

# MP-IDSA *Commentary*

## Contextualising Russian Responses to US Military Action in Venezuela

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### **S***ummary*

The removal of Maduro by the US in Operation Absolute Resolve reifies Russian concerns associated with mass protests and regime change.

Russia, as a militarily diminished power, watched US forces abduct Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a quick military operation. While highlighting the UN principles of ‘sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs’, Russia showed ‘full support’ to Venezuela when the US forces blockaded its oil tankers.<sup>1</sup>

America’s military operation in Venezuela has brought to the fore the legal and moral grounds that the US and its allies themselves have invoked while excoriating the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The US has charged Maduro with corruption, illegitimate hold of power and narco-terrorism.<sup>2</sup> While initiating the Special Military Operations (SMOs) in Ukraine, Russia, apart from citing security concerns, had given the justification of deposing the ‘illegitimate’, ‘neo-Nazi’ Ukrainian leaders.

The fear of ‘colour revolutions’ and the associated regime change has been a cornerstone concern in Russian military and foreign policy thinking. Russia’s Foreign Policy Concepts, Military Doctrines, National Security Concepts, and official statements are replete with matters related to alleged West-engineered regime change. The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2014) mentions concerns akin to the unfavourable regime established as a consequence of ‘overthrow of legitimate state authorities’.<sup>3</sup>

In the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov warned that the ‘rules of war’ have changed, with non-military means (including regime change) exceeding the effectiveness of weapons.<sup>4</sup> It is no wonder that Russia has kept the ‘post-Soviet space’ as its top priority in the Foreign Policy Concept (2023).<sup>5</sup> Not only a regime change in Russia but also social and political changes in the neighbourhood are seen as threatening Russia’s overall security and survival.

The removal of Maduro by the US in Operation Absolute Resolve reifies Russian concerns associated with mass protests and regime change. It would only strengthen the concept of ‘sovereign democracy’, which argues that Russia has a right to choose its own form of ‘democracy’ suited to its culture, history and national interests, rather than a liberal democracy, within Russia.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [“Russia Pledges 'Full Support' for Venezuela Against U.S. 'Hostilities'”](#), *The Moscow Times*, 22 December 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas McEntyre and Katherine Donlevy, [“Trump Says Venezuelan Leader Nicolás Maduro, Wife ‘Captured’ After Large-scale Strikes”](#), *AOL*, 3 January 2026.

<sup>3</sup> [“Voyennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii \[Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation\]”](#), *Sovet Bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, 14 December 2014.

<sup>4</sup> V. Morris, [“Grading Gerasimov: Evaluating Russian Nonlinear War Through Modern Chinese Doctrine”](#), *Small Wars Journal*, 17 September 2015. Also, see Mark Galeotti, [“I’m Sorry for Creating the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2018.

<sup>5</sup> [“The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation”](#), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 31 March 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Andrey Okara, [“Sovereign Democracy: A New Russian Idea or a PR Project?”](#), *Russia in Global Affairs*, 8 August 2007.

Although Trump justified this military operation in Venezuela on the grounds of holding accountable and getting Maduro under trial for the ‘narco-terrorism’, he soon switched to the issue of fixing Venezuela’s ‘badly broken’ oil infrastructure and ‘start making money for the country’.<sup>7</sup> With approximately 300 million barrels, Venezuela holds the world’s largest proven oil reserves. Trump wants to ‘run’ the country and pile up profits for American companies by tapping the oil reserves.

At an emergency UN Security Council meeting, Russia’s UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia stated that Moscow was

appalled by the unparalleled cynicism on the part of Washington, which does not even attempt to conceal the true objectives of its criminal operation, namely the establishment of unlimited control over Venezuela’s natural resources.<sup>8</sup>

Such concerns about resource plundering are reflected in several statements from Russian officials. In the past, the former secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, publicly accused the US of trying to ‘dismember’ Russia and capture its natural resources.<sup>9</sup> After the Ukraine war started in 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin, too, reiterated such perturbation. He argued that the West wanted to turn Russia into a ‘weak dependent country’, ‘violate its territorial integrity’, and ‘dismember Russia in a way that suits them’.<sup>10</sup>

Though Russia, too, has disregarded the UN principles in the conduct of its military operations against Ukraine, Russia’s belief that only military might would keep a country safe in an anarchical condition has been stonified with the recent happenings in Venezuela. Russia at the UN Security Council emergency meeting highlighted the ‘recklessness and selectivity in matters related to respect for international law’.<sup>11</sup> Ambassador Nebenzia argued that

attempts to avoid principled assessments by those who in other situations foamed at the mouth demanding that others comply with the UN charter, seem particularly hypocritical and unseemly today.<sup>12</sup>

This event could be a regnant catalyst in beefing up Russia’s belief that the UN is helpless in rescuing weaker states. Since the 1990s, Russia has complained about

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<sup>7</sup> Archie Mitchell and Natalie Sherman, “[Trump Wants Venezuela's Oil. Will His Plan Work?](#)”, *BBC*, 5 January 2026.

<sup>8</sup> “[Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at a UNSC Briefing on Venezuela](#)”, Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 5 January 2026.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Saradzhyan, “[From Mutually Assured Destruction to Mutually Assured Delusion \(and Back?\)](#)”, *Russia Matters*, 12 March 2018.

<sup>10</sup> “[Putin Says Russia Will Achieve Ukraine Goals, Decries Sanctions](#)”, *Al Jazeera*, 16 March 2022.

<sup>11</sup> “[Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at a UNSC Briefing on Venezuela](#)”, no. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

how the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have bypassed the UN Security Council to carry out several military operations against sovereign countries. Russia had been particularly unhappy about these operations against Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria and Libya. At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin stressed that the ‘uncontained hyper use of force’ was intended to maintain a unipolar world and argued that only the UN Charter should be the basis for the use of force.<sup>13</sup>

While Russia has consistently complained that the West does not stick to international law, Putin has invoked the principles of ‘equal and indivisible security’ in the context of Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> The principle of equal and indivisible security supplants the ‘non-intervention principle’ in his eyes. He argues that states’ security is interconnected, and that no state’s security should be enhanced at the expense of another.<sup>15</sup>

Since the late 1990s, Russians have been concerned about their conventional weakness relative to NATO. Consequently, to ensure comprehensive security, Russia has put all its eggs in the nuclear deterrence basket. Russia shifted from a ‘no first use’ nuclear policy to employing nuclear weapons against even conventional military threats. Since the 2000 National Security Concept, Russia has lowered the threshold of its nuclear weapons to deter several non-nuclear military threats. Later, the fear of ‘conventional prompt global strike’, a US military concept that aims to deliver thousands of conventional precision strikes anywhere on Earth within one hour, has made Russia hold the grip on nuclear deterrence even tighter.

Former Russian President and present Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, Dmitry Medvedev, argued that the ‘operation in Caracas has become the best proof of the fact that any state needs to strengthen its armed forces ... only a nuclear arsenal can provide maximum strengthening, guaranteeing that the country will be reliably protected’.<sup>16</sup> He exclaimed, ‘Long live nuclear weapons!’<sup>17</sup>

The extent to which nuclear deterrence can compensate for conventional weaknesses is questionable. The credibility of using nukes in response to attempts at regime change or sub-threshold military actions is, too, seen with scepticism. However, the Russian ruling elites’ obsession with nukes as the ultimate guarantor of the Russian Federation’s security has only gone up in recent years. Such a belief has been reified with the recent Venezuelan event.

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<sup>13</sup> Ted Galen Carpenter, [“Did Putin’s 2007 Munich Speech Predict the Ukraine Crisis?”](#), CATO Institute, 24 January 2022.

<sup>14</sup> [“Address by the President of the Russian Federation”](#), President of Russia, 24 February 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> [“‘Only a Nuclear Arsenal’ Provides Sufficient Security: Russia’s Medvedev Warns U.S. Attack on Venezuela Makes Deterrence Vital”](#), *Military Watch Magazine*, 4 January 2026.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

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