



# RCAS Report

## US Strikes on Venezuela and Its Potential Impacts on South Asian States

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## About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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## **US Strikes on Venezuela and Its Potential Impacts on South Asian States**

The US armed forces carried out one of the most remarkable military operations in the recent history with surgical precision to arrest and extract the president of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro during a daring early morning action by utilizing nearly 150 different types of aircraft including Fighter jets, bombers, helicopters and Uncrewed aerial platforms and 1500 military and non-military personnel.

This operation shook the entire world and there is a huge debate about the exact motivation of this action by the US. Was it regime change? or Oil? expanding spheres of influence? message to other nations?

It is evident that the US President ordered this action and watched the entire operation virtually. The reaction and repercussion for this illegal act by the US are yet to be seen. This was no doubt an act of war carried out unilaterally by the US and a clear case of kidnapping and violation of federal and international law.

A clear divide between the Global North and South can be seen already. Many countries in the global north appears to be justifying the action by the US and the most in the global south are condemning the same.

The special session at the United Nations Security Council under the agenda item “Threats to International Peace and Security” is yet to take place and it will be interesting to see the outcome of that.

The US categorized this action as a law enforcement operation but many condemned it as a brazen violation of International Law and violation of sovereignty of an independent country and also a violation of the charter of the United Nations.

The US President clearly indicated that the main reason is alleged links of Maduro for Narco-terrorism and cocaine shipment to the US from Venezuela. However, oil appears to be a major interest for the US. Incidentally Venezuela has the largest reserves of crude oil in the world and that is a huge market potential. Although the world is determined to reduce the use of hydrocarbons, the US does not believe in the relation between global warming and fossil fuel.

The US was very unhappy with Venezuelan former president Hugo Charvez for nationalizing oil producing facilities which once belonged to US companies in 1976. Since then, the US wanted to take revenge. The daring military operation was only one stage of taking revenge.

First it was the narrative building to blame Maduro for continued Narcotic shipments to the US. There were many aerial attacks carried by the US at sea to interdict and destroy purportedly narcotic carrying boats across the Caribbean Sea as a prelude to this special military operation. These attacks were also cited as violation of international law.

This special military operation to extract Maduro to face charges in US legal system sends many other messages to the world too.

This was a classic demonstration of American military superiority and capabilities. This showcased the power of American intelligence apparatus, deep penetration capabilities, superior tactics and capabilities of US special forces such as SEAL or Delta force, excellent coordination, seamless synchronization and system integration of Intelligence agencies, special operation forces, air assets, cyber operation, electronic warfare capabilities, logistic and diplomatic maneuvering.

This operation demonstrated that American military systems, integration, command and control, joint operations are at a higher level that no other country can replicate it at this moment.

This operation though a successful one in military terms for the US, can lead to vulnerabilities in the international domain. The US has violated the international law unilaterally and this could damage American credibility. America will be labeled as a revisionist and hegemonic power rather than the global peacemaker.

The previous military operations and regime changes in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are cited as failures of US policy. This operation also has resulted in questioning the role of the UN and rules based international order.

Now Venezuela has become the responsibility of the US. If it descends to chaos or American companies get involved in oil exploration, the US will be blamed. It will be interesting to observe how Venezuela moves to the future. Will the legitimate aspirations of its people be met or will they become a puppet regime of America?

Then, there are messages to other countries in the Western Hemisphere. Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Canada, Greenland (Denmark) need to be concerned about how they respond to US policies.

This operation could also result in provoking balancing behaviors and alternative alliance building and the need to look at in different models such as Global Security Initiative (GSI) and Global Governance Initiative (GGI) now that the UN system is hugely compromised.

This operation could also be seen as a last-ditch effort by the Trump administration to make America the unparalleled super power internationally and to influence the US mid-term elections by informing American people that they are winning the supremacy in the world again under President Trump.

This operation also proving that the true multi-polarity has not yet arrived and we are in a transition period from the uni-polar world to a multi-polar one. Still the US has the superiority to breach protected security environments and enjoy the asymmetric advantage and military superiority. It is also proven that US is benefitting from intelligence networks built over decades, alliance structures that provide basing and special operations capabilities cannot be matched by anyone.

The world has to react and react forcefully if the independence and sovereignty of states system need to be maintained. Unless the actions of the US are not checked they will continue to act uni-laterally against other sovereign countries citing their national interests.

Furthermore, military academies, research institutes, think tanks should study this operations in detail from many different angles- military, technology, political, strategic and economic, trying to understand how the US was able to carry out this special operation, what were the loop-holes that the US exploited, how the US compromised security of Maduro and gathered intelligence information, how the coordination of all assets were done, how they neutralized Venezuela's air defences and other security measures including close protection.

Then further studies need to be carried out based on the responses of world leaders and the divide between global north and south. Very importantly the political leaders need to be aware of the true aspirations, hardships of people and the address them urgently before these can escalate into dissent. Leaders should also understand that real action is much more important than mere rhetoric. People need food at affordable prices, good education, health care, housing, public utilities.

Lastly, the US is still the major economic and military power in the world. Countries need to engage with the US for economic benefits. In the case of Sri Lanka, the US is the number one export destination. The US will punish countries if they try to move away from its sphere of disengage with it. Smaller, less economically and militarily powerful countries need to be extremely careful when dealing with the US and its adversaries. Best way is to remain neutral. But it is easier said than done. It will be a very difficult task for these countries unless the unilateral actions by the US is not challenged sufficiently by international organizations such as the United Nations.—  
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Unilateral military actions jeopardize international peace and stability. Upholding international law and the UN Charter strengthens global peace, whereas their violation sets dangerous precedents that fuel violence and human suffering. Restraint, de-escalation, and diplomatic dialogue remain the most effective means of resolving conflicts.

Pakistan is a responsible member of the international community and advances its national interests through international law and multilateral engagement. As a member of the United Nations, Pakistan upholds the UN Charter and conducts its foreign relations within the framework of international law. These principles guide Pakistan's approach to global developments, including recent events in Venezuela. Pakistan seeks to maintain constructive relations with all countries while consistently upholding international law and the UN Charter.

States formulate their foreign policies in light of their respective strengths and limitations. Pakistan does not support unilateral actions and advocates the peaceful and amicable resolution of disputes. As a responsible state, Pakistan remains committed to the principles of the UN Charter and strives to maintain positive relations with all countries, including the United States. Pakistan's position is clear and consistent regarding developments in Iran, Syria, Iraq, and, most recently, Venezuela. In the recent UNSC meeting, Pakistan's viewpoint further augmented its principled stand.—**Zahid Anwar, University of Peshawar, Pakistan.**

## About Author



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The most alarming fact about the US attacks on Venezuela and the arrest of President Nicolas Maduro is that it is a deadly violation of the precepts of the rule-based international system. This is the graphic image of our time, the president of a sovereign state taken prisoner on a US war-ship, handcuffed, blindfolded, tied down and taken to America, despite the proclamation made by the president of the USA that it will rule Venezuela till it shall have had an election and that it will, mean the time, rule its oil, etc. Such an activity must have sounded the alarm in the so-called civilized world, where the United Nations serves as a proposed watchdog for over 200 independent countries. Instead, silence is deafening. But the negative can be the criticisms that can be made regarding the rule of Maduro: that no country has either a legal or moral right to intrude upon the territory of another state, to seize its head of state, and to effect political change by the sword of power. This sets a bad precedent, where power is above the law and sovereignty is conditional. This is a farce of security, narcotics, or democracy with the giant oil deposits of Venezuela in the background. Failure to address these actions can turn international law into a weapon of the strong rather than a safeguard for the weak. It can give rise to a decline in confidence and legitimacy, and even to the very idea of a rules-based international order.

The foreign policy of the small and middle world countries, such as Bangladesh, is very much a bad omen when the US has detained the Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro. It reinforces an international system in which power, rather than rules, is increasingly salient in how states conduct themselves, making weaker states subservient to the sovereignty of stronger states. These actions illustrate the threats of strategic vulnerability in other countries like Bangladesh, where the relationship between the countries is mainly reliant on international law, multilateral institutions, and diplomatic balance. When might prevails, the lesser powers face greater pressure to align with the powerful, reduce their strategic leeway, and prioritize survival over principle, which makes the adoption of an own-seeking, rule-based foreign policy more challenging.

Small and middle powers like Bangladesh are in a dangerous position to maintain a balance between their relationship with a superpower like the United States, especially when Washington has demonstrated that it is willing to use military force against those it feels are on the wrong side, like Venezuela, Iran, and Syria. As a peace-loving nation that believes in friendship to all and malice toward none, Bangladesh must walk this thin line by using all possible diplomacy, where dialogue, trade, and multilateral relations are the order of the day rather than fighting. Close bilateral relations with the U.S. can be ensured to secure economic co-operation, development support, and, at the same time, strategic support for the country, while safeguarding Bangladesh's sovereignty and non-intervention. It is possible to further strengthen Bangladesh's credibility as a responsible actor through participation in regional organisations, the promotion of international law, and positive engagement in

global and regional forums such as the United Nations. Bangladesh, being both pragmatic and principled, will be able to safeguard its national interests and avoid becoming a great-power coercive gambit. — — **Sujit Kumar Datta, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh.**

## About Author



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