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Webinar Report

“U. S. Intervention in Venezuela: Implications on Global and Regional Level”

January 16, 2026

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Introduction:

Venezuela was recognized as an independent nation by the United States on 28th February 1835 and the diplomatic ties were established later the same year. The earlier ties between the two countries were majorly centered on oil trade, security cooperation and investments. The oil sector of Venezuela was the focus of many U. S. oil companies, and U. S also provided cooperation for issues like counternarcotics. Both countries shared strong, positive and stable relationship from the mid-20th century till the late 1990’s marked with security issue cooperations, diplomatic engagements and economic ties. But the presidency of Hugo Chávez changed the nature of relationship with Bolivarian Revolution and extending ties with Russia, China and Iran. The relationship further deteriorated during the presidency of Nicolás Maduro lined with severance of formal ties, visa bans, financial sanctions, limited market access. On 3rd January 2026, this bad blood between the two countries entered into a new trajectory that sent shock waves world-wide, as the U. S captured the President of Venezuela, Mr. Nicholas Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores from the capital Caracas under multiple charges including drug-trafficking.

The BNU Center for Policy Research convened a webinar titled **“U.S. Intervention in Venezuela: Implications on Global and Regional Level”** on 16th January 2026 to examine the multifaceted implications of the recent U.S. military operation in Venezuela. Participants discussed the impact of the intervention on the contemporary world order and established international norms; how states are adjusting politically, strategically, and economically in response to the operation; the contours of the U.S. National Security Strategy 2025 and its reinforcement of hemispheric



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influence; and broader concerns about precedent and future interventions in other strategically significant or geopolitically sensitive regions such as Greenland and Iran.

Speakers included Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan, *Director BCPR*, Dr. Zainab Ahmed, *Deputy Director BCPR*, Dr. Syed Muhammad Ali, *Lecturer at John Hopkins University and Faculty member affiliated with BNU* and Dr. Marta Fernández, *Director of the BRICS Policy Center and Associate Professor at the Institute of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*.

Discussion:

Dr. Zainab Ahmed, Deputy Director BCPR, opened the webinar by situating the discussion within the broader context of renewed global power competition, particularly the longstanding strategic rivalry between the United States and China. She observed that Pakistan occupies a complex geopolitical position, given its trusted partnership with China alongside a long-standing strategic relationship with the United States as a non-NATO ally, and its proximity to key regional flashpoints such as Middle East, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, including persistent tensions with India, instability in Afghanistan, and its border with Iran. Dr. Zainab underscored that rising tensions among major powers, especially involving the United States, Iran, and Israel, could have serious repercussions for Pakistan's strategic environment. Against this backdrop, she framed the discussion on the U.S. military intervention in Venezuela, noting concerns about its implications for global order, norms of sovereignty and non-intervention, and emerging precedents for external use of force. The January 2026 U.S. military operation, culminating in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, has elicited widespread international debate and underscored the volatility of current geopolitical dynamics.

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan, Director BCPR, provided an analytical perspective on the U.S. action in Venezuela and its broader implications. He argued that the military operation should be viewed not as an isolated or spontaneous development but as consistent with the strategic objectives articulated in the United States' National Security Strategy 2025, which seeks to



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reaffirm U.S. influence globally and within the Western Hemisphere. Ambassador Khan contended that the first year of the current U.S. administration has witnessed an unusually high level of policy activity, ranging from migration and trade policy to heightened tensions with Iran and efforts to shape outcomes in Europe and Ukraine, reflecting a comprehensive approach to national strategy. He emphasized that the core objective of U.S. strategy is to maintain unipolar dominance through sustained military superiority, economic and technological leadership, and energy leverage. In this context, he characterized the Venezuela operation as part of a well-structured framework aimed at consolidating regional influence through a combination of military, economic, and political tools, including a reinvigorated interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine.

Ambassador Khan further noted that the intervention has implications for ongoing global debates about the trajectory of world order. He argued that recent developments call into question assumptions about an imminent transition to a fully multipolar system, as the U.S. appears intent on reinforcing its strategic primacy even as China, Russia, and the European Union navigate the evolving landscape cautiously. Looking ahead, he raised concerns about future potential flashpoints, including strategic regions such as Greenland and contexts of heightened geopolitical sensitivity like Iran. Given Pakistan's geographic proximity to Iran, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan warned that any escalation involving U.S. military actions in that theatre could have profound regional consequences, further destabilizing West and South Asia. He concluded by cautioning that the use of force and military interventions may contribute to prolonged instability beyond Latin America, and emphasized the need for greater international engagement to mitigate tensions and uphold an international order that enables smaller states to pursue their interests peacefully.

Dr. Marta Fernández, Director of the BRICS Policy Center and Associate Professor at the Institute of International Relations of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, offered a comparative analysis of the United States' historical engagement in Latin America and its current approach in Venezuela. She argued that the U.S. use of overt military force in Venezuela represents



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a significant departure from its traditional toolkit, which historically relied on indirect measures such as sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and support for opposition actors rather than direct intervention. In her assessment, the January 2026 military operation constitutes one of the most direct uses of force by the United States in South America in decades, and signals a substantial shift in regional dynamics and U.S. operational posture. Dr. Fernández linked the intervention to broader U.S. national security priorities, particularly Washington’s intensified focus on countering China’s expanding influence in the region. She contended that the United States now seeks to assert influence through coercive means rather than the traditional practice of shaping choices indirectly. She described the current global context as one in which an older international order is eroding, without the emergence of a stable alternative, thereby generating instability and more assertive behavior by dominant powers.

On regional interactions with China, she observed that China’s influence has grown through soft power engagement, notably through infrastructure investment and economic ties, a dynamic that has been met with resistance and retrenchment in certain countries due to U.S. pressure. As an illustration, she referenced Panama’s decision not to renew its participation in China’s Belt and Road Initiative amid U.S. diplomatic engagement. Dr. Fernández further highlighted the role of economic instruments, such as tariffs and trade restrictions, noting that major regional economies like Brazil have faced significant trade pressures. She pointed out that while some states are diversifying their economic partnerships, including strengthening ties with China, such moves may invite additional political and economic pressure from the United States. She concluded by underscoring that Latin American countries currently confront a constrained set of strategic choices in navigating great power competition, with limited and potentially perilous options for preserving autonomy and stability.

Dr. Syed Muhammad Ali, Lecturer at Johns Hopkins University, situated the United States’ recent intervention in Venezuela within the long historical arc of hemispheric dominance in South America. Drawing on the evolution of the Monroe Doctrine and its early operationalization under



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Theodore Roosevelt, he argued that U.S. interventionism in the Western Hemisphere predates the Cold War and has been driven consistently by political and economic interests. Historically aimed at countering European influence, Dr. Ali noted, the doctrine's logic has evolved such that the current U.S. strategy is now shaped by concerns over China's expanding presence in the region, including in Venezuela and around strategic infrastructure such as the Panama Canal. He observed that the U.S. military operation in January 2026 named Operation Absolute Resolve, represents one of the rarest and most direct uses of force by the United States in South America in decades, with profound regional repercussions. He contended that the current administration has adopted a more pragmatic orientation that engages directly with domestic power brokers in Venezuela, particularly those advocating for reopening the country's oil sector. Dr. Ali cautioned that this approach carries significant risks. He highlighted Venezuela's structural vulnerabilities, including fragile infrastructure, environmental challenges associated with heavy crude, and deep political and economic instability, and argued that Venezuela's oil output, though politically consequential, constitutes a relatively small share of global energy supply, making rapid economic recovery unlikely without massive, long term investment over at least a decade.

On the international stage, he agreed with other participants that there is widespread unease, particularly among European states, regarding the implications of U.S. interventionism, while China and Russia have openly criticized the operation. He further noted that multilateral legal mechanisms such as the International Criminal Court exert limited constraint over major powers, raising concerns that this precedent could embolden similar interventions elsewhere, including in highly sensitive geopolitical contexts such as Taiwan. Dr. Ali concluded by describing the situation in Venezuela as highly tenuous, marked by acute humanitarian, political, and economic challenges that cannot be resolved through external military intervention alone, and warned that the broader implications for international stability remain uncertain and potentially destabilizing.

Toward the end of the webinar, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan posed a series of questions to deepen the discussion on great power competition and regional influence. Addressing Dr. Marta



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Fernández, he asked whether reliance on soft power alone can meaningfully shape the balance of power in the current global landscape, or whether major actors such as the United States and China might eventually be compelled to lean more heavily on hard power instruments, potentially intensifying global strategic competition?

In response, Dr. Fernández underscored that China's expanding presence in Latin America is best understood within the context of a deeply polarized regional environment, where domestic divisions have complicated collective responses to external pressure. She noted that regional bodies such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) have struggled to reach consensus following the U.S. intervention in Venezuela, reflecting broader political fragmentation among states. Brazil, in particular, illustrates this dynamic: competing domestic forces simultaneously align with the United States and advocate for a more autonomous foreign policy that embraces engagement with multiple external powers. Dr. Fernández observed that China has deliberately refrained from adopting an overtly assertive posture in the region, prioritizing economic engagement and infrastructural partnerships over coercive measures. She cited China's cautious approach during sensitive trade negotiations and its careful diplomatic positioning, including the decision of President Xi Jinping not to attend a recent BRICS related forum in Brazil, as indicative of Beijing's preference to avoid actions that could later be used against it in other contexts, such as Taiwan.

Dr. Fernández further argued that the United States' increasing reliance on coercive measures, exemplified by its overt military action in Venezuela, signals not strength but a decline in hegemonic legitimacy, as its capacity to lead through persuasion and soft influence appears diminished. She linked recent U.S. actions to broader strategic priorities, including energy security and supply chain control, and highlighted U.S. sensitivity to challenges against the dominance of the dollar, particularly in energy transactions involving Iran and China. According to her, these dynamics underscore that Latin American states currently confront limited and fraught strategic choices as they navigate competing pressures from great powers.



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Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan asked Dr. Syed Muhammad Ali to reflect on the evolution of U.S. strategy over the past decade, contrasting the approach under President Obama in 2015 with that of President Trump in 2025–26? He highlighted that these shifts have generated considerable debate among analysts and asked whether the strategic changes under the current administration are likely to be temporary or enduring.

Dr. Muhammad Ali responded by emphasizing that U.S. strategic evolution cannot be understood in linear or simplistic terms, given the constantly shifting global environment. While he acknowledged certain continuities with previous Republican administrations, such as a leaner government, spending restraint, and efficiency-oriented reforms, the contemporary international system is far more complex and fragmented. Unlike earlier periods, traditional instruments of U.S. influence, including soft-power mechanisms and institutional tools such as USAID, have diminished in effectiveness amid intensified multipolar pressures. He noted that China's expanding global influence does not yet constitute a direct challenge to U.S. dominance in regions like South America, as Beijing remains cautious and largely focused on core interests in the Indo-Pacific. He further observed that prior administrations, including Obama and Biden, maintained a balance between competition and cooperation on issues such as climate change; however, under the Trump administration, this space has narrowed due to renewed prioritization of energy security, fossil fuels, and control over critical supply chains.

Concluding, Dr. Muhammad Ali argued that while the Trump administration's approach differs in tone and method, many of its core objectives, like securing resources, maintaining technological dominance, and controlling global supply chains, reflect enduring U.S. strategic interests. As such, he suggested that certain elements of the current strategy are likely to persist, particularly in a turbulent and unpredictable global environment, even as tactical approaches may evolve.

Dr. Zainab concluded the webinar by sharing a famous thesis that the "American century" still exists and it will continue to be the hegemon of the world, as it has the most uncontested soft power. She further added that the institutions like USAID have historically allowed the U.S. to



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influence countries like Pakistan deeply, shaping sectors and bureaucracy. However, in the present times it is relying more on the hard power and has reduced its soft power engagement, thus a global vacuum is emerging. On the other hand, China is expanding its soft power and is not in a position to completely fill this gap, leaving room for uncertainty and increased geopolitical fluidity over the coming decade.

Conclusion:

The U. S. military operation in Venezuela reflects a broader U.S. strategy and should not be considered an isolated action, as it has presented the U.S. dominance in the increasingly contested international system. The operation signals a revival of interventionist practices aligned with the reinforcement of the Monroe Doctrine and driven largely by concerns over China's expanding influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Collectively, the webinar highlighted several key conclusions:

1. The U.S. intervention in Venezuela represents a significant strategic and operational departure from prior hemispheric practices, with implications for sovereignty, international norms, and global stability.
2. Latin American countries face constrained and complex choices in navigating the pressures of great-power competition, with domestic divisions further complicating regional consensus.
3. The intervention signals a broader trend of U.S. reliance on coercive instruments in pursuit of strategic objectives, with potential ripple effects for other geopolitically sensitive regions, including the Middle East and Arctic.
4. The event underscores the limitations of external interventions in resolving deep-seated political, economic, and humanitarian challenges, highlighting the importance of multilateral engagement and regional diplomacy.
5. Observers agreed on the need for careful monitoring of U.S.–China dynamics, energy security priorities, and financial mechanisms such as de-dollarization, as these will shape the trajectories of both regional and global stability in the coming years.