

U.S. Attacks Venezuela & Kidnaps President Maduro

Prof. Jeffrey Sachs discusses the US invasion of Venezuela and the kidnapping of President Maduro. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: <https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng> Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined by Professor Jeffrey Sachs to discuss the U.S. attack on Venezuela and the kidnapping of its president, Maduro. Thank you very much for coming back on the program.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Dramatic events.

#Glenn

Yeah, it's quite dramatic. And this, of course, was an actual unprovoked attack—an illegal attack as well. But the capture, or "arrest," as the media sometimes call it, of the president of Venezuela has also been quite dramatic. How are you assessing the situation, and what are the objectives of the United States here?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, clearly this is a blatantly illegal act, but it's one in a long line of blatantly illegal American actions. And just in recent days, Trump has been threatening a new country every day. He bombed Nigeria last week. He said the U.S. would intervene in Iran if the government acts against protesters in a way that Trump doesn't like. He has invaded Venezuela. Just recently, he created a special envoy for Greenland, declaring that Greenland will be ours. So it's a threat against Europe—which, of course, Europe doesn't even acknowledge or recognize because it's so passive relative to the United States. We are not in a constitutional order in the United States; we are in an order led by a military state. We do not obey the U.S. Constitution. Everything is by executive decree.

When a congressman dared to mention the U.S. Constitution today, Trump said, "What is he whining about? This is ridiculous." Well, really, what Trump has done is expose the fact that we're at the end

of constitutional rule in the United States. What happens when there's thuggish rule remains to be seen. But in my view, this makes the world extraordinarily dangerous. Of course, we're hardly at the end of the story about Venezuela itself. They've arrested a president, but this is not the end of Venezuela. The whole history of U.S. regime change operations—probably around a hundred such operations since the end of World War II—is a record of bloodshed and violence, the deliberate creation of instability, coups, assassinations, civil wars. So we don't know what will come next, but we know there's been thuggery.

It's also interesting—though maybe I don't have a definitive count—but I haven't noticed any of the mainstream media in the United States even raising a question about this. The New York Times, the so-called paper of record, has not once in recent weeks said, "Oh, it wouldn't be a good idea to brazenly attack." The editorial board was completely silent. As far as I can see, it remains silent. Our Congress is moribund. It doesn't exist, in fact, in any operational sense. So I find all of this very dramatic and extremely worrisome, though I hasten to repeat that we're not at the end of the story by any means of what will transpire in Venezuela itself. There is a government in place. There is a military. There is a mobilized part of society. There are lots of guns around. This is not a simple, smooth takeover by the United States, as much as Donald Trump might believe so.

#Glenn

Yeah, that long list of threats being made over the past few weeks is quite extraordinary. We see Trump getting increasingly unhinged, not just domestically but also internationally. The Europeans—the leaders of Europe—have predictably shown their obedience and offered their support, making it clear they consider Maduro illegitimate and want to back the American position on this. But what does this mean for Latin America? Because in the U.S. national security strategy, it's outlined clearly that this is more or less America's backyard now, and it wants other great powers out so the U.S. can reign supreme. Is this a warning for what's to come in other parts of Latin America as well?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, first, let me say a word about Europe. It's a very sad day for your country, Glenn. I think we can rename the Nobel Peace Prize as the Nobel War Prize. It was given this year to a person who called for exactly what has happened today—who called for a military strike by the United States on Venezuela. And it came to pass. This is a tragedy for countries, governments, and institutions that once upon a time talked about international law. The European response has been pathetic—absolutely pathetic. Of course, every leader in Europe seems to cower to the U.S., to be terrified. The strongest statements were, "We hope that this will return to stability soon," not any kind of shock at a brazen attack—an attack against the international order, against the UN Charter, against peace itself.

So this is the world we're in right now. Europe varies between complete vassalage and acquiescence to the U.S., or its own war-mongering when it comes to Russia. There seems to be no diplomacy, no

peace, no attachment to multilateralism or to the U.N. Charter. You don't see it anywhere. When it comes to Latin America, of course, Trump has been openly saying that the United States rules the Western Hemisphere—it will dictate the terms. He said today—basically, I don't have the direct quotation because I'm halfway around the world—but I saw the wire notice that Trump said, "Well, the oil is ours." This is a grab for Venezuelan oil. He said our companies will go back in and do business in Venezuela.

It could not be crasser or cruder. And we've been here before, in this kind of world. We've had a world of sheer imperialism that was not in any way tempered or bound by international law, and it led to two world wars—an unconscionable, unimaginable loss of life. So we've been in this kind of situation before. We've never been in this kind of lawlessness in the nuclear age, however. And I think this is just extraordinarily worrisome—to have an unhinged, undisciplined, crude bully, absolutely lawless, absolutely disrespectful of any norms, as president of the United States, and to have no counterweight whatsoever in Europe—not a voice for decency or international law.

And for the rest of the world, well, I suppose Russia and China are watching. They've said this is obviously a crass violation. They're not going to intervene in the Western Hemisphere. But what's happened is simply another step in the complete dismantling of the institutions and lessons we once thought we had learned from World War I and World War II, and had installed—however fragilely—in the United Nations system and in international law. It barely exists. The UN is in the same situation today as the League of Nations was in its defunct period in the late 1930s and early 1940s. It's essentially useless right now. And I'm sorry to say that, because I've been working for and with the UN for 25 years. But the U.S. has disowned it and is trying deliberately to destroy it. And while one hoped that the rest of the world would rally to its defense, we see that Europe is silent.

And—oops—our lights went out. I'm in the Himalayas right now. But I don't see... What is needed right now is for the rest of the world to rally to the cause that this can't stand in this way. Maybe in the first hours one shouldn't expect that, and maybe more will come. But it's a very, very alarming period. The U.S. is deliberately out to rip up any semblance or shred of international law. I don't know how Europe will feel when the United States invades Greenland, but don't be surprised when it happens. Trump has announced it—he's announced it again and again—and it's very, very likely to happen. One day Trump will say we have a national emergency and Greenland will be occupied. And then probably Europe will say, "Oh, thank you. Thank you, U.S. It could have been worse." This is how things are right now. Principles? Who needs them?

#Glenn

You mentioned the Norwegians gave the Peace Prize to Machado, and I already see that Fox News has announced she's the logical successor. Now, after Maduro's fall, that's how they're framing it. But of course, all this was, to a large extent, the purpose, I think, of giving the prize—to provide legitimacy for the invasion, given that she's been a supporter of it. It was also, of course, complemented by other justifications. We heard about narco-terrorism; we're told that Hamas,

Hezbollah, Iran, Russia, China—all these actors—are operating in Venezuela, whatever that might mean, which supposedly makes it legitimate.

And of course, Trump said, "This is our oil, and we want it back." So there are all these different justifications, but none of them are very convincing. And in terms of trying to put in Machado, as you suggested, it doesn't seem as if the U.S. thinks the game is over yet. The idea that they can just kidnap Maduro and then Washington can appoint a new leader—it doesn't seem to work that way. How likely do you think it is that the U.S. can actually break the Venezuelan government now that the president has been taken?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, let me say a few things. First, all the various explanations that have been given are just blah, blah, blah—meaning they're whatever joke or improvisation the United States wants to use at the moment. The U.S. has been trying to overthrow the government of Venezuela for 23 years. They tried a coup against Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez. They've declared that the U.S. is the enemy, that Venezuela is the enemy of the United States—to put it more clearly—because this has been a left-wing regime that believes Venezuela's resources belong to Venezuela, and that the country doesn't have to follow U.S. dictates about who controls the oil and who receives the rents, and so on.

And so this is a long story, and it's very important to understand. In 2017, in Trump's first year in office, he said at a dinner table with Latin American leaders, "Why don't I just invade Venezuela?" Two of the leaders talked him down from that. I heard from two presidents who were there, independently, about this dinner. That idea of Trump invading Venezuela has been eight years in the making. The lead cheerleader for invading Venezuela was Senator Marco Rubio, and now Secretary of State Marco Rubio. And there were celebrations in Florida today by Venezuelan expats and others celebrating the U.S. action. What does this mean? This is partly U.S. politics, because Florida is a swing state—but it also means it's been a long-term project.

Whatever is said is just blah, blah, blah. This is a concerted, long-term attempt to bring down the government of Venezuela. I think people would do well to understand how U.S. foreign policy operates. It works on a long-term basis and tells whatever lies, stories, or narratives it wants to tell at any given moment to maintain that long-term agenda. In the case of Ukraine, it was a 30-year project to bring Ukraine into the American military orbit, going back to the early 1990s. In the case of Venezuela, it's been more than a 20-year effort. And in the case of Syria, where Bashar al-Assad was targeted last year, that was a 13-year effort by the CIA and the U.S. deep state.

These are projects. And trying to overthrow Venezuela, which just happens to have the world's largest oil reserves—larger than Saudi Arabia's, though more expensive to produce because it's heavy oil—but still the world's largest reserves. Well, this is a project of the United States. Trump is unusually thuggish. The collapse of the American constitutional order is very far advanced. I would

say, if you think about Roman history going from the Roman Republic to the Roman Empire, which is usually dated to 27 B.C. with Augustus becoming the princeps, we're somewhere into the reign of Tiberius now. In other words, the U.S. stopped being a constitutional order 10, 20, 30 years ago. But we have the trappings of the Senate, the same way the Romans kept the trappings of the Senate.

We don't have a constitutional order. We have a president enriching himself and his friends, and nobody says a word. We have a president who rules by executive decree—no one says a word. We have a president going to war against Iran, complicit in Gaza, attacking Venezuela, or bombing Nigeria, and still nobody says a word. We're in a post-constitutional order in the United States. This is really our situation—it's quite dramatic. The world should not sit by if it takes any lessons from history. This is an extraordinarily dangerous period. The reason we created international law and the International Court of Justice was not for the U.S. to sanction, threaten, and bludgeon it, but to avoid global annihilation in a third world war—this time in the nuclear age. We're getting closer to that every moment we rip up the UN Charter.

#Glenn

You know, giving the Peace Prize to Machado made some sense, because for the past 30 years we've been saying that peace depends on democracy, and democracy is delivered by military force. So essentially, war is peace. That's been the logic for the past 30 years. But you see now in the media a repetition of this. All the media outlets don't discuss the legality of what the United States has done; they just refer to Maduro as a dictator and suggest that now there might be freedom. They do what they can to make this seem legitimate. And of course, the EU frames this as standing with the Venezuelan people against their president. But as we said before, Trump has also threatened to "help" the people of Iran if protesters are shot or arrested by their government.

So while legitimizing it might work across the Western world, the world looks very different now. I'm not saying that countries like China or Russia would go to war with the United States—I don't think under any circumstances they're considering anything of the sort. But what are the wider ramifications here? Because if you're sitting in Iran or other countries, you must be aware that the rule of law is essentially gone. And it does feel like the U.S. has gone rogue. Again, when we started speaking, we went through a very solid list of the things the Trump administration has done over the past few weeks. So what do you think are the wider ramifications, beyond, of course, the suffering in Venezuela?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, the first thing I would say, by the way, is that the idea that democracy equals peace is a fairy tale that was disproved 2,300 years ago and countless times since. Athens was the democracy of its day, and it was utterly imperialistic—making war, destroying other city-states. It finally ended up, in a way, committing its own suicide through an extravagant adventure to conquer Syracuse, a city-state in Sicily, which, when it failed, left Athens exposed to a final defeat by Sparta in 404 B.C. In

the 19th century, the great democracy was Britain—certainly the most violent country of that century, the country that attacked just about everybody in the world.

And in the 20th century, the United States—especially in the second half of the century, when it became the global hegemon or would-be global hegemon replacing Britain—has certainly been the most violent country in the world. Around a hundred regime-change operations, wars of choice, perpetual war, all based on whatever narrative, whatever lies, whatever story the United States wanted. And for many reasons—whether it was resources, simple conquest, or ideological campaigns—it's been war. So the idea that democracy equals peace is an Orwellian idea.

Democracy, by these leading hegemons—whether Athens, Britain, or the United States—has meant war almost nonstop.

Now, Iran is a project—like Venezuela is a project, like Syria is a project. The United States has been intervening in Iran since 1953, when it toppled the democratic government of Mossadegh, which had the audacity to think that the oil under Iranian ground was actually Iranian. And when Mossadegh declared that Iranian oil was Iranian and would be controlled by Iran, MI6 and the CIA overthrew him and installed a police state. When that police state fell in 1979, the United States armed Iraq to attack Iran, and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost. Since that time, the United States has tried to destroy Iran in multiple ways—economic sanctions repeatedly, of course.

That's why there are protests—because the economy is in collapse. But the U.S. is the agent of that sanctions regime. When Iran negotiated an arrangement to absolutely show that its nuclear program was curbed, Trump said, no, we will crush the regime instead. This is all at the behest of the Zionist lobby in the United States and Israel in this case. So this is another project. They're probably chortling, "Oh, look, we're very, very close right now." We should understand that the protests in Iran are part of the script. I'm not saying people aren't protesting; I'm saying the U.S. has gone out of its way to crush the Iranian economy and to crush the regime. And last week, Trump made all of this very, very clear.

So we, I think, can expect Israeli bombing soon—or maybe U.S. and Israeli bombing soon—or some other CIA operation. God only knows. But I was saying that, for the world, this is alarming. It's not something to just go along with. I don't think, even though, as I said, the UN really is defunct right now, that it should be allowed to die. It needs to be brought back to life. And while the U.S. will not do that, the rest of the world—maybe the rest of the world except Europe, so leave aside the so-called Western alliance—you have 85% of the world that really should not want this kind of thuggery. Of course, as an American, I don't want this kind of thuggery. But nobody asks the American people anything anymore. This is all a military state that we're in, and it's extra-constitutional.

#Glenn

Well, it seems that the success of the U.S. attack on Venezuela will, to a large extent, depend on how quickly they can do this. If they're able to topple the government and get it done by the end of the weekend, then it would be low-hanging fruit: we went in, we showed strength, and now we have all their oil. But if it drags on, it could be deeply problematic. How do you see this affecting Donald Trump's base? Because it appears that the America First people are already quite split—the ones aligned with the ideas of Tucker Carlson see this as a violation of Trump's mandate, of what they voted for.

#Jeffrey Sachs

I think you're exactly right. What will determine the verdict is what happens in the coming days, weeks, and months. My guess on that—and I'll underscore guess—is that nothing will go smoothly. We have a long history of regime change operations. Sometimes they succeed. This one hasn't even succeeded yet. This has been a decapitation of a president and his wife, not of the regime. And it's hard, actually, to see how that will play out. But it's possible that something more happens. I'm sure there are plans and ideas. But the history of these operations is that they're followed by long periods of unrest, coups, instability, insurrections, civil war. And I think that's quite possibly what will happen in Venezuela.

There's a very good book that everyone who wants to understand American foreign policy should read, called **Covert Regime Change** by Lindsay O'Rourke, who was a PhD student of John Mearsheimer and wrote her dissertation on the sixty-four covert regime change operations that took place between 1947 and 1989. By the way, "covert regime change" is a bit of an oxymoron. When the regime is changed, you know who did it. What "covert" means is that the U.S. lies about it—not that it's unknown who did it, but that the U.S. lies about it. So you could say sixty-four regime change operations in which the U.S. lied. Now, she documents what happens. Many of them failed to achieve regime change. Maybe they assassinated a leader but didn't change the regime.

Many changed the regime, but of those that did, most descended into prolonged instability. There are very few cases where the U.S. political purpose was actually served by what happened. Even if you don't accept the U.S. political purpose as legitimate, just to ask the question—did the U.S. achieve its aims? The answer is very, very rarely. And I think in the case of Venezuela, it would be a real long shot that the U.S. achieves its aims. Even—and I don't accept the aims—but even if one accepted the aims of regime change, the idea that this will lead to a pro-U.S. democracy in which Chevron and ExxonMobil will thrive, well, that's Trump's aim, but I think it's unlikely to be realized.

#Glenn

I can't help but think that part of the problem here is that the U.S. can't really compete with China anymore. When the new U.S. national security strategy essentially tries to restore this new imperialist version of the Monroe Doctrine, it's clearly aimed at that concern—that China is the main

trading partner for most, if not all, of Latin America. So how do you expect different world leaders to react? I know the Chinese and the Russians, especially, have issued very strong condemnations, but do you see this moving in a dangerous direction?

#Jeffrey Sachs

Well, it certainly moves in a dangerous direction. Anytime there is a violent attack by the United States against another country, it can have many profound ricochet effects. So this is, of course, dangerous. I don't think that Russia or China, as you rightly said, will directly intervene or challenge the United States on this militarily, though I think they will strongly condemn it from the point of view of the UN Charter. If we see this followed up by violence inside Venezuela and an attack by Israel on Iran, well, then we're really heading toward a potential complete explosion and disaster. Iran, of course, would be far more vulnerable and destabilizing than this attack on Venezuela, which is bad enough.

But if Israel now takes this—and I think they're very likely to—as the cue for an attack on Iran, I think we're heading toward all kinds of very, very dire and unpredictable consequences. Iran itself is no pushover, and Venezuela may prove to be no pushover, but Iran is far stronger and able to inflict far more damage, and it has friends that can inflict even more damage. So it's extremely dangerous. This kind of thuggery has a contagion effect—complete lawlessness by the United States, the ripping up of the U.N. Charter by the United States. It does not lead to good results unless the rest of the world understands how dangerous this is. And we don't see that coalescing of the rest of the world, at least for the moment.

#Glenn

I see that a prominent European leader just recently tweeted that they're worried about the narrative, because when Washington says that stolen oil must be returned, it's too similar to what Caracas is saying. So, more or less, what seems to bother the European leaders is that Trump isn't following the script—just say, you know, "democracy, freedom," and then it becomes legitimate. But by referencing oil, it doesn't. Just a last, very brief question: how do you see this impacting, for example, the Ukraine war? Because it's very hard for the world not to see this as hypocrisy. As you and I discussed before, the Ukraine war was anything but unprovoked—but this was an actual unprovoked invasion.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Yes. I mean, Ukraine—ironically, though, in Europe, what you and I have been discussing is not accepted. But the truth is, Ukraine is another story of a U.S. project. So I think the main point is, one should not glibly say, "Well, the U.S. is doing in Venezuela what Putin did in Ukraine." It's actually that the U.S. is doing in Venezuela what the U.S. did in Ukraine. So both are U.S.-provoked; these are both projects of the U.S. And I hope people can come to understand how U.S. foreign

policy works, and what a military-industrial state really means—what a military-industrial complex without constitutional bounds means, what the CIA means in such operations. If they did, they would understand that when we view Ukraine and Venezuela, we're viewing the same phenomenon: long-term projects of the would-be global hegemon, carried out in different ways.

Now, I think Trump maybe has the idea that the Americas are ours, the Middle East is ours, Africa we don't want. Ukraine—well, that's Russia's. That's not even how Russia views it, but that may be how Trump sees it. And it may be, "Okay, I'm going to do what I want in the places that I want, which are the Middle East and the Americas, and I'm going to get away with it. I'm going to have my way. And if others do whatever they want to do, that's okay with me." In other words, lawlessness everywhere. That is probably Trump's interpretation. It doesn't bode well for any kind of sensible, true peace in this world, but it could be the way Trump views this issue.

#Glenn

Well, thank you so much for taking the time. I assume that once this war comes to an end, Trump will have the audacity to claim that he ended it as part of his big list. He did the same after attacking Iran—he took credit for ending that war. After financing the genocide in Gaza, he took credit for ending that as well. He says he's trying to be a mediator in Ukraine, even though this is largely a U. S. war too. So I think we're seeing a pattern here—Trump, the peacemaker. Thank you very much again for taking the time.

#Jeffrey Sachs

Glenn, great to be with you. Thanks so much.