract" between the people and the government had completely snapped. This was a huge advantage for the intervention, as the U.S. knew there wouldn't be a massive "popular uprising" to protect Maduro; the people were simply too tired and broken by the economic misery to fight for a regime that had already let their country fall into ruin.

4. The Narco-State Narrative: How Criminal Charges Became a Strategic Tool

1. **Changing the Label from President to "Kingpin":** For years, the U.S. government intentionally shifted its language to describe Maduro not as a head of state, but as the boss of the "Cartel of the Suns," a group of high-ranking Venezuelan officials accused of smuggling cocaine. By doing this, they effectively stripped him of his "presidential" status in the eyes of the American public and the legal system. This meant that when the military raid happened in 2026, it could be sold to the world as a "police arrest" of a wanted criminal rather than an act of war against a sovereign nation, which made the intervention much easier to justify at home.
2. **Using Domestic Law to Bypass International Rules:** One of the cleverest parts of this strategy was the use of U.S. federal indictments to give the military operation a "legal" cover. Normally, you can't just invade a country to change its government, but the U.S. argued that they were simply executing an arrest warrant issued by a court in New York for narco-terrorism. By framing the 2026 mission as a law-enforcement "extraction," the U.S. was able to argue that they didn't need permission from the United Nations, as they were "protecting American streets" from the poison of drugs supposedly sent by Maduro's regime.
3. **The "Self-Defense" Argument Against Fentanyl and Cocaine:** To make the 2026 intervention feel urgent, the U.S. tied Maduro directly to the drug crisis that has been killing thousands of Americans every year. They claimed that the Venezuelan government was partnering with violent gangs like the "Tren de Aragua" to weaponize the drug trade against the United States. This allowed the U.S. to claim they were acting in "anticipatory self-defense," telling the global community that the raid was necessary to stop a criminal organization from continuing to attack American citizens with illegal narcotics, effectively turning a social issue into a reason for a military strike.
4. **Setting a "Noriega-Style" Precedent for the Modern Era:** This narrative followed the exact "playbook" used in 1989 when the U.S. invaded Panama to arrest Manuel Noriega on drug charges. By reaching back to this historical example, the U.S. signalled that it views criminal activity by a leader as a complete cancellation of that leader's right to rule or be protected by international law. In 2026, this served as a powerful warning to other world leaders that if the U.S. decides to label you a "criminal" or a "narco-





terrorist," they no longer feel bound by the traditional rules of diplomacy and will use their military to bring you to a U.S. courtroom.

5. The Immediate Trigger: Why Military Action Happened Now

- 1. The Rejection of the "Exile Offer":** In late December 2025, just days before the raid, the U.S. reportedly gave Maduro a final opportunity to step down peacefully and go into exile in Turkey. Maduro not only rejected the offer but publicly mocked the threat on state television, telling his supporters there would be "no crazy war." This public defiance was the final "green light" for the U.S. leadership, who saw Maduro's refusal to negotiate as proof that he would never leave power voluntarily, making a forceful extraction the only remaining option.
- 2. The "Southern Spear" Military Buildup:** Starting in late 2025, the U.S. launched "Operation Southern Spear," moving a massive fleet including the USS Gerald R. Ford and 150 aircraft into the Caribbean. This wasn't just a show of force; it allowed the U.S. to "box in" the Venezuelan coast and gather precise intelligence on Maduro's daily habits and security flaws. By January 2026, the military felt they had a "perfect window" where they knew exactly where Maduro would be, allowing them to strike with surgical precision before he could escape to a safe house.
- 3. The "Non-International Armed Conflict" Declaration:** A critical legal trigger happened in October 2025 when the U.S. declared that it was in an "armed conflict" with drug cartels, labelling them as unlawful combatants. By tying Maduro directly to these cartels and designating his inner circle as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, the U.S. gave itself the legal authority to use military force rather than waiting for a slow police extradition. This re-classified the mission from a political dispute to a counter-terrorism operation, which allowed the Pentagon to launch the raid without needing a formal declaration of war from Congress.
- 4. The Escalation of Fatal Maritime Strikes:** In the months leading up to the capture, the U.S. Navy began a series of deadly strikes on vessels leaving Venezuela, claiming they were carrying cocaine and fentanyl. These strikes, which killed over a hundred people, were used to "test the waters" and see how the Venezuelan military would react to direct American fire. When Venezuela's defence systems failed to stop these smaller attacks, the U.S. realized that Maduro's military was too weak to prevent a larger raid on the capital, providing the tactical confidence needed to launch the final mission on January 3rd.
- 5. The Perfect "Weather Window" in Caracas:** Even after the order was given, the mission was actually delayed for four days because the U.S. military was waiting for specific cloud cover to mask their approach. On the night of January 2nd, the weather finally "broke," providing the darkness and visibility needed for specialized helicopters to fly low over the water and avoid radar detection. This tactical opening was the final physical trigger—once the weather cleared, the elite teams were given the immediate "go" signal to descend on Caracas and capture Maduro before the opportunity vanished.

6. International Law and the UN System: Why This Case Is So Controversial

- 1. Breaking the "No-Trespassing" Rule of Nations:** The biggest reason this is controversial is because of a rule in the UN Charter that says no country is allowed to use military force against another's land or independence. Think of it like a global "no-trespassing" sign; by flying helicopters into Caracas and bombing military targets to get to Maduro, the U.S. essentially tore that sign down. Most world leaders





are terrified because if the U.S. can just ignore this rule whenever they want, it makes every other country's borders feel much less safe.

2. **The Mystery of the Missing "Permission Slip":** Normally, if a country wants to use force, they need a "permission slip" from the United Nations Security Council to show the world agrees. In this case, the U.S. didn't even ask; they just went in on their own, which is called acting "unilaterally." Because there was no UN approval and Venezuela hadn't actually attacked the U.S. with an army, many experts say the raid was a "crime of aggression"—basically a fancy way of saying an illegal attack.
3. **The "Sovereign Immunity" Shield Was Ignored:** There is an old rule in international law that says you can't arrest a sitting president of another country because they have "immunity," which is like a legal shield. The U.S. argued that since they didn't recognize Maduro as the legal president anymore, his shield was gone. However, many other countries say that since he was still the one actually running the country and in control of the palace, the U.S. had no right to just decide his immunity didn't count anymore.
4. **Is Smuggling Drugs the Same as an Act of War?:** The U.S. tried to justify the raid by saying that Maduro's drug trafficking was an "armed attack" on American citizens, which gave them the right to strike back in self-defense. This is very controversial because, in the past, "self-defense" was only supposed to be used if a country's army actually attacked you with missiles or tanks. By calling drug smuggling a military attack, the U.S. is trying to change the definition of war, and many nations fear this will let powerful countries invade anyone they accuse of a crime.
5. **Setting a "Dangerous Precedent" for Others:** The biggest worry at the UN right now is the "precedent" this sets—meaning, if the U.S. does this today, what stops another country from doing it tomorrow? For example, China or Russia could now argue that they have the right to invade a neighbour and "arrest" its leader by calling them a criminal or a terrorist. The UN Secretary-General warned that this makes the law feel "optional," creating a world where "might makes right" and the rules only apply to the weak, not the strong.

7. The Global Response: A World Deeply Divided

1. **A "Big Win" for U.S. Allies and Supporters:** In places like Miami and even parts of Europe, many people celebrated, calling the raid a "victory for freedom." Some leaders praised the move, saying that Maduro was a "criminal dictator" who finally got what he deserved. For these supporters, the legal technicalities didn't matter as much as the fact that a leader they saw as a "narco-terrorist" was finally being brought to justice in an American courtroom.
2. **Anger and Fear from Russia and China:** On the other side, countries like Russia and China were absolutely furious, calling the raid an "act of aggression" and "international kidnapping." Russia's ambassador to the UN said the U.S. was acting like the "world's police" and warned that this move completely destroyed the idea of national sovereignty. These countries are worried that if the U.S. can just "snatch" a leader they don't like, then any country that disagrees with Washington could be next on the list.
3. **The "Scared and Shocked" Neighbours in Latin America:** Many of Venezuela's neighbours—like Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico—gave a very worried response, even if they didn't like Maduro. They issued a joint statement saying that "bombing a neighbour" is a line that should never be crossed, as it reminds them of the old days when the U.S. used to interfere in Latin American politics all the time. They





fear that this military action will bring chaos and violence to the whole region rather than a peaceful new beginning for the Venezuelan people.

4. **The European Union's "Confused" Middle Ground:** The European Union found itself in a very awkward spot; they were happy to see Maduro gone, but they were also uncomfortable with how it happened. Most EU leaders said that while Maduro "lacked legitimacy," the U.S. still should have followed international law and the UN Charter instead of acting alone. They are trying to support a democratic future for Venezuela while also politely telling the U.S. administration that "might does not make right" in the 21st century.

8. India's Position: A Very Careful Balancing Act

First, India's response to the US–Venezuela crisis was deliberately cautious and measured. Instead of reacting emotionally or ideologically, India issued a statement expressing deep concern over the developments and called for restraint, dialogue, and peaceful resolution. This language is significant because it reflects India's long-standing preference for diplomacy over force, without directly taking sides in conflicts involving major powers.

Second, India consciously avoided condemning the United States outright. This restraint is not accidental. Over the years, India and the U.S. have developed strong strategic, economic, and defense ties. Openly criticizing Washington on such a sensitive issue could have harmed broader bilateral interests, especially at a time when cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and technology sectors is important for India.

Third, at the same time, India did not endorse or justify the military action. By refraining from supporting the U.S. narrative of law enforcement or counter-narcotics operations, India subtly signaled its discomfort with unilateral military interventions. This reflects India's consistent support for the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention, even if expressed in diplomatic language rather than sharp criticism.

Fourth, another important aspect of India's position was its focus on humanitarian concerns. India emphasized the safety and well-being of the Venezuelan people and the need to prevent further suffering in a country already facing severe economic distress. This humanitarian framing allows India to maintain moral credibility without entering into geopolitical confrontation.

Fifth, India also kept in mind the safety of Indian nationals and diplomatic staff in Venezuela and the wider region. In situations of instability, India's immediate priority is often consular protection rather than political positioning. This practical consideration partly explains the measured tone of India's response.

Sixth, India's stance reflects its broader foreign policy principle of strategic autonomy. India seeks to maintain working relations with multiple power centers — the U.S., Russia, Latin America, and the Global South — without becoming aligned too closely with any single bloc. A strongly partisan position on Venezuela would have undermined this carefully maintained balance.

9. The Bigger Picture: Oil, Power, and the Global Economy

1. **The Quest for the "Oil Crown":** While the U.S. says this was about catching a criminal, many people believe it was really about the 300 billion barrels of oil sitting under Venezuelan soil. Venezuela has the





world's largest proven oil reserves—even more than Saudi Arabia. By taking control, the U.S. ensures that this massive "energy prize" isn't controlled by an enemy, but by American companies who can now invest billions to fix the broken pipes and get the oil flowing again.

2. **Weakening the "Anti-U.S." Team:** For years, Venezuela was a "safe haven" and a piggy bank for countries that don't get along with America, like Russia, Iran, and China. By removing Maduro, the U.S. has effectively kicked these rivals out of the Western Hemisphere. This isn't just about one country; it's about making sure that no hostile foreign power has a "parking spot" for their ships or spies right next door to the United States.
3. **Will Gas Prices Go Down?:** In the short term, world oil prices didn't jump as high as people feared because Venezuela was already producing very little oil due to its internal collapse. However, in the long term, if the U.S. successfully restarts Venezuela's oil industry, it could flood the market with cheap energy. This would be great for your wallet at the gas station, but it could make other oil-rich countries very nervous as their own profits start to drop.
4. **A Message to Global Markets:** This raid sent a massive shockwave through the world's stock markets, especially for companies dealing in gold and energy. It reminded investors that "geopolitical risk" is back—meaning a war or a raid can happen at any moment and change the value of money overnight. It tells the world that the U.S. is willing to use its military to protect its economic interests, making every global business deal feel a bit more "political" than it used to be.

10. The Final Verdict: What This Tells Us About the World Order

1. **The "Might Makes Right" Era:** This crisis tells us that the old "rules-based order" created after World War II—where everyone is supposed to follow the same laws—is under extreme pressure. If a powerful country can just label someone a criminal and invade their home, then the law only exists if you have the guns to back it up. It suggests we are entering a tougher, more "muscular" era of history where strength is more important than signatures on a treaty.
2. **The Ultimate Test for the UN:** The way this ends will be the final test for the United Nations. If the UN can't do anything except "express concern" while a member country is invaded and its leader taken, people will start to ask if we even need the UN anymore. This crisis is a mirror reflecting a world where international organizations are losing their power to stop the "big players" from fighting.
3. **A Crossroads for Humanity:** Ultimately, this crisis leaves us with a big question: Do we want a world where countries respect each other's borders, or a world where the strongest nations decide who gets to lead? The way this ends will tell us if we are moving toward a world of many equal powers or a world where one side calls all the shots. It's a "new dawn" for some, but a very scary sunset for the idea of global cooperation.
4. **The Final Thought: A Test for the Future-** Ultimately, the way this crisis ends will be the ultimate "reveal" for the 21st century. It will tell us once and for all what kind of world we are actually living in: are we in a **unipolar world** where one superpower can still set the rules for everyone else? Or are we in a **multipolar world** where power is shared and even the strongest nations are held back by international law? The answer to that question will define the global order for decades to come.

