

# Security Council: The US, Venezuela and Greenland

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## Introduction

Three days into the new year, the United States carried out a military operation in Venezuela to enter the capital and seize President Nicolás Maduro and his wife. In less than three hours, the Venezuelan president was captured and later taken to New York to face trial.



## International Responses

This action has seen widespread condemnation, with many (including traditional US allies) seeing it as a violation of international law; this is the position taken by Russia, China, and France.

*Barrot (Foreign Minister): "The military operation that led to the capture of Nicolás Maduro violates the principle of non-use of force, which underpins international law. France reiterates that no lasting political solution can be imposed from the outside and that sovereign peoples alone decide their own future."*

In Venezuela itself and the Venezuelan diaspora, the removal of Maduro was celebrated, although the new interim leader of Venezuela is also a member of his party, the

United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). The UK appears to have taken a neutral to positive stance, with Keir Starmer refusing to condemn the operation.

*Starmer: "The UK has long supported a transition of power in Venezuela. We regarded Maduro as an illegitimate president and we shed no tears about the end of his regime."*

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stated that he is "deeply alarmed" by the US's actions in Venezuela and about potential violations of international law.

*Guterres: "...these developments constitute a dangerous precedent. The Secretary-General continues to emphasise the importance of full respect - by all - of international law, including the UN Charter. He's deeply concerned that the rules of international law have not been respected."*

Donald Trump has since claimed that the US will "run" Venezuela and that American oil companies are prepared to enter the country to invest in oil production and increase output, since Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves, which account for about 20% of global oil.



*Trump: "We're going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of*

*dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure, the oil infrastructure, and start making money for the country."*

Yet many American companies, most notably ExxonMobil, are unwilling to enter Venezuela as the security situation remains highly unstable. Trump has since publicly focused less on Venezuela, instead threatening to invade Greenland.

## Venezuela

Nicolás Maduro came to power in 2013, following the death of President Hugo Chávez, who had been elected in 1998. His rule has been largely characterised by continued democratic backsliding, corruption, and economic decline. Under Maduro, human rights violations in Venezuela have been significantly criticised, with widespread reports of inhumane prison conditions, torture and extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, and restrictions on media. Maduro is now detained in the state of New York and faces charges including "narco-terrorism" and the possession of weapons. Attorney General Pam Bondi has stated on social media that he "...will soon face the full wrath of American justice on American soil in American courts".

It is generally argued that American interest in Venezuela mostly stems from its large oil reserves, which were once controlled by American companies before these were nationalised during Chávez's "Bolivarian Revolution". Venezuela has also reportedly been involved in the smuggling of cocaine and fentanyl into the United States, contributing to a major domestic health crisis, which US politicians have described as "narco-terrorism". The US argues that this threatens its domestic security, which justifies Maduro's extradition.

Critics have noted that the US has a history of overthrowing governments in order to secure oil resources - most notably perhaps the 1953 Iranian coup d'état, conducted together with the UK to protect their interests in the form of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which the Iranian government had attempted to nationalise. The US also has a long history of

interventionism in South America, notably having overthrown a democratically elected government in Guatemala to prevent land controlled by the United Fruit Company (from whose influence over South American governments the phrase 'banana republic' originates) from being nationalised. The US has also overthrown governments in Chile, Honduras, Bolivia, and Brazil, mostly in order to remove socialist leaders who the US perceived as a threat to American interests. The US generally rejects these criticisms, arguing that modern day interventions are more due to legal and security concerns, not the economic and political ones of the Cold War era.

Following Maduro's removal, PSUV politician Delcy Rodríguez was sworn in as the acting president of Venezuela. She has been under sanctions by the US, EU, and Canada since 2019 due to her alleged role in human rights violations. There were hopes that the US would allow María Corina Machado, the leader of the centre-right opposition party Vente Venezuela, to replace Maduro; however, Trump appears to have prevented this. It is speculated by some (although there is no direct evidence) that this is due to Trump's unhappiness with Machado having been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize instead of him, which he has expressed grievances about on social media. On the 15th of January, Machado gave Trump her Nobel Peace Prize (although a Nobel Peace Prize is non-transferable) in what appeared to be an attempt to regain his favour.

## Beyond Venezuela

Trump's National Security Strategy, published in December 2025 and condemned by some commentators as "neo-imperialist", outlines the US's ambitions on the global stage. It marks a notable change from recent American doctrine, with focus shifting away from the Middle East, Asia, and Europe and towards the Western Hemisphere.

Part of this is what Trump calls his "Trump Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine", jokingly the "Donroe Doctrine", which asserts that the United States has the right to use force to defend its interests in the Western Hemisphere. For international organisations such as the UN,

this highlights what is seen as a concerning shift away from the international law-based world order of the post-WW2 era, towards a multipolar system where great powers exert dominion over their spheres of influence. This is also concerning for traditional US allies in Europe, who are increasingly worried by Trump's threats to invade Greenland.



Trump has repeatedly threatened to seize Greenland (an autonomous territory of Denmark, part of NATO, but not part of the EU). These threats have once again come into the spotlight, with Trump claiming that America "needs" Greenland in the interests of its national security, that Denmark is incapable of defending it, and that residents of Greenland want to be part of the United States (when surveyed, 89% did not). Denmark, along with various other EU countries and the UK, has responded by asserting that Denmark maintains sovereignty over Greenland and that the people of Greenland have a right to self-determination. On the 15th of January, small numbers of Danish, French, British, German, Norwegian, and Swedish troops were sent to Greenland as a show of European solidarity and to establish a more permanent deployment there. While European leaders argue that this is necessary for the protection of European territory, it can also be argued that it increases the risk of direct confrontation between the US

and EU. It is generally agreed that any confrontation or conflict between American and European militaries would be catastrophic for NATO, as the North Atlantic Treaty contains no provision for what would happen if one NATO member attacked another. The British and Danish governments have stated that such an attack would be "the end of NATO".

While the US's next actions remain to be seen, it is clear that global alliances are rapidly shifting as Trump's foreign policy, viewed by many nations as hostile, threatens the US's alliances. European foreign policy is increasingly detaching itself from the US's views, and voices on both the left and the right are calling for closer integration of the European Union in the face of a threat from both the US and Russia. The main aspect of debate for the UN is to what extent these mean that the UN's power has been weakened, and with reduced influence over global affairs, where the future of the organisation lies.

## Questions to consider

- How should European countries respond to America's actions in Venezuela and beyond?
- What precedent does Trump's National Security Strategy set for other major powers?
- Should China play a greater role in the UN with the decrease in US involvement?
- Is it possible to recover the post-WW2 rules-based order, or is it time for something new? Is multipolarity inevitable?
- What can the US do to maintain alliances and international law while still defending security interests?

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