

The Capture of Venezuela's President, Greenland Security and Airstrikes against Iran: A New World Order?

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On 3 January 2026, the United States deployed military strikes in Venezuela and kidnapped President Nicolás Maduro Moros and his wife to sit trial in New York for drugs charges constituting a threat to American national security. If the socialist government is replaced, there is potential to reap tantamount oil supply if the deteriorated energy sector is revived. Regime changes to suit American interests were debatably evident in Iraq and Libya that has resulted in stark opposition to respect the rule of non-intervention. Fighting terrorism since the 9/11 attacks has also been part of America's national interests. Moreover, the Trump administration has declared that Greenland should be part of America that has been disputed by Denmark and European allies. The liberal international order is under threat with international force from powerful states replacing international law. This is evident with America in Venezuela, Russia with Ukraine, China with Taiwan, and America-Israel with Iran. These contexts have circumvented authorisation from the United Nations Security Council. The Security Council is the highest legitimate authority to apply sanctions and contentiously respect self-defence of states and/or entities sponsored by states seriously threatening or encroaching international security. The regimes of multilateral institutions still matter in a realist international political system.

Keywords: United States, Venezuela, Greenland, liberal international order, relative gain, realism, international law

Introduction

The United States has held interests in South American energy infrastructure over the past few decades. However, its interest dwindled in Venezuela since Hugo Chávez's presidency and the alleged narco-terrorist regime of Nicolás Maduro Moros. Despite significantly depleting oil infrastructure, Venezuela holds the highest estimated oil reserves in the world at approximately 303 billion barrels. If heavy money and time is reinvested in the Venezuelan oil sector, the profits could be tantamount for Venezuela, oil companies, and the United States. The Trump administration has been negotiating for the removal of Maduro in Venezuela for several months to change the socialist regime to better fight narco-terrorism that has infiltrated heavy drug, illegal migrant, and gang supply in America. On 3 January 2026, America conducted airstrikes on Caracas and kidnapped Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, and transported them to New York to face multiple drugs felonies.

During the Cold War, the war on drugs and communism was a Republican strategy. However, the war on terror from 2001 conflated threats to national security and the justification on the right to self-defence with democratisation and regime change heading swiftly toward the Middle East. Although the use of force is illegal

under international law, the inherent right to self-defence is open to interpretation at the dismay of international lawyers. The highest legitimate authority for this is within the United Nations Security Council and as a Permanent Member of the Council, the United States is aware of this. This is why America consulted the Security Council immediately after the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks for a legitimate intervention in Afghanistan where the Taliban were harbouring al-Qaeda. Moreover, America and European allies attained some legitimacy to install a no-fly zone and protect civilian lives in Libya in 2011, but there was no consent fulfilled when America invaded Iraq in March 2003. If America has been in negotiation with Venezuela concerning narco-terrorism, then this matter could be taken to the United Nations Security Council as a threat to international peace and security. The United States should have better consulted the Security Council to opt for Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (1945: Chapter VII “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, and Acts of Aggression”) approval for retaliation. Even if permitted, suitable sanctions against the Maduro regime should have been exhausted—including sanctions and aviation embargoes—prior to military intervention. The actions of the United States regarding Venezuela and intentions to purchase mineral-rich Greenland for Arctic security reasons to deter Russian military and Chinese economic influence have revived realism over the liberal international order.

This essay is split into several parts. The initial section briefly covers America’s war on drugs, narco-terrorism, and communism during the Cold War era that is explained with the realist theory of international relations. The subsequent section focuses on the international rules-based order and regime theory that derived from the beginning of the post-Cold War era. This was primarily influenced from the United States to encourage post-communist states toward liberal democracies. This is followed by post-9/11 interventions that did and did not consult the United Nations Security Council for permission. These incursions include Afghanistan and Iraq and then alleged regime change in Libya that held repercussions for intervention in Syria. The main section covers the recent airstrikes and kidnapping of Maduro and United States (US) intentions of regime change without consulting the United Nations Security Council that received immediate criticism from members of the Security Council. At the close of this section, a brief overview of America’s intentions to purchase Greenland from the Kingdom of Denmark (arising from the Arctic security dilemma with Russia and China) and the disagreement with Europe is provided. With the additional example of US-Israel airstrikes against Iran without consulting the United Nations Security Council, it will be concluded that the proposed relative gains desired from the United States have attempted to resurrect the Monroe Doctrine that is forming a new *realist* world order at the demise of the international rules-based order.

Realism During the Cold War

This section focuses on a very brief overview of realism, which is followed by the role of the United States during the Cold War and particularly Washington’s focus on combating communism, the war on drugs and narco-terrorism.

The theory of realism can be explained with statism, survival, and self-help that is framed within the idea of an anarchical world that has no competent authority to tame the behaviour of states led by lust-seeking leaders. This pessimistic perspective of human nature, the competitiveness of states, uncertainty of other state’s policies and actions attempt to manage chaos in the global anarchical political system (Morkevičius, 2018, p. 17). Classical realism undertakes this pessimistic perspective that orientates selfish and non-benevolent interests as

principal state behaviour to deal with anticipated threats, aggression, and fear (Kirshner, 2015). An Athenian general named Thucydides elaborated on the pessimistic perspective of human nature that leaves little or no room for morality. In the Melian Dialogue, Thucydides covers the Peloponnesian War in Ancient Greece between the Delian League led by Athens and the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta (Singh, 2023, p. 8). There was one Greek island unconquered that held historical and colonial ties with Sparta. This was Melos. The Athenians feared appearing weak in the dialogue with the pleading neutral and independent Melians and thus the island was conquered because “the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (Donnelly, 2000, p. 23). Although Thucydides was against power politics, he understood the human nature of security competition and power politics that equate to the might of superior states conquering other states to survive and retain a strong state.

Other classical realists identified warmongering power politics at the expense of diplomacy. The work of Hobbes (1651) on the state of nature suggested that all humans are atavistic and thus fight each other due to the fear of neighbours. This creates a security dilemma, which is why governments endorse laws and pacts to escape the security relations of fear and uncertainty of other states increasing their military capacity and technology (Hobbes, 1651). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli (1985) stressed that rulers must maintain their power by waging war and seeking political gain with the strength of a lion and cunningness of a fox to manage fragmented diplomacy in an anarchical world. As part of political realism, Morgenthau (1948) contended that politics is part of human nature and governed by objective; the national interest is driven by the lust for power; power interests are global and not fixed; political action carries moral implications; states, universal morality, and laws are separate entities; and the global political arena is autonomous. States are unitary rational actors in international relations. Behaviour and action are based on enriching the greatest power. Therefore, a means relates to an end, but morality, ethics, and law should be respected due to the caution of justifying political goals.

Under a defensive neorealist position, states have motives to pursue their national interests when competing with rival states for survival within an anarchical world (Waltz, 1979). This includes enhancing military capacity and capability and increasing technological outputs. To deal with anarchy, investing in a state with a strong military, weaponry and potentially nuclear capability functions as deterrence for war. Defensive neorealism explains the bipolar system of great power rivalry between the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War that resulted in enhancing military power, nuclear capability, the arms race, space race, and proxy wars against communist and liberal regimes because it was the only form of deterring a direct war in an anarchical world. Offensive realists, such as Mearsheimer (2014, pp. 57-60), perceive power as relational to measure power on material outcomes and capabilities. The material structures in global politics naturally create “security competition” between great powers (Hyde-Price, 2013, p. 22). The state is placed first and scepticism rests on trying to do moral good with promoting human rights or advocating democratic peace because it can hinder the national security interest.

In sum, realism can be explained with the example of the world constituting a zoo that replicates a legitimate authority like the United Nations that is unable to control animal behaviour (of states) due to power imbalances. This imbalance results in states competing, instead of cooperating, ensuring the survival of the state by enhancing its capabilities. This pessimistic view of human nature, calculations of relative gain (over rival states), competitiveness, state egoism, and the sovereign inequality of states fight for survival in the anarchical global system (Donnelly, 2000, pp. 10-11). Now that some of the many metatypes of realist theory have been briefly

discussed, the Cold War dynamics resting on an ideological struggle between liberalism and communism causing proxy warfare will be covered.

Although the United States and their allies (which included the Soviet Union) defeated the Axis powers during World War II, both superpowers drifted apart during the Cold War (1947-1991). This was due to differences in political and economic ideology which was namely based on liberal democracy and communism. Cooperation was undertaken cautiously and the rivalry intensified the arms race, space race, nuclear capability, and diplomatic isolation. America was opposed to communism, and many proxy wars were fought by liberal and communist powers that involved the alliances of the anti-Soviet North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and pro-Soviet Warsaw Pact.

An example of cautious cooperation, diplomatic isolation, and confrontation between both great powers during the Cold War rests on the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. In April 1961, the United States-led Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and approximately 1,500 exiled Cubans intervened in communist Cuba with the Bay of Pigs invasion that failed to overthrow Fidel Castro (Campbell, 2008, p. 308). The forces were outnumbered by Cuban troops and anticipated aerial support from United States President John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not arrive. Castro had cemented strong diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union since 1959 (Rubinstein, 1972, p. 422). He rightly believed that the United States would attempt to invade Cuba once more to potentially force regime change with a pro-US government as Castro was seen as a threat to US interests, held influence within the region and communism was to be deterred from Latin America. The United States deployed missiles in Italy and Turkey that posed a threat to the Soviet Union. In retaliation, Soviet Premier, Nikitita Khrushchev, and Castro mutually agreed for Soviet nuclear missiles to be placed in Cuba to discourage potential United States-led invasions. In October 1962, American intelligence located these missile sites with U-2 cameras that resulted in 13 days of heated escalation and diplomatic efforts to avert a nuclear war (Murphy, Jr., 2015, p. 151).

After this crisis, both the United States and Soviet Union acknowledged that better communication, dialogue, and negotiation were needed to avert the intensity of military rivalry, confrontation, and nuclear conflict. This strategy was referred to as *détente* to increase diplomatic efforts to foster cooperation and reduce tensions between both superpowers. Under the Nixon administration, *détente* was encouraged by the Soviet Union for international stability. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) I (1972) was signed to reduce nuclear weapons to control arms and promote cooperation between both superpowers (Casey-Maslen, 2021, pp. 129-130). *Détente* also materialised in 1975 with the Helsinki Accords from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe that promoted human rights and economic and cultural relations.

America's anti-communism resulted in military incursions to defeat communism that undermined *détente*. One of many examples is the War in Vietnam where America supported South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam) from 1965-1973 to protect Laos and Cambodia and weaken North Vietnam (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam), which was militarily and diplomatically supported by the Soviet Union and China (Perkins, 2013, p. 543). Although Morgenthau's political realism advocated the advancement of national interests with calculated and strategic considerations for foreign policy, he stressed that nation-building and other policies in South Vietnam were not ethically viable (Rafshoon, 2002). Similarly, Waltz (1979) and Humphreys (2013) criticised American liberal-democratic policy in Vietnam due to over-extending ideology. America did fail with its intervention in Vietnam and by 1975, South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia lost the War and became communist.

A similar example of proxy warfare between both great powers during the Cold War is Afghanistan. On 27-28 April 1978, Hafizullah Amin of the Afghan People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) ordered the violent Saur Revolution that forcibly replaced Mohammad Daud Khan, and the new socialist government was led by Nur Muhammad Taraki (Marwat, 1997, p. 355; Singh, 2020, p. 101). However, Amin arranged for the assassination of Taraki in September 1979 and Amin entered discussions with America. The Soviet Union wanted to eradicate the threat of any United States influence close to their southern border. Therefore, on 24 December 1979, Leonid Brezhnev deployed Soviet armed forces to invade Afghanistan and Amin was killed and replaced with Babrak Karmal, a pro-Soviet leader. Islamic minorities rebelled against the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.

On 28 December 1979, the United States President, Jimmy Earl Carter Jr., approved the Central Intelligence Agency to purchase weapons to support Afghan resistance combatants, which included the Mujahideen, to weaken the Soviets as deterrence, averting their intervention elsewhere (Sprague, 2024, p. 27). The Mujahideen were supported by the Central Intelligence Agency with covert operations, funding, training, and military supplies to counter Soviet influence, contain communism, and support anti-communist resistance groups globally. Guerrilla training occurred across the border in Pakistan that also supported the Mujahideen. The Geneva Accords in 1988 resulted in the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Mikhail Gorbachev in 1989 "to resolve the Afghan conflict" (Eliot, 1988, pp. 1, 5). The decade-long intervention did not necessarily economically drain the Soviet Union because natural gas was exported from Kabul to fund the entirety of the war, but it ideologically undermined the strength of the Soviet Union and desire to continue accessing Afghan raw materials (Eliot, 1988, p. 6). This marked the decline of détente that restored the arms race and America's-led boycott of the Moscow Olympics in 1980 under United States Democrat President Carter resulting in over 60 countries participating in the prohibition of the games.

During this period, the United States President, Ronald Wilson Reagan (1982), coveted "a crusade for freedom" against communism and determined that the Soviet Union characterised an empire of "evil" due to its foreign policy and disregard for restraint. Reagan's "democratic peace" premise asserted that authoritarianism influences war. This was based on Woodrow Wilson's (1914) Points 1 and 3 in the Fourteen Points Speech focusing on diplomacy and removing economic barriers to develop stronger trade relations with democratic states. As Arkes (1986) postulated, the quest of liberal states was presented with a "same" moral universe that incorporates overseas democratic elections.

For instance, in the 1980s, Reagan ordered armed and paramilitary activities in Nicaragua and mined its harbours. Without full authorisation from the United States Senate, Reagan supported the Contras rebellion with \$100 million to take over the Marxist Sandinista regime (Burns, 1987, p. 61). Consequently, Nicaragua presented a case against the United States to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). In *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986), the International Court of Justice ruled that America abused international law for its support of the rebellion and mining activity and thus recommended reparations to be paid for damages caused. Therefore, the respect for state sovereignty under Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and the exclusion of threatening or using force to pursue international relations was mentioned and preserved in the judgement.

During the Cold War, the war on drugs was pursued by America with different approaches. Ronald Reagan's initial term influenced drug interdiction and enforcement measures as part of punitive measures to replace Richard Milhous Nixon's treatment and prevention approach (Coombs & Ziedonis, 1995, p. 122). The need for this change in policy was shaped from societal outrage on drug use, which notably included the crack cocaine

epidemic throughout the 1980s. National legislation became part of the Reagan administration's motives to curtail the drug problem. This included the 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act that endorsed compulsory minimum sentences for narcotics offences targeting crack cocaine harshly with five-year prison sentences for five grams (Coombs & Ziedonis, 1995, p. ix). Rather than treating and preventing drug addiction with public health initiatives in deprived and low-economically developed neighbourhoods, Lady Nancy Reagan campaigned rigorously with "Just Say No" that was aimed at children (Benze, Jr., 2005, p. 211). Racial disparities soured with the mass incarceration of non-violent drug offences.

In sum, the Cold War comprised of two rival superpowers and their allies fighting for ideological, economic, militaristic, and technological reasons. This can be highlighted with the number of proxy wars to either support or repel communism and/or liberalism; increase on the military and its weaponry capacity (including nuclear arsenals); and the space race. The competition between the United States and Soviet Union was part of a security dilemma and lack of diplomatic dialogue between both powers due to suspicion and a lack of trust in an anarchic world. As postulated by Waltz (1979, p. 93), it was the balance of power axis under a defensive neorealist explanation that prevented a direct third world war due to the deterrence factor arising from military, technological, and nuclear capability to survive. During this period, internal problems such as drugs in America and economic stagnation and calls for democratic reform in the Soviet Union endured.

The Spread of Liberal Democracies During the Post-Cold War Era

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was followed by the signature of the Commonwealth of Independent States. As the Soviet Union was disintegrating, the independence of Lithuania and subsequently 14 additional states followed that witnessed the fall of the Iron Curtain (Singh, 2023, pp. 72-73). The bipolar axis of great powers and deterrence within an anarchical world had now diminished and the balance of power theory (or what is referred to as defensive neorealism) became obsolete and the United States attained the status as the sole global hegemon. After the demise of communism throughout Eurasia and the Balkans, the Warsaw Pact had fallen, and NATO began encircling Russia with its enlargement strategy that included post-socialist satellite states (Nanda, 2001, p. 28).

To eradicate the threat of nuclear weapons, the United States encouraged the indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) (1968) that promoted the use of nuclear energy and averted the dissemination of nuclear arsenals. On 5 December 1994, in Budapest, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that would surrender their nuclear weapons in exchange for American, British, French, Chinese, and Russian security guarantees (Adams, 2024). After the NPT during the demise of communism, the United States promoted an open global economy to reduce nuclear proliferation for global peace (Mearsheimer, 2018, p. viii). Hence, democracy promotion, economic liberalisation, and further multilateral international institutions with United States support were also encouraged (McKeil, 2022, p. 2).

To retain its global hegemonic position and ensure that communism would not redevelop to rival the United States, America had the capacity and a lesser threat from Russia to champion a "liberal hegemonic order" (or what may be referred to as liberalist foreign policy) to revamp states into additional liberal democracies to preserve the international order (Doyle, 1986, p. 1161). The United Nations also sponsored the United States liberal way by endorsing interim administrations over war-torn states in the late 1990s. In Kosovo and East Timor, the United Nations adopted extraordinary law-making powers for the United Nations Special Representative of

the Secretary-General (SRSG) and peacekeeping forces to oversee transparent, free, and fair elections, thus striving for a path toward democracy (Strohmeier, 2001). America created a hegemonic order, encouraged a stabilised international economy and shaped international financial institutions, advocated cooperation (including in the United Nations), progress, international law, spread the postwar order to Western Europe and Japan and fortified NATO expansionism. A recent article in *International Security* exhibits that the Joe Biden administration respected the shared values of human rights and the sovereign territorial integrity of all states as presented in the Charter of the United Nations for democracies to coexistent and reside “peacefully side by side” (Trachtenberg, 2025, p. 13).

It must be noted, however, that a special issue in *International Affairs* has rightly stressed that “liberal international order” is a contested concept. Parmar (2018) has argued that liberal internationalism is a rigid Eurocentric and elitist viewpoint supplanted for American foreign policy and elites with the support of multilateral institutions. The postwar liberal global order was predominantly created and shaped by the United States that resulted in a system of unipolarity after the breakup of the Soviet Union, but President Donald John Trump’s reversal of globalisation by supporting economic nationalism and Britain’s departure from the European Union (Brexit) has threatened the liberal international order (Ikenberry, 2018; Stokes, 2018).

Despite evidence of a declining liberal international order, regime theory fortifies the role of institutional liberalism sponsoring optimism and state’s mutual cooperation within the governance of institutional arrangements. These norms and regimes (that may be temporary) advocated by international institutions attempt to deal with anarchy from reciprocal agreements and rules that entail transparency, predictability, behavioural standards, and sanctions that attract weaker states to respect the ideology of the regime (Krasner, 1982, pp. 185-186; Oye, 1986; Keohane, 1988, p. 386). However, the United Nations Security Council has been marred with its permanent members vetoing draft resolutions that have formed political stalemates, indicating that multilateral cooperation is undermined (Duncombe & Dunne, 2018). Koskenniemi (1996, p. 464) similarly stressed that the Security Council is based on reacting to aggression that results in some United Nations members receiving “more protection than others” with some factors based on if “the aggressor is able to invoke the support of a permanent member” and thus “selectivity is unavoidable” to undermine “consistently”. This is a threat to regime theory that is based on standardised rules, law, order, and the role of multilateral institutions. Hence, as postulated from Parmar (2018), the liberal international order and role of multilateral institutions remain under threat or are a version of Eurocentric multilateral institutions serving United States foreign policy and national interests.

Rather than the United Nations Security Council serving as the highest authority to decide cases on international peace and security, the United States has recently established the Board of Peace that is likely to include the participation of Russia, but no other permanent Security Council members have signed up yet (Nevett, 2026). The subscription fee for a permanent seat on the Board of Peace is \$1 billion that is unilaterally designed with a vague charter to consolidate United States influence external to the preexisting multilateral institutions (Kerhner, 2026). This American strategy is to provide an alternative avenue to influence US foreign policy with the support from allies.

After a brief discussion of the liberal ideology and military exceptionalism of the United States within a unipolar world, the subsequent section covers several American-led or influenced international interventions that engaged or disengaged with the United Nations Security Council and met adversity from rival states pitted against regime change.

Interventions and the Role of the United Nations Security Council

This section covers examples of United States-led or desired interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. In the context of Afghanistan, the United States retaliated against the 9/11 terrorist attacks comprising four airplanes hijacked from 19 al-Qaeda combatants that struck the World Trade Centre twice, the Pentagon and one airplane was courageously derailed that hit Shanksville, Pennsylvania, amounting 2,997 casualties (Huiskes, 2026). Al-Qaeda was provided a safe haven from the Taliban and the latter refused to surrender Osama bin Laden to the United States. The United States rightly consulted the United Nations Security Council and passed two resolutions (1368 and 1373) exercising Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) for the inherent right to self-defence and targeting threats against “rogue states” sponsoring and harbouring terrorism (Luban, 2004, p. 232). Al-Qaeda was supported from the Taliban and had orchestrated an act of aggression against America and thus the United States had the right to defend itself with the help of allies (Orend, 2006, pp. 71-74). Despite the fiasco to avert the Taliban from regaining power in September 2021 and failure of an earlier exit strategy, the 9/11 attacks imposed an immediate threat toward America. Hence, realist national security threats were seriously undermined from transnational terrorism that warranted an initial intervention.

After 9/11 and America’s incursion of Afghanistan, the United States threatened adversaries to “bandwagon” with them or face their military capability. Mearsheimer (2005) termed this as “Wilsonianism in boots” that merged liberal-idealism with the teeth of military authority, which threatens adversaries to join America due to their military might. The United States advanced its foreign policy as the unipolar benevolent hegemon that promoted United States exceptionalism from its duty to offer preemptive action and regime change (Fukuyama, 2006, p. 3). America asserted its aggressive foreign policy, military exceptionalism, unilateralism and removal of an international consensus, chiefly avoiding consent from the United Nations.

America’s dominance and unipolarity was evident with the decision to invade Iraq in March 2003. The invasion commenced without United Nations Security Council approval because United Nations Weapons Inspectors, including the report from Hans Blix, and the later Iraq Survey Group headed by David Kay did not locate any active or concrete blueprints of a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programme (Hein, 2008, pp. 15-17; Singh, 2024, p. 193). There was a one per cent doctrine that Saddam Hussein could have WMD and these could be disseminated with transnational terrorists to attack the United States (Suskind, 2006). However, Mearsheimer and Walt (2003, pp. 55-58) stressed that Saddam Hussein possessing WMD was not adequate to intervene because this security threat was certainly deterrable, as evident in the past, and Saddam was not motivated to use unproven chemical weapons (or hand them to al-Qaeda), only if his “survival” was endangered.

Therefore, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq rested on the reaction of the Bush administration to an assumed considerable existential terrorist threat and the proliferation of WMD. Yet, the replacement of the pan-Arab socialist Ba’ath Party would have led to better oil liberalisation with America and the West. Fukuyama (2006, pp. 5-6) realistically contended that the calculated threat from the Bush administration was “overestimated...from radical Islamism” and “undeterrable terrorists [within ‘rogue states’] armed with WMD” to validate “preventive war necessary” to “fight...the enemy”, exclusively after 9/11. Therefore, America’s unipolarity and imperative agenda to democratise the Middle East and pursue its geopolitical ambitions within the Persian Gulf resulted in a pre-planned intervention and regime change in Iraq without United Nations Security Council consent.

The Arab Spring in late 2010 resulted in a domino effect of mass civic demonstrations against decades of totalitarian regimes throughout the Middle East. On 17 February 2011, Colonel Muammar Muhammad Abu Minyar al-Gaddafi's security forces fought with unarmed protestors and rebel forces in Benghazi pushed the state forces out (Al Jazeera, 2011). The United Nations Security Council was concerned with the civilian casualties and approved the use of force for member states to act domestically and through regional organisations or agreements to protect Libyan civilians with international sanctions that included a travel ban and arms embargo (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970, 2011: Travel Ban).

However, on 17 March 2011, Gaddafi deployed his armed forces to Benghazi proclaiming, "we will find you in your closets" (Kirkpatrick & Fahim, 2011). To repel the threat, the United Nations Security Council approved to protect Libyan civilians with military capability "by all means necessary" (Dunne & Teitt, 2015, p. 380). The Resolution also sanctioned an arms embargo on Libya's authorities, denied flights of Libyan state-owned aircraft, and endorsed the financial assets freeze of the Gaddafi regime, state banks, and national oil (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, 2011, paras. 3-5, 13, 17, 19, Annex II). The arms embargo was contravened from several coalition states such as France providing light arms and ammunition to rebels located near Tripoli in the mountains.

On 19 March 2011, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation multi-nation coalition, with logistical support from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, commenced bombing to safeguard Libyan civilians and the United States, United Kingdom, and France engaged with aerial force (Al Jazeera, 2011). Alongside arming rebels and aerially attacking Gaddafi's security forces, Gaddafi's arms were looted and transferred to Mali, Niger, Sinai, and Gaza that contravened the arms embargo (Walzer, 2012). Gaddafi was killed by Libyan non-state combatants but NATO's intervention to defend civilians was heavily criticised for leading to regime change in a state that contained a lucrative oil sector that would benefit the West due to anticipated improved deals with the rebels (Paris, 2014, p. 584).

The context of Libya raised suspicion of regime change that was expressed in the United Nations Security Council from both Russia and China, resulting in multiple vetoes in Syria during its civil war under the former Bashar al-Assad's regime (Webb, 2014). Like Libya, Western states attempted to condemn the Syrian regime and hold elections for temporary power to improve the physical security of civilians, but Russia and China disagreed with the West engaging in regime change to pursue their geopolitical interests. Since the outset of the Syrian civil war, both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council vetoed on a minimum of nine occasions, which included targeting protestors, airstrikes over Aleppo and the prohibition of chemical weapons attacks (Barber, 2019; Syrian Network for Human Rights, 2020). For instance, a draft resolution presented by Germany, Belgium, and Kuwait on the dire humanitarian circumstances of Idlib-based civilians in northwest Syria was blocked by China to respect the sovereign territory of Syria and vetoed by Russia to avert saving international terrorists located in the area (United Nations Security Council, 2019; Singh & Dukhan, 2025, p. 204). Furthermore, Russia vetoed humanitarian aid (food, water, and medicine) to reach approximately 4.1 million people in northern Syria in the aftermath of two earthquakes and a cholera epidemic due to suspicion of the Security Council bringing NATO together once again (United Nations, 2023). Therefore, the legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council is important, but states must follow the rules of engagement and embargoes to avoid selectivity of the Security Council due to the veto-power of its permanent members against anticipated regime change.

America's Kidnapping of Maduro and Greenland Intentions

Prior to America's military operation in Venezuela, America intended to curb drug flows into the United States. From September 2025, America conducted 28 strikes with Operation Southern Spear on boats allegedly smuggling narcotics located in the Caribbean Sea and east part of the Pacific Ocean that killed a minimum of 104 people (Maturana, 2025). The Trump administration provided an ultimatum for the Venezuelan President to relinquish power since November 2025, and America had been in discussion with Venezuela for several months to avert alleged narco-terrorism (Phillips, 2025). At this point, another robust American intervention was desirable.

On 3 January 2026, the United States conducted airstrikes as part of Operation Absolute Resolve on Venezuela's capital, Caracas, and kidnapped President Nicolás Maduro Moros and his wife, Cilia Flores (Singh, 2026). Over 150 American aircraft from 20 airbases were deployed to counter Venezuela's armed forces for the Special Operations forces to enter Maduro's compound and approximately 80 Venezuelan military forces and civilians were killed (Blanca, 2026). Many South American states—including Brazil, Chile, and Colombia—condemned America's assault (Middle East Eye, 2026). Maduro and his wife have been transferred to New York to face trial where they initially pleaded not guilty to narcotics charges, including conspiring with major drug traffickers, heading a drugs cartel, the importation of cocaine and arms trafficking and will sit a full trial on 26 March 2026 (Queen & Wolfe, 2026).

Shortly after the Special Operation, Trump (2026) claimed that America would "run" Venezuela for an interim period until a transition could commence without a clear timeframe and the United States did not recognise Maduro as the presidential election victor on 28 July 2024. Trump also postulated that Venezuela has unilaterally stolen and traded United States oil (since the 1976 nationalisation of private corporations and foreign-owned resources correlated to the petroleum trade) and thus United States companies will repair Venezuela's oil infrastructure and utilise the profits to reimburse America and benefit Venezuelan civilians (Picchi, 2026). Trump's strategy is to fight narco-terrorism that may include drug cartels in Mexico due to drugs entering America and migrant drug-affiliated gangs (Papp, 2026). This poses a threat to United States national security.

America's claim on targeting drug trafficking, cartel's actions comprising an armed attack against America and boat crews qualifying as combatants under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) is flawed because Venezuela has not used military force (an armed attack under international law) (Mohamed, 2026). Venezuela is not a main major narcotics cultivating state, but Colombia, Peru, and the Bolivia area, are leading cocaine transit states, but these states do not have colossal oil reserves (Bloomfield, 2026). Venezuela holds an estimated 303 billion barrels of extra-dense crude oil located in the Orinoco Belt, but the heavy crude oil is expensive to extract and would cost an estimated \$80-100 billion of investments over a decade (Gratton, 2026). The United States has undertaken a "hostile takeover", and particularly Venezuela's oil energy sector, but the petroleum reserves are tar-like, contain sulphur and dirt that makes it difficult to extract and thus this venture could be a poor strategy (Becker, 2026). It is thus debatable whether it is in the best interests of the United States to engage in the Venezuelan oil sector as a long-term strategy.

Despite the poor quality of Venezuela's oil, the Trump administration is still selling oil from the South American state with its initial "deal worth \$500 million" with some of the returns held in the Gulf, mainly Qatar, to avert potential seizure (Sommerlad, 2026). A new Venezuelan law passed by acting President Delcy Rodríguez has made it easier for international companies to liberalise the oil industry as per the Trump administration's

demands (Torres, Thomas, Rios, & Sharman, 2026). Trump has claimed that once this oil is sold, the revenue will reduce the cost of gasoline for American citizens. United States Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, has permitted Venezuela to sell oil subject to sanctions with oversight from the United States Treasury for money to benefit Venezuelan civilians, deterring oil being sold at discount prices to China as evident under the previous Maduro and Chávez regimes (Klepper & Cano, 2026). It can be contended that the United States is pursuing regime change from a socialist government to liberalise Venezuelan oil for the benefit of America's relative gain over competitors such as China. Therefore, it appears that international law has been derogated by the United States to pursue their international relations that contravenes Chapter I: Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945).

Similarly, António Guterres, the United Nations Secretary-General (2026), claimed that the Charter of the United Nations must be respected to safeguard "sovereignty", prohibit "the threat or use of force", and "international law" can address "illicit traffic in narcotics, disputes about resources and human rights concerns". It has been argued that cocaine, fentanyl, and marijuana trafficking from Venezuela to the United States was merely an excuse to attack Venezuela (Bloomfield, 2026). Unlike Reagan supporting the Contras in Nicaragua during the Cold War to overthrow a communist government, the Trump administration did not seek consultation from Congress. In addition, the United Nations Security Council was not consulted by America for the military strikes and capture of the Venezuelan Head of State with the premise of the South American state and leader constituting a narco-terrorist threat to peace and security.

Two days after the military strikes and kidnapping of the Venezuelan leader, on 5 January 2026, the United Nations Security Council held an Emergency Meeting as per neighbouring Colombia's request that was supported from China, Russia, and Venezuela (Security Council Report, 2026). In the Emergency Meeting, Trump's actions in Venezuela were denounced as America's "crime of aggression" constituting an act of war rather than law enforcement activity against an illegitimate leader (Smith, 2026). Venezuela claimed that America proceeded with unilateral use of force against military and civilian sites that contravened Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) that forbids the threat or use of force against the sovereign territory of any state and holds the right to exercise Article 51 of the Charter for self-defence to protect its sovereignty and population (Security Council Report, 2026). Samuel Moncada (2026), Venezuela's Ambassador, claimed that America's military strikes held "no justification whatsoever" for the kidnapping of Venezuela's leader in pursuit of "natural resources" that constituted "imperialist...aggression with objectives of domination". China's Ambassador, Fu Cong (2026), also stressed that America should "cease its bullying and coercive practices" because "no country can act as the world's police". These claims rest on power politics of superpowers (in this case, the United States) doing as they please that is based on realpolitik practicality rather than legal or moral considerations.

From an offensive realist position, it can be argued that the Trump administration is not attempting to comply with legitimate authorities of the United States Congress or the United Nations Security Council but is vying for relative gain with its oil venture in Venezuela. However, offensive realists would also question whether depleted oil reserves are within the national interest of the United States because some political influence would be needed to secure a Venezuelan government that would support American presence. This would undertake time, resources, and investment, which classical/political realists such as Morgenthau (1948) would have been weary of for undermining the concepts of strategic prudence and scepticism with regime change.

Alongside oil interests in Venezuela, other alleged national interests have been advocated from the Trump administration. At the World Economic Forum at Davos, on 21 January 2026, President Trump proclaimed that

mineral-rich Greenland is essential for the national security interest and international security to repel China or Russia takeover and called for immediate negotiations with Denmark to acquire the land (Popli, 2026). The Trump administration, including Marco Rubio (United States Secretary of State), Karoline Leavitt (White House Press Secretary), and Stephen Miller (Trump's aide), argued that it is strategic to buy Greenland as a "national security priority" because the country "is covered with Russian and Chinese ships all over the place" and no one will conquer "the United States militarily over the future of Greenland" (Stallard, 2026). The Trump administration's approach is based on the idea of anarchy within the international political system meaning there is no single legitimate or political authority to tame great powers and the pursuance of their geopolitical agenda (international relations) (Singh, 2026). If anarchy is the belief, there are two neorealist responses to it: either defensive or offensive and the Trump administration has opted for the offensive realist approach to compete with rival states and maximise gains.

Trump is focusing on the relative gain of the state over rival states with the perception that Greenland could be lost to China or Russia if America does not claim it first because Denmark would not allegedly be able to tame Beijing or Moscow. However, this thought in this context of Greenland is problematic because Denmark is unlike the island of Melos (that was invaded from the Athenian Empire to join the Delian League due to the fear of holding colonial ties with Sparta) and Denmark is one of the 12 founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Alliance. Regime theory would apply to NATO and particularly the rule of Article 5 of the Treaty (1949) on retaining collective security if there is an attack on the territory of a NATO ally. Greenland would also qualify as a NATO member under attack because it remains under the political auspices of the Kingdom of Denmark. The United Kingdom and allies within NATO have presented support for Denmark regarding Greenland. Consequently, the United States has revoked its threat of an increase of 10 per cent trade tariffs on the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden that would have increased to 25 per cent if no United States purchase deal of Greenland materialised by 1 June 2026 (Sky News, 2026).

Moreover, NATO is working on transatlantic security over the Arctic to deter Chinese economic inroad influence and Russian northern remilitarisation fleets stationing military bases close to Europe and Canada (Boynton, 2026). China holds economic interests for "Arctic shipping", and Russia has dominating influence in the Arctic, which includes 30 military installations and a "nuclear-powered submarine fleet" (Kottasová, 2026). The arctic race has weakened Russian relations with NATO concerning the Arctic Council, which was established in 1996 and diplomacy regarding the Arctic region with Moscow has depleted since its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The rules-based order would include the role of the United Nations and thus the spirit of Article 2 (4) of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) should be promoted on the rule of non-interference. If Greenland poses a threat to international peace and security due to evidence of Russia and/or China wanting to claim it illegally, then the United Nations Security Council must be consulted for a meeting to address the issue.

Therefore, the imperialist American aggression on Venezuela and threats of Greenland annexation are forms of colonialism reinvigorating the depiction of Thucydides on the strong doing what they can, whilst the weak suffer. During the World Economic Forum at Davos, Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney (2026), claimed that the Trump administration is engaging with bullying tactics with America's unilateral coercive aggression over Venezuela and threats toward Europe if the United States does not attain Greenland from Denmark. Power politics rather than international law governs the world system. Weaker states are faced with existential threats and require protecting themselves (that includes seeking smaller regimes among weaker states) because the rules-

based order has been replaced without constraints from strong states to pursue their geopolitical interests within an uncaged zoo.

Conclusion: What Do America's Intentions Mean for the World Order?

The Trump administration intends to make America glorious again. Trump is striving to evade the “hawkishness” with earlier Republican administrations with his adaptation of flexible realism and unilateralism by reloading the Monroe Doctrine. As indicated in the late 2025 National Security Strategy, this policy rests on “America first”, with the ambition to protect “strategic assets”, extend American “access”, and undertake necessary measures (The White House, 2025, pp. 13, 17, 22). However, Slobodan Milošević in the early 1990s and Vladimir Putin since 2022 faced internal political problems in Serbia and Russia correspondingly and thus elected war to distract the problems and revive the ideology of a Greater Serbia and Iron Curtain. Like both scenarios, Trump is possibly endeavouring to divert internal issues and sidetrack concentration for interventions whilst stating relative gain as the global hegemon.

International law still has a role to play in international relations, which is why America received numerous objections for its military strikes in Caracas and abduction of a Head of State on 5 January 2026 in the United Nations Security Council. The Russian Federation, China, and many Latin America states were intensely sceptical of the United States sloping toward the use of force instead of international law. Venezuela maintains a strong relationship with Russia and has managed to receive financial aid and thus the relationship could resemble one between Cuba and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The Trump administration could contend that Russia and China would have likely vetoed a resolution for American sanctioned action against Venezuela due to suspected ulterior motives to invest in waned crude oil. This energy sector would take many years and financial resources to revive. If Trump pursues restoring Venezuelan energy infrastructure, oil companies and American taxpayers would have to pay the price. The Trump administration has similarly opted to deal with drug use concerns in a punitive manner which is like Reagan during the Cold War. There are other similarities that rest on the dislike of socialist or communist administrations and the desire to engage in the economic liberalisation of states to benefit the United States. This was evident with American agricultural interests in Nicaragua during the 1980s that was marred with a Marxist administration that required action.

Now with Venezuela stands an added forced chapter of regime change that optimistically for the Americans will not be another chronicle of a protracted intervention. Military intervention in Libya has been heavily scrutinised that resulted in Russian and Chinese opposition of regime change and proclamations to uphold respect for the rule of non-intervention more rigorously. Consequently, Syrian civilians paid the price with numerous vetoes for these reasons until al-Assad's departure. The use of American force in Iran has also been criticised for similar reasons. The late February–March 2026 joint US-Israel airstrikes on Iran that killed Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have been condemned in a United Nations Emergency Meeting by the United Nations Secretary-General for undermining international peace and security (United Nations Emergency Meeting, 2026). Similarly, Russia (an Iranian ally) condemned the attacks on Iran as an act of aggression resulting in an escalation of violence in the region (McArthur, 2026). China was not informed of the planned attacks on Iran. Beijing has argued that the national territory of Middle East states must be respected and America and Israel did not attain authorisation from the United Nations Security Council that flouts international law (Rai, 2026).

The respect for international law is dominant, but elucidations of the United States and their behaviour are being left to Washington. Possible annexation of Greenland from Denmark without consultation from Denmark

or Greenland would weaken relations with NATO. The international rules-based order that America heavily influenced with the advancement of liberalism after the Cold War is now gravely under threat. It can be questioned if there is a difference between Trump's military action in Venezuela, Putin's choice to invade Ukraine and annex four oblasts in late September 2022, and the Xi Jinping administration recently firing rockets off Taiwan against separatists and showcasing assault ships for the reunification of Taiwan. Despite Kyiv signing the NPT in 1994 for Russia and US security guarantees, Putin annexed Crimea in 2014 and the oblasts in 2022 from eastern Ukraine. This is evidence that the rules-based order is diminishing at the hands of power politics, and Ukraine is paying the price for destroying its nuclear weapon capabilities. In relation to US-Israel strikes on Iran, the opportunistic attacks against the Khamenei regime dealing with mass protesting seemed plausible to significantly weaken Iran's alleged existential terrorist threat and nuclear programme. In these four contexts of Venezuela, Ukraine, Taiwan, and Iran, relative gain is pursued that is seriously weakening the United States-led liberal international order. Although national interests are driven by the lust for power that resembles the actions of the United States (and allied Israel concerning Iran), Russia, and China, Morgenthau (1948) argued that political action carries moral implications. These implications are advocated with respect to international law wherever possible and if not inflicting national security interests. Yet, regular political stalemates from the veto power in the United Nations Security Council due to geopolitical interests and suspicion of regime change have undermined regime theory.

Despite the bleak reality of the international rules-based order, America might have to adopt multilateralism with European allies and consent from the United Nations Security Council to work on curtailing international threats such as narco-terrorism to reinstate the national interest and mitigate further anti-Americanism. The United States President and their administration do not always exercise the national interest, which was evident with America's decision to invade Iraq in March 2003. Even offensive realists, such as Mearsheimer and Walt (2003), argued that the decision to invade Iraq was not within the United States national interest to do so. In response to the allied American-Israel war with Iran, Joseph Clay Kent, Director of the National Counterterrorism Centre, resigned from his post claiming that "Iran posed no imminent threat to our [US] nation, and it is clear that we started this war due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby" (Kent, 2026). These contexts are reminiscent of Morgenthau and Waltz opposing the Vietnam War during the Cold War because it was ethically unfeasible and over-extending United States ideology for regime change in North Vietnam (Humphreys, 2013; Rafshoon, 2002). Therefore, the security dilemma in international relations has formed continuity rather than change regarding the United States engaging in regime change of communist and resource rich states and launching invasions based on the fear of rival states closing in. As with the contexts of Vietnam, Nicaragua, and Iraq, it is pivotal to note that American Presidents do not always act within the national interest and thus the recent ventures in Venezuela and Iran and desire for Greenland may question the American national interest and foreign policy.

A solution to the realist security dilemma, uncertainty, and increased unilateralism from superpowers does not rest on destroying the discipline of international relations theory and political science altogether. This has been attempted with efforts to avert traditional realist and liberalist international relations theory and merge both together with the English School to focus on cautiously pursuing and planning state interests whilst considering other states resulting in respecting common rules, institutions, and values (Bull, 1977, pp. 9-13). Moreover, engagement of the sociology of state identity with constructivism claiming state behaviour within an anarchical world is not confined to coercion (enemy) and competition, but also states can opt for cooperation (Wendt, 1992).

As a political scientist, considering other states when chasing national interests undertakes a prudent approach to realism and the idea of anarchy constituting what states make of it is not entirely valid in a world fuelled with power politics, domination, and the security dilemma between powerful states. Neoliberalists may postulate that détente; multilateralism attempting to honour international law (especially the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation Treaty (1949)); and the spirit of the United Nations Security Council without the selectivity of cases can revive international organisations and the decaying international rules-based order. However, this order debatably supports or tames United States interests and there are ideas to provide alternative avenues with the Board of Peace that could undermine the credibility and role of the United Nations Security Council. The international order is thus a realist one built around multilateral institutions because the United States has ironically tarnished the order that it worked so hard with cementing after the victory of the Cold War against communism.

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