Analyses OSW

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES 14.01.2026 www.osw.waw.pl

Intervention in Venezuela from a domestic perspective: a public relations success and an expansion of presidential powers

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The operation to capture Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro can be interpreted within the context of restoring American dominance in the Western Hemisphere, as outlined in the most recent National Security Strategy. However, it also carries significant domestic implications. The intervention has strengthened the standing of Donald Trump's administration among Republican voters at the start of an election year and has helped to divert public attention from politically damaging issues that dominated debate in the United States at the end of the previous year – most notably the Epstein case and the rising cost of living. The MAGA movement welcomed the success of the military operation in Caracas. However, prolonged US engagement in Venezuela's internal affairs could prove unpopular. The case also represents a key element in the ongoing power struggle between the President and the US Congress over the authority to deploy military force. Trump seeks to exercise this authority selectively as part of his effort to expand influence across the Western Hemisphere.

Domestic drivers behind the intervention in Venezuela

Removing Maduro is not only part of Washington's broader effort to reassert its influence in the region by triggering regime change in Venezuela, but also a signal to other states in the hemisphere: the United States is resuming a more active role in the Western Hemisphere and will not hesitate to use military force or disregard international norms when its interests are at stake. Equally significant, however, are the domestic drivers behind the events in Caracas. The successful military operation in Venezuela may have been intended to improve the administration's public image and divert attention from mounting political difficulties. The end of 2025 proved challenging for the Trump administration. Voters were particularly critical of the administration's economic policy – according to a CBS News/YouGov poll, only 37% of respondents rated it positively. Other problems included the prolonged government shutdown (which lasted until 12 November 2025) and the release of further documents related to the Epstein case. The president also faced criticism for excessive foreign involvement, particularly in the Gaza peace process and negotiations concerning Ukraine. Moreover, Republicans performed poorly in state and local elections. Republican candidates lost gubernatorial races in Virginia and New Jersey, and the party's candidate in a special House election in Tennessee underperformed. In New York, Zohra Mamdani's local success – despite President Trump's endorsement of independent

candidate Andrew Cuomo – further alarmed the administration.

With the 2026 midterm elections approaching in November – which will determine the composition of the House of Representatives, one-third of the Senate, and a range of state and local offices – the Republican Party is in urgent need of reclaiming momentum among Latino voters. This is a rapidly growing voting bloc, rising from 27 million in 2016 to 36 million in 2024, and one that is increasingly open to supporting right-wing candidates. According to the Pew Research Center, 48% of Latino voters backed Trump in 2024, compared to just 28% in 2016. However, Trump's first year back in office saw a decline in Republican support within this group, mainly due to persistently high living costs and a hardline immigration policy that often affected even those residing legally in the United States. For many Latino voters, particularly those with right-wing sympathies, ending the dictatorships in Cuba and Venezuela remains a key concern. The removal of Maduro could therefore help the Republican Party improve approval ratings among this group.

A key driver behind the actions targeting the Venezuelan regime was pressure from within the Republican Party. During work on the 'great, beautiful bill' – the flagship legislative achievement of the administration's first year (see '*Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill Act: lower taxes and greater focus on border protection and confrontation with China*') – several congressmen made their support conditional on a tougher stance towards Venezuela. More radical measures against Caracas were also advocated by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller. For Miller, the crackdown on the Venezuelan regime also formed part of the administration's broader anti-narcotics and immigration policy. The latter aims not only to end illegal border crossings and deport those residing in the US unlawfully, but also to reduce the overall number of immigrants in the country. In recent months, the Trump administration revoked Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for approximately 600,000 Venezuelan immigrants. This status had been granted under President Joe Biden in response to the severe humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. The current administration now argues that Maduro's arrest has removed the basis for such protection and is urging Venezuelans to return immediately – warning that those who fail to do so may face deportation.

The expansion of presidential power

During his second term, Trump has sought to expand presidential powers, primarily at the expense of the US Congress. The most visible manifestation of this effort has been his bypassing of the legislative branch and introducing significant changes through executive orders – in 2025 alone, he issued more than 200, the highest number in the first year of any presidency since F.D. Roosevelt. The administration has also sought to shift the boundaries of its authority in budgetary matters – by withholding funds previously approved by Congress or reallocating them for different purposes. Another area of concern is the use of the armed forces. During this term, the president has deployed them to strengthen border security, restore order in American cities, and support efforts to combat illegal immigration.

Under the US Constitution, the power to declare war rests solely with Congress. However, the last time this power was formally exercised was during the Second World War. Since then, successive administrations have found alternative ways to employ military force. As a result, in 1973 Congress passed the War Powers Resolution, which requires the president to consult Congress before deploying armed forces, to report the reasons for doing so within

48 hours, and – unless Congress declares war – to withdraw troops within 60 days. Congress also has the authority to end US military involvement through a resolution. Nonetheless, presidents have repeatedly found ways to circumvent these provisions.

In the case of Maduro's capture, the Trump administration claimed that the operation constituted a law enforcement action, with the military merely providing support. However, this claim is contradicted by other statements from administration officials and the president himself, which pointed to Venezuela's oil reserves and the need to assert dominance in the Western Hemisphere as the true motivations behind the intervention. Vice President J.D. Vance declared the War Powers Resolution unconstitutional, suggesting that one of the operation's aims was to expand presidential authority over the use of the armed forces. This is seen as central to the implementation of a revised version of the Monroe Doctrine – referred to either as 'Trump's Addendum to the Monroe Doctrine' or the 'Donroe Doctrine' – which envisages unchallenged American dominance in the Western Hemisphere.

Trump's first year back in office was marked by Republican party discipline and deference from the legislative branch to the executive. However, with the midterm elections approaching and growing concerns over the marginalisation of Congress, at least some Republican lawmakers may begin to reassess their position. A sign of this shift came in the form of a procedural vote on a resolution requiring the president to withdraw US armed forces from operations against Venezuela – five Republican senators allowed the measure to proceed to a final vote. While Trump is expected to veto the measure if it is passed, the episode reflects changing sentiments on Capitol Hill.

The Maduro case and the domestic consequences of the intervention

By launching the operation in Venezuela, the administration took a political risk. Trump's electoral success had been built on a promise to scale back American interventionism – a message that resonated strongly with his voter base. The airstrikes in Iran at the end of June 2025, as well as involvement in the Gaza peace process, had already sparked internal tensions within the MAGA movement. The deployment of troops to Venezuela risked being interpreted in a similar light – as a betrayal of one of the core tenets of the America First policy. However, the effectiveness of the operation altered this perception: Trump's voters responded positively to the capture of Maduro, viewing it as a display of uncompromising American power. According to a YouGov poll conducted for *The Economist*, the share of MAGA-identifying voters who supported the military overthrow of Maduro rose from just over 50% before the operation to over 80% afterwards. Enthusiasm for the action was lower among more moderate Republican voters. Democratic politicians responded cautiously, wary that strong criticism of the administration could lead to accusations of siding with the dictator.

The success of the Caracas intervention prompted at least some commentators affiliated with the MAGA movement to call for further action in the Western Hemisphere – including the overthrow of the Cuban government or the occupation of Greenland. This points to a duality in the mindset of Trump's voter base: on the one hand, it demands a greater focus on domestic issues, but on the other, it responds enthusiastically to demonstrations of American power abroad. The administration's narrative also proved effective – presenting the intervention through the lens of access to Venezuelan oil and the pursuit of US national

interests. However, if the situation in Venezuela destabilises and the United States becomes drawn into a deeper intervention, this could negatively affect Trump's approval ratings and those of the wider Republican party.

Another element of risk for the administration is the criminal case against Maduro – despite the strong likelihood that the former dictator will be convicted. The case is based on an investigation dating back to the early 2000s, which sought to uncover ties between Venezuela's political elite and drug trafficking. Charges against Maduro were made public in 2020 and include allegations of 'narco-terrorism' and facilitating the smuggling of narcotics. It is unlikely that appeals to head-of-state immunity will aid his defence. Since 2019, the United States has not recognised Maduro's position in Venezuela, having deemed the election results fraudulent. This line of defence also proved ineffective in the case of former Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega, who was overthrown by the US and convicted in an American court in 1992.