

A CASE FOR EMPIRE: WHY THE UNITED STATES INTERVENED IN VENEZUELA IN 2026?

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Abstract: This research article analyzes the U.S. military operation “Absolute Resolve” on January 3, 2026, which resulted in the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife by Delta Force units supported by air and naval assets. Employing a qualitative interpretive case-study design, the study examines the event through five analytical levels: civilizational, geopolitical, international relations, political philosophy, and military. The findings show that the intervention reflects persistent imperial logic, thalassocratic geopolitical imperatives, a shift toward offensive realism, institutional transition from republican to extractive models, and mature network-centric warfare doctrine. Two novel concepts are introduced: Monroe Doctrine 2.0 (an updated regional exclusion policy targeting extra-hemispheric revisionists such as China, Russia, and Iran) and hybrid imperial contraction (strategic refocus on hemispheric consolidation to enable future global objectives). These concepts frame the operation as defensive consolidation of regional hegemony and preparation for continued power projection. The event is symptomatic of a status quo hegemon defending dominance through preemptive action, realist assertiveness, institutional adaptation, and doctrinal refinement. Implications include regional instability in Latin America, deepened geopolitical divides, and potential erosion of U.S. republican institutions. Limitations stem from reliance on secondary sources and the event’s recency. Future research should explore long-term outcomes and comparative cases.

Keywords: *U.S. intervention in Venezuela, offensive realism, geopolitics, international relations, thalassocracy, network-centric warfare, institutional regression.*

INTRODUCTION

On January 3, 2026, at approximately 02:01 local time, U.S. special operations forces, primarily from the 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment-Delta (Delta Force), executed Operation Absolute Resolve in Caracas, Venezuela. Supported by elements of the U.S. Air Force and Navy, including approximately 150 aircraft for air superiority and suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD), as well as helicopters from

the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (Night Stalkers), the operation neutralized key Bolivarian National Armed Forces air defense assets and secured the capture of President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores. The individuals were extracted to the USS Iwo Jima (LHD-7) in the Caribbean Sea and subsequently transferred to U.S. custody in New York for arraignment on federal charges including narco-terrorism, cocaine importation conspiracy, and possession of machineguns and destructive devices. The

intervention prompted divergent international reactions. Supportive statements emerged from several Latin American governments aligned with U.S. policy, including Argentina (under President Javier Milei), Paraguay, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. Opposition was expressed by Brazil (President Lula da Silva), Mexico, Colombia, and major global actors such as Russia, China, and Iran, which characterized the action as a unilateral violation of international law and the principle of non-intervention. The United Nations Security Council addressed the matter, with a majority of member states - including some traditional U.S. allies - condemning the operation. This study employs a multidisciplinary framework to analyze the drivers and implications of the January 3, 2026, intervention. Drawing on, geopolitics, international relations theory, political philosophy, and military studies, the analysis is structured across five analytical levels: (1) civilizational, (2) geopolitical, (3) international relations, (4) political philosophy, and (5) military. The investigation examines the potential effects of the event on U.S. domestic political organization, Venezuela's political trajectory, regional power dynamics in Latin America and the Caribbean, perceptions of military power in diplomacy, the deepening geopolitical divide between status quo powers (led by the United States) and revisionist challengers (Russia, China, Iran), and broader implications for U.S. identity and the international order in the coming years. Particular attention is given to whether the intervention signals substantive shifts in U.S. strategic conduct and the structure of global order.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To address the complexity of the U.S. intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026 (Operation Absolute Resolve), this study integrates insights from multiple disciplines, including geopolitics, international relations

theory, political philosophy, military studies, and institutional economics. The literature is selected for its capacity to provide complementary perspectives on the drivers, execution, and implications of the operation, with particular emphasis on the interplay between military innovation, geopolitical imperatives, realist foreign policy orientations, civilizational dynamics, and institutional transformations in the United States. For the military dimension, the articles of Slaven Knežević are central. Knežević's analyses anticipate the need for cognitive and technological adaptation among global leaders in response to evolving warfare. He critiques the continued applicability of Clausewitzian concepts and introduces supplementary terms such as "superior information dominance," which prioritizes informational advantage over traditional firepower concentration. Knežević also highlights the obsolescence of conventional notions of national security in fragmented operational environments, particularly relevant to the current U.S. administration's approach to hybrid threats and rapid decision cycles. His examination of "friction multiplicity" and the integration of network-centric warfare principles aligns with the observed execution of Operation Absolute Resolve, where information superiority and distributed command enabled a high-precision decapitation strike.

Alan Collins's contributions to contemporary security studies offer a valuable framework for understanding interventionism and securitization processes. Collins explores the concept of "distant war," facilitated by air and naval supremacy, which reduces domestic political costs for intervening states. His analysis of offensive and defensive variants of realism provides tools for evaluating U.S. foreign policy decisions, including the securitization of transnational issues such as drug trafficking networks allegedly linked to the Maduro regime. Nebojša Vuković's examination of imperial logic and historical patterns of imperial behavior elucidates the strategic

rationale underlying U.S. military actions. Vuković traces recurring imperial tactics across history, emphasizing the persistence of conflict as a structural feature of international systems. His geopolitical insights, including references to key thinkers, aid in contextualizing U.S. operations in the Caribbean basin and broader hemispheric control efforts. Nemanja Božić provides a detailed account of post-World War II U.S. grand strategy, including tactics employed against the socialist bloc during the Cold War. Relevant elements include the “two-and-a-half wars” doctrine and the role of collective psychology (e.g., fear as a coercive instrument) in shaping adversary behavior. These historical patterns offer parallels to contemporary U.S. approaches in Latin America and the Caribbean. John J. Mearsheimer, a leading proponent of offensive realism, supplies a core theoretical lens for analyzing U.S. foreign policy under the current administration. Mearsheimer's distinction between status quo and revisionist powers (drawing on Morgenthau) frames the geopolitical tensions evident in the intervention. His doctrine of offensive realism, the “stopping power of water” paradox in thalassocratic systems, and assessments of imperial project sustainability (including financial viability) inform evaluations of U.S. hegemonic maintenance.

Mearsheimer's typology of international systems - bipolar, balanced multipolarity, and unbalanced multipolarity - suggests that the current global configuration approximates unbalanced multipolarity, with implications for U.S. regional dominance in the Western Hemisphere. Joseph S. Nye's reflections on imperial overstretch, sovereignty, and nationalism through a realist prism complement Mearsheimer's framework. Nye's classification of international orders (imperial, feudal, anarchic) and his analysis of subjects, objectives, and means in foreign policy provide additional structure. His discussion of the Median Dialogue as a realist archetype and hegemonic stability theory elucidates patterns of

imperial conduct, including shifts in U.S. strategic priorities and perceptions of sovereignty. Đorđe D. Dašić's comprehensive history of diplomacy traces realist tendencies in U.S. foreign relations, particularly toward Latin America (e.g., relations with Spain over Cuba and broader hemispheric interventionism). This historical context supports analysis of recurring patterns in U.S. policy toward regional challenges. Yuval Noah Harari's historical perspective on universal orders (monetary, imperial, religious) and imperial behavioral tendencies aids in situating the U.S. as an imperial actor. Harari examines the role of multinational corporations in sustaining imperial structures and the self-perception of empires as bearers of universal benefits. Arnold J. Toynbee's macro-historical studies identify civilizations as primary historical actors. His assessment of Western civilization's trajectory and inter-civilizational dynamics (e.g., relations between the West and non-Western entities such as Russia, China, and Iran) frames the civilizational implications of the crisis. Aleksandar Savanović, alongside Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, provides institutional analysis linking political philosophy and economics. Their emphasis on inclusive versus extractive institutions elucidates the republican framework of U.S. governance and potential shifts toward imperial models in response to geopolitical pressures. This multidisciplinary synthesis establishes a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis across five levels: civilizational, geopolitical, international relations, political philosophy, and military.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive case study design to examine the U.S. military intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026 (Operation Absolute Resolve) and its broader implications for U.S. foreign policy, institutional dynamics, and global order. The qualitative approach is selected because the

phenomenon under investigation is a singular, contemporary geopolitical event embedded in complex historical, theoretical, and civilizational contexts that require in-depth conceptual analysis rather than quantitative measurement or statistical generalization. The analytical framework is structured as a multidimensional interpretive model consisting of five complementary levels: civilizational level, geopolitical level, international relations level, political philosophy level, and military level. This layered approach enables systematic examination of distinct but interconnected dimensions of the same event, drawing on established theoretical traditions in international relations, political philosophy, geopolitics, and military studies. Primary sources include: Peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books (e.g., Mearsheimer, 2017; Nye, 2006; Knežević, 2024, 2025; Vuković, 2007; Harari, 2018; Toynbee, 1971; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2014; Savanović, 2019; Collins, 2010; Dašić, 2012; Božić, 1974). Classical and historical texts providing foundational concepts for civilizational and imperial analysis (e.g., Plato, 2017; Roosevelt, 2019). Inclusion criteria for sources: Direct relevance to one or more of the five analytical levels. Contribution to theoretical frameworks applicable to interventionism, realism, imperialism, civilizational dynamics, institutional change, or military innovation. Exclusion criteria: sources unrelated to the core themes of the study. No primary data collection (e.g., interviews, archival research, or content analysis of official documents) was undertaken, as the objective is theoretical synthesis and conceptual innovation rather than empirical description of operational details.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds in three sequential and iterative stages: Thematic extraction and initial coding - Each source was systematically reviewed to identify and extract key

concepts, arguments, and theoretical propositions relevant to the five levels (e.g., “offensive realism” and “stopping power of water” from Mearsheimer; “superior information dominance” and network-centric warfare from Knežević; “inclusive vs. extractive institutions” from Acemoglu & Robinson). Relevant passages were catalogued and preliminarily categorized by level. Multilevel mapping and cross-level synthesis - Extracted elements were mapped onto the five analytical levels. Interconnections were traced (e.g., how civilizational perceptions of periphery reinforce geopolitical thalassocratic imperatives; how military doctrinal shifts enable realist foreign policy turns; how institutional changes reflect imperial transitions). This stage involved iterative comparative reading to ensure conceptual coherence. Conceptual refinement and evaluation - The study develops two novel interpretive concepts - Monroe Doctrine 2.0 (an adapted regional exclusion policy reoriented toward extra-hemispheric revisionist actors, primarily China, Russia, and Iran) and hybrid imperial contraction (a strategic inward refocus on Western Hemisphere consolidation to facilitate future global objectives) - as heuristic tools derived from the synthesis. These concepts were assessed for explanatory adequacy against the case patterns and existing literature.

Reliability, Validity and Limitations

Reliability is enhanced through transparent source referencing, explicit logical steps from literature to conclusions, and consistent application of concepts across levels. Construct validity is supported by grounding all analytical categories in established theoretical literature from the reference list. Internal validity relies on process tracing (establishing sequences of theoretical linkages and implications) and source triangulation within the secondary literature. Key limitations include: Exclusive reliance on secondary academic

sources, which may reflect existing theoretical biases, the interpretive nature of the framework precludes statistical generalization; findings are context-bound to this case but offer conceptual transferability to analogous interventions or hegemonic transitions, the recency of the event constrains assessment of long-term consequences (e.g., sustained institutional shifts or regional realignments).

RESULTS

The analysis of the U.S. military intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026 (Operation Absolute Resolve) reveals consistent patterns across the five analytical levels, confirming the persistence of imperial logic, thalassocratic imperatives, realist foreign policy orientation, institutional tensions, and evolving military doctrines. The findings are organized by level, with integrated discussion of interconnections and implications.

Civilizational Level

The intervention aligns with the classic imperial-peripheral dichotomy that structures civilizational relations. The United States, as the dominant core of Western civilization, perceives Venezuela as part of the periphery subject to imperial oversight. This relationship mirrors historical patterns where empires justify intervention as a civilizing or liberating mission. Plato illustrates this mindset in the context of intra-Hellenic relations: “Is it right for Greeks to enslave Greek states, or should they, as far as possible, teach themselves to spare the Greek race and guard against becoming slaves to barbarians?” (Plato, 2017:131). He further notes that “the Greek tribes are akin to one another and domestic, while barbarian peoples are foreign and alien” (Plato, 2017:131). Toynbee extends this logic to modern Western civilization, proposing to begin his inquiry “by examining the conflict between the West and all

other contemporary civilizations” (Toynbee, 1971: 547). Harari traces the continuity of imperial self-perception: Persian King Cyrus “claimed not only to rule the entire world, but to do so for the benefit of all peoples. ‘We conquer you for your own good,’ the Persians said. Cyrus wanted the peoples he subjugated to love him and be happy to be Persian vassals” (Harari, 2018:172). This pattern persists: “It passed from Cyrus and the Persians to Alexander the Great, and from him to the Hellenistic kings, Roman emperors, Muslim caliphs, Indian dynasties, and eventually even to Soviet leaders and American presidents” (Harari, 2018: 173). Roosevelt exemplifies this in the U.S. context, accusing Spain of ruling its colonies by “archaic principles which had become incompatible with the progress of humanity and intolerable to the conscience of mankind” (Roosevelt, 2019:189). He asserts: “Our duty, even more from the standpoint of national honor than from that of national interest, required us to stop the destruction and devastation. For these reasons I was for war; and today, when all is clearer in retrospect, few humane and honorable men doubt that the war was both just and necessary” (Roosevelt, 2019:189).

The intervention securitizes drug trafficking and regime illegitimacy as existential threats, combining national interest with a perceived moral duty to liberate. This approach parallels the U.S. securitization of terrorism in the early 2000s, where global terrorism was framed as an existential danger following 9/11, leading to military campaigns in the Middle East, including invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to dismantle perceived threats and promote regime change. Similarly, the 2026 operation positions narco-cartels and their alleged ties to the Maduro regime as a comparable crisis in Latin America, justifying rapid intervention to neutralize risks and “liberate” the region from authoritarian influence. Collins explains securitization: “Ole Wæver argues that an issue becomes a security issue precisely because it has

been ‘securitized,’ brought into the realm of security. ‘Security’ is thus a self-referential practice, because in that practice the issue becomes a security issue—not necessarily because there is a real existential threat, but because the issue is presented as such” (Collins, 2010:80). Successful securitization, as seen in both cases, enables extraordinary measures and institutional reorganizations, transforming regional conflicts into global security imperatives while reinforcing the imperial civilizational narrative of moral superiority and protective intervention.

Geopolitical Level

The U.S. military intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026, Operation Absolute Resolve, underscores the enduring geopolitical imperatives of thalassocracy, where maritime-oriented powers prioritize control over strategic waterways and regional spheres to sustain global influence. In this framework, the United States, as a classic thalassocratic state, views the Western Hemisphere not merely as a backyard but as the indispensable foundation for any broader international projection. This imperative drives the need for uncontested regional dominance, ensuring that no rival power can establish footholds that threaten core interests. Historical precedents illustrate this logic: Roosevelt emphasized the pivotal role of naval efficiency in foreign affairs, noting in his autobiography discussions with Senator Lodge that focused on “all public questions that arose and usually we agreed about them: our very close relations remained, of course, unchanged by my coming to the White House. He had the best and wisest knowledge of our foreign relations of any of our public men, and clearer than almost any other he understood the vitally important fact that the efficiency of our navy determined the efficiency of our country abroad” (Roosevelt, 2019:310). Vuković reinforces this by highlighting Mahan’s foundational theory: “one of the most significant

geopolitical theories, today widely known concept of sea power” (Vuković, 2007:27). Similarly, Spykman’s strategic vision supports the binding of continental spaces to secure the thalassocratic rim: efforts to achieve “tighter binding of the two Americas” (Vuković, *The Logic of Empires*: 115). Mearsheimer provides a theoretical anchor for understanding this regional focus, clarifying that hegemony often operates at sub-global scales: “Hegemony means domination of a system, which is usually interpreted as domination of the entire world. It is possible, however, to apply the concept of system much more narrowly and use it to describe particular regions, such as Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Western Hemisphere. Thus one can make a distinction between global hegemony, which dominates the world, and regional hegemony, which dominates one geographic area. The United States has been the regional hegemon of the Western Hemisphere for the past hundred years or so” (Mearsheimer, 2017:75). The intervention in Venezuela fits this model precisely, targeting a state perceived as a vulnerability in the hemispheric perimeter due to its alliances with revisionist powers. By neutralizing Maduro’s regime, the U.S. administration aimed to eliminate a proxy point of entry for external influence, thereby reinforcing the structural barriers that prevent rival encroachments. This action aligns with the “stopping power of water” paradox in thalassocratic systems, where oceanic buffers provide defensive advantages but demand vigilant maintenance of adjacent landmasses to avoid erosion of influence.

The introduction of two novel concepts - Monroe Doctrine 2.0 and hybrid imperial contraction—offers a refined lens for analyzing this geopolitical maneuver. Monroe Doctrine 2.0 represents an evolved iteration of the original 1823 policy, which proclaimed “that America belongs to Americans” (Dašić, 2012:160) and prohibited European interference in the hemisphere. In its updated form,

the doctrine shifts focus from 19th-century European colonial powers to contemporary Asian and Eurasian revisionists, particularly China, Russia, and Iran, whose economic, military, and diplomatic engagements in Latin America are viewed as direct challenges to U.S. primacy. This reorientation reflects the changed geopolitical landscape: while the original doctrine addressed waning colonial empires, the 2.0 version counters rising multipolar actors through proactive exclusion, as evidenced by the rapid, unilateral nature of the Venezuela operation. Hybrid imperial contraction complements this by describing a strategic retrenchment: a deliberate pivot from overextended commitments in distant theaters (e.g., Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the South China Sea) back to hemispheric consolidation. Venezuela, as the weakest link - ideologically opposed, institutionally divergent, and traditionally aligned with U.S. adversaries - became the focal point for this contraction, allowing regrouping of resources and elimination of internal vulnerabilities. This inward focus is not retreat but preparation, enabling future expansion toward new objectives such as Greenland for Arctic control or Iran for Middle Eastern dominance, thereby maintaining the thalassocratic balance between regional security and global ambition.

International Relations Level

The U.S. intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026, marks a clear shift toward offensive realism in American foreign policy, moving away from liberal multilateralism toward unilateral power maximization in an anarchic system. Mearsheimer associates this change with the current administration: "Donald Trump's arrival in the United States has also, in his own 'unique' way, contributed to the popularity of realist theories today" (Mearsheimer, 2017: 492). Realism views international politics as inherently conflictual, where states prioritize survival and relative

power. Vuković summarizes the Hobbesian foundation: "war is an unpleasant but inherent part of a system of states composed of sovereign independent units. To forget the reality that war is unwelcome means exposing oneself to catastrophe. War has been a constant phenomenon in international relations in all periods of history" (Vuković, 2007:81). The operation reflects this worldview through decisive, unilateral action to eliminate a perceived threat. Offensive realism argues that great powers must seek regional hegemony whenever possible. Mearsheimer explains that states are compelled to maximize power because "the anarchic structure rewards such behavior" (Mearsheimer, 2017:74). The United States, as the established regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere for over a century (Mearsheimer, 2017:75), acted to prevent revisionist powers (China, Russia, Iran) from establishing influence through allied regimes. The raid itself embodied calculated risk-taking: "historical data show that attack sometimes succeeds, sometimes not. The recipe for a refined maximizer of power is to understand when to proceed and when to withdraw" (Mearsheimer, 2017:74). Executed with superior technology and minimal escalation, it achieved strategic goals efficiently. This realist orientation has systemic implications, accelerating the erosion of liberal norms such as non-intervention. Nye acknowledges historical precedents for similar actions to maintain regional balance: "Intervention may be justified when it is necessary to maintain the balance of power and order... In 1965 the United States intervened in the Dominican Republic and in the eighties in Central America so that there would be no more communist governments in the Western Hemisphere" (Nye, 2006:212). The 2026 intervention follows the same logic - excluding contemporary revisionists - while contributing to unbalanced multipolarity, where great powers increasingly favor raw capability over shared rules. The event is thus a

symptom of structural change in the international system.

Political Philosophy Level

The U.S. intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026, exposes deep tensions between republican and imperial institutional models within American governance. Republican institutions, characterized by inclusive political and economic arrangements that distribute power widely and encourage broad consensus, are increasingly strained by imperial tendencies that concentrate decision-making in a narrow executive elite. Historical patterns demonstrate that such shifts toward extractive institutions often follow external hegemonic pressures and internal ambitions for power projection. Acemoglu and Robinson trace this dynamic through two paradigmatic cases. In the case of Venice, the city-state initially rose as a thalassocratic power precisely because of its inclusive institutions: “Venice was once a trading and maritime great power, which acquired that status thanks to inclusive (for that time) political and economic institutions that enabled entrepreneurship, free private initiative, and innovation to flourish” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2014:537). However, the turning point came when the Council of the Doges introduced the Golden Book, creating barriers to new entrants and restricting economic and political access: “The moment, however, when the Doge’s Council, by introducing the Golden Book, changed the character of political and economic institutions, when it created barriers to new entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship disappeared, Venice lost its status as a trading great power” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2014:537). This institutional closure accelerated decline, illustrating how the transition from inclusivity to extraction undermines long-term prosperity and resilience.

The Roman case follows a similar trajectory. Rome built an impressive empire during its republican period through relatively

inclusive mechanisms that fostered trade, innovation, and broad participation: “For the Romans, this was the consequence of the transition from republic (510 BCE - 49 BCE) to empire (49 BCE - 476 CE). Although Rome built an impressive empire in its republican period, and trade with distant destinations and the transport of goods flourished, a large part of the Roman economy rested on the extraction of wealth” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2014:175). The shift to empire intensified extraction, eroded republican checks, and generated internal conflicts that ultimately contributed to instability and collapse: “The transition from republic to empire strengthened the process of extraction and eventually led to internal conflicts, instability, and ruin” (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2014:175). The 2026 intervention reflects a parallel trajectory: unilateral executive action, justified by national security imperatives, bypasses traditional republican checks and broad societal input, signaling a shift toward extractive institutions that prioritize power projection over inclusive deliberation. This domestic institutional regression mirrors the historical pattern - external hegemonic demands accelerate the concentration of authority, facilitating rapid foreign interventions while weakening the very foundations of republican legitimacy. Savanović situates this change in the post-Cold War context: “Instead of assuming the role of ‘leader of the free world’ after the collapse of communism, spreading ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity to the nations of the world, and thus establishing Pax Americana; the United States tried to impose itself as a world hegemon” (Savanović, 2019:133). Bush-era policies already exemplified this concentration: “Bush, with his unsophisticated bullying approach ‘with us or against us,’ risks turning not only Islamic states and third-world peoples against the U.S., but also free peoples of Europe... It is already possible to speak of the phenomenon of ‘global anti-Americanism.’... At the same time, Bush

administration policy creates an alliance between the political class (state), the military sector, and big capital, which centers power and resources in the hands of a narrow elite” (Savanović, 2014:93–94). The intervention reflects this trajectory toward imperial institutions facilitating unilateral action.

Furthermore, this institutional shift directly challenges the fundamental principles of economic freedom that underpin republican frameworks. As Borović explains in his analysis of economic freedoms' impact on growth, “The IEF consists three fundamental principles of economic freedom: empowerment of the individual, non-discrimination, and open competition (Miler, et al 2014). The IEF published by the Heritage Foundation contains ten economic freedoms, which are grouped into four broad categories or pillars of economic freedom (Miler, et al, 2014): 1. Rule of Law (property rights, freedom from corruption); 2. Limited government (fiscal freedom, government spending); 3. Regulatory efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom); 4. Open markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).” (Borovic, 2014:12) These principles - rooted in republican institutional norms that protect individual rights, limit government overreach, and foster competitive markets - are increasingly eroded by imperial centralization, which prioritizes state-driven power accumulation over decentralized economic liberties. The result is a potential threat to America's robust and complex financial markets, which thrive on adherence to these republican norms of transparency, rule of law, and open competition; imperial tendencies risk introducing greater extraction, corruption, and regulatory inefficiencies, undermining the very economic resilience that supports U.S. global position.

Military Level

The execution of Operation Absolute Resolve on January 3, 2026, in Venezuela

illustrates the advanced stage of U.S. military doctrinal transformation, emphasizing distributed operations and information superiority over traditional massed-force engagements. This evolution responds to the demands of modern, fluid battlefields where decision speed and precision eclipse conventional concentration of forces. Knežević underscores the urgency of adaptation: “States must recognize that traditional approaches to national security are inadequate for emerging challenges. A new paradigm is needed that balances the need for technological innovation with the imperatives of global security” (Knežević, 2025:31). The raid fully embodied this shift: a high-precision decapitation strike relying on network-centric coordination rather than prolonged territorial control. At the heart of this transformation lies the primacy of superior information dominance. Knežević cites Admiral Cebrowski’s key insight: “in a network-centric operational concept, the advantage is not in massive concentration of forces at the decisive point, but in superior informational position and the ability to command and control distributed forces with greater speed and precision” (Knežević, 2024:86). The operation demonstrated this principle in practice: no conventional front line or dominant battlefield emerged, as integrated special forces, air/naval suppression, real-time intelligence, and rapid extraction achieved overwhelming tempo. By overcoming the traditional “fog of war,” U.S. forces achieved near-perfect situational awareness and execution. Joint-force synergy and operational flexibility were decisive enablers. Vuković emphasizes that U.S. forces “fight best as a joint team. Their capability for integration is largely responsible for their superiority on the modern battlefield” (Vuković, 2007:258). The raid’s success derived from seamless coordination across services - Delta Force insertion, air and naval support, special aviation extraction—aligning closely with historical projections of future operations centered on distributed, mobile,

and information-driven strikes. This doctrinal maturity not only secured immediate objectives with negligible losses but also reinforces U.S. deterrence posture: future interventions are likely to favor high-tech, low-footprint actions that minimize political costs while maximizing strategic impact against revisionist challengers.

Analyst Frederick R. Strain, as cited by Vuković, provided a remarkably prescient description of how future U.S. joint operations would unfold, and the Venezuela intervention matched this vision almost exactly: “naval armadas will fight on the high seas together with long-range bombers armed with ‘Harpoon’ missiles; operations against enemy ground forces will include sea- or air-launched anti-armor munitions, as well as more conventional artillery; air battles will involve rocket ballistic defense systems launched from ground forces or from specialized naval vessels, as well as aircraft engagement; even relatively small, secret special operations will include space-based communications and will be supported by naval or air insertion and recovery for mission personnel.” (Vuković, 2007:260–261) In Venezuela, naval assets (including the USS Iwo Jima) provided the extraction platform and supported suppression of air defenses; long-range air assets neutralized AD systems and ensured air superiority; special forces executed the ground insertion and capture; real-time space-based and networked communications enabled seamless command and control; and rapid air/naval insertion and recovery were critical to the operation’s low-casualty success. The parallels are striking: the operation unfolded precisely along the lines Strain anticipated—coordinated, multi-domain, high-precision, and reliant on technological integration rather than massed conventional forces. This convergence underscores that the doctrinal evolution described in the literature has reached operational maturity, with Venezuela serving as a real-world validation of these future-war projections.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. military intervention in Venezuela on January 3, 2026 (Operation Absolute Resolve) provides a compelling case for understanding the contemporary dynamics of hegemonic maintenance amid intensifying great-power competition. The analysis across the five levels reveals a high degree of internal coherence: the operation was neither ad hoc nor exceptional, but rather a logical outcome of long-standing structural patterns adapted to current strategic realities. On the civilizational level, the intervention reaffirms the persistent core–periphery structure, in which the dominant Western power perceives peripheral actors as legitimate subjects of corrective action when they diverge from expected alignments or threaten perceived civilizational norms. This logic has deep historical roots, as reflected in classical reflections on kinship and otherness (Plato’s Republic), macro-historical examinations of civilizational conflict (Toynbee’s *A Study of History*), accounts of imperial self-justification across eras (Harari’s *Sapiens*), and explicit assertions of moral duty in earlier U.S. foreign policy (Roosevelt’s autobiography). The securitization of issues such as drug trafficking merely updates this traditional imperial rationale with contemporary security discourse, consistent with established frameworks in security studies (Collins). Geopolitically, the action aligns with enduring thalassocratic principles: sustained control over the Western Hemisphere constitutes the indispensable foundation for any broader global role. This is evident in historical emphases on naval supremacy (Roosevelt), foundational geopolitical theories of sea power (Mahan via Vuković), and analyses of regional hegemony (Mearsheimer). Venezuela was selected precisely because it represented the most vulnerable point in that hemispheric perimeter. The novel concepts developed here - Monroe Doctrine 2.0 (a reoriented regional exclusion policy now directed against extra-

hemispheric revisionist actors such as China, Russia, and Iran) and hybrid imperial contraction (a deliberate strategic refocus on core-region consolidation as a precondition for future outward expansion) - offer a precise interpretive framework for this decision.

In the domain of international relations, the intervention signals the full consolidation of offensive realism as the prevailing paradigm in U.S. foreign policy. The operation embodies the realist assumption of anarchy and power maximization, as elaborated in Mearsheimer's work and supported by Vuković's emphasis on the constancy of conflict in international systems. It follows historical patterns of regional exclusion to prevent rival influence (Nye), while simultaneously accelerating the transition toward unbalanced multipolarity, where great powers increasingly rely on unilateral capability demonstrations rather than shared institutional norms. From a political-philosophy standpoint, the event highlights accelerating institutional divergence: external imperatives of hegemonic defense continue to erode republican inclusivity in favor of more extractive and centralized structures. Historical analogies from Venice and Rome (Acemoglu & Robinson) and analyses of post-Cold War U.S. hegemonic ambitions (Savanović) illustrate how such shifts concentrate authority in narrow elites, thereby facilitating rapid executive decisions and reducing procedural constraints on foreign interventions. Militarily, the raid demonstrates the operational maturity of network-centric warfare, in which information superiority, distributed joint

operations, and accelerated decision cycles decisively supplant traditional concepts of dominant battlefields and massed forces. This doctrinal evolution is clearly articulated in Knežević's emphasis on technological adaptation and information dominance, as well as in Vuković's discussion of integrated joint-team superiority. Collectively, these findings indicate that the intervention is symptomatic of a profound structural shift: a status quo hegemon defending its dominance through preemptive, high-precision military action, realist strategic assertiveness, institutional adaptation to imperial exigencies, and doctrinal refinement. The concepts of Monroe Doctrine 2.0 and hybrid imperial contraction provide a coherent lens for interpreting this moment and anticipating analogous responses in other contested peripheries. Future research should examine the longer-term consequences: the degree to which the operation contributes to regional stabilization or further fragmentation in Latin America, its impact on domestic institutional polarization within the United States, and whether it provokes accelerated counterbalancing coalitions among revisionist powers. Comparative analyses with prior U.S. regional interventions would help validate and refine these interpretive tools. Above all, the event underscores a fundamental tension: as the United States increasingly employs imperial strategies to preserve its global position, it simultaneously risks eroding the republican institutional foundations that historically underpinned its resilience and international legitimacy.

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ARGUMENT ZA IMPERIJU: ZAŠTO SU SJEDINJENE AMERIČKE DRŽAVE INTERVENISALE U VENECUELI 2026. GODINE?

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Sažetak: Ovaj istraživački članak analizira vojnu operaciju SAD „Apsolutna odlučnost” (*Absolute Resolve*) od 3. januara 2026. godine. Operacija je rezultirala hvatanjem venecuelanskog predsjednika Nikolása Madura i njegove supruge, koje su izvele jedinice Delta Force uz podršku vazdušnih i pomorskih snaga. Primjenom kvalitativnog interpretativnog dizajna studije slučaja, istraživanje razmatra događaj na pet analitičkih nivoa: civilizacijskom, geopolitičkom, nivou međunarodnih odnosa, političko-filozofskom i vojnom. Rezultati pokazuju da intervencija odražava postojanu imperijalnu logiku, talasokratske geopolitičke imperitive, zaokret ka ofanzivnom realizmu, institucionalnu tranziciju od republikanskog ka ekstraktivnom modelu i zrelu doktrinu mrežnocentričnog ratovanja. Uvode se dva nova koncepta: Monroeova doktrina 2.0 i hibridna imperijalna kontrakcija. Monroeova doktrina 2.0 označava ažuriranu politiku regionalnog isključivanja, usmjerenu protiv vanhemisferskih revizionističkih sila poput Kine, Rusije i Irana. Hibridna imperijalna kontrakcija označava strateško preusmjeravanje na hemisfersku konsolidaciju radi ostvarivanja budućih globalnih ciljeva. Ovi koncepti tumače operaciju kao odbrambenu konsolidaciju regionalne hegemonije i pripremu za nastavak projekcije moći. Događaj je simptomatičan za hegemonu statusa kvo koji brani svoju dominaciju preventivnim djelovanjem, realističkom asertivnošću, institucionalnom adaptacijom i doktrinarnim usavršavanjem. Implikacije uključuju regionalnu nestabilnost u Latinskoj Americi, produbljivanje geopolitičkih podjela i potencijalnu eroziju republikanskih institucija SAD. Ograničenja istraživanja proizlaze iz oslanjanja na sekundarne izvore i nedavnosti događaja. Buduća istraživanja trebalo bi da ispituju dugoročne ishode i uporedne slučajeve.

Ključne riječi: *intervencija SAD u Venecueli, ofanzivni realizam, geopolitika, međunarodni odnosi, talasokratija, mrežnocentrično ratovanje, institucionalna regresija.*